

Life of Christ Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Jesus Christ is unique among all of the religious leaders and ethical teachers in the history of the world in that his legacy was never intended to merely be in what he said or spoke, but especially in his life and, more importantly, his death. His coming was predicted by the Jewish Scriptures and even, to a certain extent, by the writings of Pagans all over the world. He was the second person of the Divine Trinity made flesh in a human nature given to him freely by the Virgin Mary and was born in the town of Bethlehem in Israel, which was then ruled by Rome. Aside from a few years spent in Egypt to avoid being killed by King Herod, who was fearful of the prophecies of the Messiah coming true, Christ's early life was quiet and largely unknown.

His public ministry did not begin until he was thirty years of age. John the Baptist had at the time begun his ministry, calling people to repent of their sins and offering a ritual baptism in water. Christ, though he was sinless, took this baptism, showing his sympathy with mankind's sinful state. He now began to preach the themes which pervaded his ministry and confirmed them with many miracles. Man, he taught, was in desperate need of salvation from his sins, and needed to turn to God to receive forgiveness. A life of true happiness could be gained by giving up the things which the world valued so much, like wealth, power, and status. Though he preached these ideas forcefully, few understood him. He was the Messiah, and people had been hoping for a political leader who would free them from the oppressive rule of the Romans. His purpose, however, was to establish a spiritual kingdom.

The worldly interests of the people is also why few, including his own Apostles, understood him when he said that he must die. If he was truly the Son of God, no one could understand why he would allow himself to be tortured and killed. To suffer and die, however, was the purpose of his coming to earth, even more so than his teaching, because by suffering and dying he would redeem mankind from its sins. Thus, after three years of preaching, he was taken prisoner by the temple authorities who persuaded Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, to crucify him. His dead body laid for three days in the tomb, and his disciples scattered, not believing his word that he would rise from the dead in three days. But three women found his tomb empty three days after his death; he had spoken the truth. For forty days, he remained with the Apostles, conferring on them the authority to rule over his Church and to forgive sins. When his time was done, he left the Earth and ascended into Heaven, but his presence remained in his Mystical Body, the Church.

Chapters 1 - 2

Chapters 1 - 2 Summary and Analysis

Christ is distinguished from all other religious leaders in the world because his coming to the world was preceded by centuries of prophecies which were fulfilled in his life. Further, while other religious thinkers might be admired, even if one does not believe in the religion, such is impossible with Christ. If he claimed to be God and was wrong, then he is not worthy of admiration, but scorn.

The conception of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary was an act of God which was even greater than Creation, because Creation involved the production of inanimate matter, whereas the Incarnation involved the entrance of God Himself into the physical world. Christ's conception was unique in that involved clear consent and will on behalf of Mary, in a more direct way than a mother wills to have a child naturally; Mary verbally consented to bear Christ in her womb, reversing Eve's decision to sin in Eden.

Mary became pregnant with Jesus in the midst of several events which were prophesied to occur around the time of his birth. First, the Scriptures had predicted that the Messiah would have a forerunner who would announce his coming, and six months before Mary conceived, her cousin, Elizabeth, became pregnant with John the Baptist, who would do just that. Also, before Mary would give birth, she and Joseph would be forced to travel to Bethlehem to report for the Roman empire's census, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

The manner in which God came to earth defied what people expected. Many Jews thought that the Messiah would be a political savior who would liberate them from the oppressive Roman empire. Further, Jew and Gentile alike would expect that if God came into the world, he would do so in some magnificent fashion. But, displaying perfect humility, Christ was born in a filthy manger to a poor family. Despite being sinless, he submitted to the ritual circumcision all Jews underwent as a symbol of penance for their sins; likewise, his mother, also sinless, went through the purification rituals, for she would mirror, in a much smaller fashion, the life of her son, even sharing spiritually in his sufferings. When threatened, Christ did not, as some might think, dramatically destroy his enemies; rather, when King Herod decreed that all children under the age of two must be killed (fearful of the prophecy of Christ's coming), Joseph took his family and fled to Egypt until Herod died and it was safe to return.

When the family returned from Egypt, Mary experienced her first separation from her son when he disappeared for three days to teach at the temple. While it would seem to be an act of disobedience to his parents (he was still a young child at the time) it was actually an act of true obedience, since his first loyalty was to God the Father. However, after leaving the temple, before his adulthood, Christ would submit totally to the authority of his parents. The family settled in Nazareth, fulfilling yet another Scriptural

prophecy, this one stating that the savior would be a Nazarene. Once again, this defied expectations, as Nazarenes had the reputation of being backwards and stupid.

Christ's private life would end soon after his herald, John the Baptist, began his ministry, which involved urging people to repent and baptizing them in the Jordan River. This baptism did not have the power or grace of the Baptism which Christ would later establish, and it was a merely symbolic act. Christ's ministry officially begins when he, who is totally without sin, has John baptize him, a sign that he is sharing in the guilt of the human race.

Chapters 3 - 8

Chapters 3 - 8 Summary and Analysis

Christ's first act after his Baptism was to escape into the wilderness to pray and fast before beginning his ministry, setting the example that penance and prayer are the best ways to prepare for activity. While there, God allowed Christ to be tempted by Satan, to allow Christ to share also in that part of human condition. Each of Satan's temptations were attempts to lure Christ away from the Cross and to succumb to worldly goods rather than heavenly ones.

Christ is called the Lamb of God because he is the sacrificed offered by God to atone for the sins of the world, much like the Jews offered up literal lambs in sacrifice to atone for their sins. Even though human hands would take Christ's life, it is truly God who sacrificed Christ, and this is why Scripture speaks of Christ as having been sacrificed from the beginning of the world.

When he was about thirty years of age, Christ was at a wedding feast in Cana and the supply of wine was running low. Mary asked him to do something about it, and he miraculously turned water into wine. Just as God sent Christ into the world to redeem mankind, so too did Mary send Christ on his mission. By performing this miracle, Christ would manifest his Divinity to the world, which would begin the series of events culminating in his Crucifixion.

The Jewish temple—the place of ritual sacrifice—was one of the first places Christ visited and temple imagery figures prominently into his lessons. He prophesied, for example, that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, and his audience did not yet realize that he referred to his body—the place where God truly dwells—and not the physical structure.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was one of the first people to seek Christ out, though he was somewhat of a coward and does so only under the cover of night. The first lesson that Christ taught him was that of spiritual rebirth: that a man must be born again "of water and the spirit" to be part of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus could not yet understand his doctrine, and Christ said that his wisdom was from Heaven and would not be understood until his death.

Christ approached a Samaritan woman drawing water from a well. Gradually, in the course of conversation, he revealed that he is the Messiah and offered to her a "living water" which would quench her spiritual thirst. He proved who he is by revealing the secret sins of her past, and she was so impressed that she told everyone in her village about him.

Chapters 9 - 15

Chapters 9 - 15 Summary and Analysis

Christ and his disciples were criticized for not fasting as severely as John the Baptist and his followers, and Christ responded by saying that his followers should be joyous while he is still with them, foreshadowing his eventual death, likening it to the festivities that friends engage in before a marriage.

Soon after his ministry began, Christ chose twelve men to be the chief instruments by which his teachings would be spread: the Apostles. He chose men to help spread his word so that men would have a role in the plan of salvation, and thus he established that religious authority would be in the hands of men. Simon was the chief of these Apostles, and would later be renamed Peter (which means "rock") to signify that he was the head of the Church. The Apostles as a whole were an eclectic group of men, symbolizing the diversity that would exist in the Church.

Many say that the Beatitudes—the blessings which Christ gives during the Sermon on the Mount—are the essence of Christianity. This view is flawed, however, insofar as it attempts to separate the joyfulness of being a Christian from the necessity of suffering. Christ was crucified precisely because of the Sermon on the Mount—and his other teachings—because his message completely contradicts the instincts of man's sinful nature. The beatitudes recommend poverty, purity, and forgiveness, while the world exalts wealth, sexual freedom, and vengeance.

Simon, a Pharisee, invited Christ to his house because he was curious about his teaching, though he was hesitant to be seen publicly with him. During dinner, a prostitute entered the house, in tears, and threw herself at Christ's feet in penance for her sins. She begins anointing his feet, a sign of respect which Simon omitted. Simon was outraged because of her reputation, but Christ rebuked him, saying that she is loved greatly by God because of the magnitude of the sins he has forgiven her. He forgave her sins and sent her on way, causing those nearby to wonder who he is that claims to have such authority.

John the Baptist was invited to speak at a dinner hosted by King Herod and rebuked Herod for marrying his brother's wife. Herod immediately had John imprisoned for months in his dungeon and would eventually execute him. John, perhaps experiencing some doubt as a result of his imprisonment, sent messengers to ask Christ if he is truly the Messiah, and Christ confirmed he was by relating the miracles which have been accomplished. He then praised John as "the greatest man ever born from a woman."

As more people started to believe that Jesus might be the Messiah, a curious crowd of thousands of people gathered around him. As the day went on, the crowd became hungry, and had to be fed, so Christ miraculously turned a few loaves of bread and fish into enough food to feed the entire multitude. The crowd was so impressed, and still



convinced that he came to be a political savior, that they tried to make him king on the spot; he and the disciples immediately withdrew and he sent the disciples on a boat to meet him at another city. During the boat ride, a heavy storm threatened their journey, and they became frightened, but Christ miraculously appeared on the water and calmed the storm, rebuking them for their lack of faith. Peter asked to meet Christ on the water, but became scared as the wind picked up and started to sink until Christ offered his hand to save him, symbolizing the inevitable failure one experiences after taking their eyes off of Christ. When the group finally arrived at their destination, they met the crowds again, and Christ introduced the doctrine that he was the Bread of Life: That unless people eat his body, they will not have eternal life.

As a result of introducing the doctrine of the Eucharist—that one must literally eat Christ's body and drink his blood to be saved—many of Christ's followers started to lose their belief and became split; many left altogether. This proved that Christ was not speaking in mere symbols, as he surely would have corrected those who could not handle the doctrine. The doubt even spread to the Apostles, as this was the beginning of Judas Iscariot's turning away from Christ.

Chapters 16 - 21

Chapters 16 - 21 Summary and Analysis

Among the first moral lessons Christ taught to his disciples regarded sex and physical possessions. Both of these are good if used legitimately, but excess could lead to sin. In fact, Christ taught his disciples that in order to balance out the excess of others, some would even be appointed by God to voluntarily forgo sex and property. While such sacrifice was good and praised by Christ (and practiced in his life) it was never obligatory.

Unlike other religious teachers in history, who wanted their legacy to be their teachings, Christ taught that he, as a person, was the way to true happiness and to true knowledge of God; in fact, he taught that he was the only way. Further, while other religious teachers were sinners—even if they were still good men overall—Christ was sinless and never spoke once about having moral defects. In these ways, Christ pointed to his Divine nature and his purpose in this world both as a mediator to God and as an example to imitate.

Not long before his Crucifixion, Christ took Peter, James, and John up a mountain where they would witness the event known as the Transfiguration: Christ's Divinity, in some way, became visually evident by the illumination of his body with white light. This display was meant just to be a taste or preview of the glory that would come after his death, but Peter misunderstood it and wanted to set up shelters for the glorified Christ and for the apparitions of the prophets Elijah and Moses (who had also miraculously appeared), but Christ would ignore him.

Christ was careful when he told his disciples about his coming death, since they had difficulty understanding why he, who was Divine, would allow himself to be killed by mortal men. Each of the three times he mentioned it, it caused quarreling among his Apostles; the Apostles still envisioned Christ's kingdom in a worldly way and could not understand why the Son of God would allow himself to suffer at the hands of evil men. They were also ambitious and each wanted to secure a high position in what they thought would be a political kingdom.

The Feast of the Tabernacles, a Jewish holy day, was the first place where the Jews tried to arrest Christ, but since "his hour had not yet come", their attempt failed, as the soldiers were so impressed by him that they refused to carry out their orders. While at the feast, which honored God's guidance of the Jews during the exodus from Egypt, Christ taught that he was the true gift from God; everything else in Jewish history merely pointed towards him symbolically.

Shortly after the Feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews, growing more and more antagonistic towards him, attempted to trick Christ by bringing a woman before him who committed adultery. The Mosaic law said the penalty for adultery was a brutal death by



stoning, and they asked if she ought to be stoned. They were attempting to place a wedge between justice, which would seem to say that she ought to die, and his mercy, which would seem to say that she should be pardoned. But Christ was too smart to fall for this, and challenged whoever among the crowd that was sinless to stone her; but this left no one, and the crowd went away unhappy. Christ then released her and told her to sin no more. In this story, Christ violates neither justice or mercy, but simply taught the lesson that it is easy for a man to focus on other's sins rather than his owns.

Chapters 22 - 27

Chapters 22 - 27 Summary and Analysis

Imagery of God as a shepherd was common in the Old Testament, and thus it is highly significant that Christ called himself the "Good Shepherd"—he was essentially telling his Jewish audience of his Divine nature. Further, he insisted that he was the only shepherd, and that the only way to salvation was through him, contrary to modern thought which states that all religions can lead to God.

Christ refers to himself throughout the Gospels as the "Son of Man," though no one else ever called him by that name. He was fond of that name because it showed his unity with the human race, the unity that was established when he assumed a human nature. In assuming a human nature, Christ took part in everything that was human. Just as humans have families, so did he; just as humans worked, he became a carpenter. He took on this human nature in order that he might redeem it from the sin of Adam by his death. But his death could never be sufficient to atone for Adam's sin against God—a sin of infinite magnitude—unless he was also Divine, and thus the necessity of the Incarnation in God's redemptive plan is clear.

While many people looked to Christ as a political savior, the freedom that he was preaching was spiritual freedom: freedom from sin. Thus, when the Jews tried to trap him again by asking if one ought to pay the tax to Caesar—if he said no, he would be a political revolutionary and persecuted by the Romans, but if he said yes, he would be a friend of the oppressive Roman invaders—Christ sidestepped the question, showing no concern for political freedom, and said that one should obey one's government, but also remember to give God his due. The spiritual freedom that Christ preached would come at a price, though. He likened sin as a kind of slavery, and thus his death on the Cross would be the ransom necessary to set man free from that bondage.

Whenever Christ preached the most central points of his teachings, he incited men to violence against him, but these attempts on his life would never be successful until it was the time of his choosing. The first of these episodes occurred in his hometown of Nazareth, when he stated that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah. It is fitting that his fellow townspeople would reject him; this placed him squarely in line with the rest of prophets, all of whom were rejected by their own people. As his ministry continued, so too would the attempts to kill him for arrogantly—so they thought—claiming to be equal to God.

Though Christ performed many miracles, many stubbornly did not believe he was the Son of God. It is for this reason that he had to give up his life in sacrifice, because doing so was the ultimate sign of love for the human race, which would convince many of his doubters that he was truly divine.

Christ is the only teacher in the history of the world to recommend the way he died to his disciples. He told his Apostles, and those who would follow him in general, that by following him, they would bring persecution upon themselves. But even if they should lose their physical lives in the process, they would gain the much more valuable glory of a soul united with God.

Chapters 28 - 35

Chapters 28 - 35 Summary and Analysis

Christ came to Earth for the redemption not only of the Jews, but of all the nations of the world. God's plan, however, was that salvation would come from the Jews, and thus, as recounted in the Old Testament, the Jews were raised up as God's chosen people and they would produce the Messiah. Likewise, Christ more or less confined his teaching to the Jews—his Apostles would evangelize the Gentiles after his death. Nonetheless, Jesus does interact with Gentiles on several occasions in the Gospel, even performing miracles for some of them. In fact, the faith of some Gentiles is so great—even greater than the faith he found among the Jews—that he says that the Gentile nations will testify against the Jews who denied him on the day of judgment.

As the opposition to Christ grew, it became more direct. His enemies looked more and more for causes to heap blame upon him, and ultimately they looked for a crime for which they could execute him. He and his disciples were frequently accused of violating the Sabbath, such as when he forgave the sins of a sick man and, then, as proof of his authority to forgive sins, he healed the man. His enemies were so blinded by their hatred of him that they cared more about a supposed legal violation than the fact that the man had been cured, both physically and spiritually. He was frequently accused of blasphemy for equating himself with God or claiming to be God, and at one point, when he drove a demon out of a man, he was accused of "driving devils out by the prince of devils."

Christ was warned by his enemies that if he stayed where he was, Herod would have him killed, but Christ saw through this warning: They were really trying to trick him into going to Judea, where it would be easier to convict and execute him. Christ remained in Herod's land unafraid, knowing that he would not perish before going to Jerusalem, where he was destined to die. When he would go to Jerusalem, he would admire the city first from afar and weep in anticipation of what it was about to do. He was not sorrowful over his approaching death; rather, he was sorrowful for the inhabitants of the city who would commit such a great sin.

Christ's enemies finally decided to plan his death after Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. Though he had raised others from the dead in the past, this miracle was performed in Jerusalem and thus attracted even more attention to him, causing them to fear political unrest if the people made him king. Thus, Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest, called for his execution at the hands of the Romans, simultaneously showing obedience to the Romans and ridding themselves of the "problem" of Christ.

Mary, who was formerly a "harlot," anointed Christ with expensive oil at a private gathering in Jerusalem, prefiguring the balm that would be put on him in his burial. The Apostles, especially Judas Iscariot, protested that she was being wasteful, since the

balm could be sold and given to the poor. Christ rebukes them saying that it is right for Mary to honor him while he is still on Earth.

When Christ finally arrived in Jerusalem, he was greeted by cheering crowds proclaiming him king. Up to this point, Christ had avoided public acclaim or ceremony, often even telling people to keep his true nature a secret. Now, however, he was ready to begin his suffering and death, and he knew that the cheers of the crowd would quickly turn into calls for his crucifixion. Thus, as joyous as the crowds were, Christ once again felt sorrow over the sin that they would soon commit.

At the temple, Christ was approached by curious Greeks, who had been impressed by his reception into the city. Greeks held typical pagan values: beauty, strength, and wisdom. Christ, knowing this, contradicted them by telling them that in order to be glorified he must first be humbled and die, and in a particularly shameful fashion. Feeling the burden of the sins of all mankind, Christ, in his human nature, experienced some distress, but remained confident in his Father's plan. The voice of God then rung out in the temple, declaring that Christ would be glorified in his death and this voice, Christ informed those around him, was for their sake and not his, proof of what he was.

On the Tuesday before his death (on Good Friday), Christ tied himself into the succession of prophets that God had sent to Israel, by describing himself as God the Father's last resort for the salvation of Israel. Like the prophets, Christ would be ignored and killed, but in his rejection, he would become the "cornerstone" of the church which would include Jew and Gentile alike. Feeling like they were being targeted, this angered the Pharisees, and their resolution to kill him grew stronger.

Chapters 36 - 40

Chapters 36 - 40 Summary and Analysis

As Christ came to Earth in order to die, and his death was to be a source of grace and strength for his followers throughout history, it is only logical that he would institute a memorial of his death, and he did so in the Last Supper when he consecrated bread and wine. The memorial he instituted—the Eucharist—is not a mere commemoration, like one might remember the death of some historical figure. Rather, Christ is truly present in the memorial, and so is the sacrifice he offered on Calvary, and is thus more perfect than any memorial that could be created by men.

Though the time of Christ's death was soon approaching—it was now the day before his Crucifixion—the Apostles continued to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest in Christ's kingdom. In the Kingdom of God, however, the greatest were characterized by their humility and service to others, and Christ taught them this lesson by humbling himself and washing their feet. He was their master and humbled himself, so should they, his servants.

Judas was in charge of managing finances for Jesus' ministry, but was guilty of the sin of greed, and so frequently used it for his own purposes. Judas' dissatisfaction with Christ centered around the doctrine that Christ would give his body for his followers to eat. It is fitting, then, that the betrayal was consummated at the Last Supper, when Christ instituted the doctrine, for then Judas made up his mind to betray Christ. Christ told his disciples that one of them would betray them, causing great anxiety among them, before revealing to Judas (and not to the others) that he knew of his impending betrayal. Immediately after, Judas left to go to the Pharisees.

After Judas' departure, Christ spoke openly about what would soon happen to him and what the Apostles should expect after his death. He spoke once again about how he must die, but his death would culminate in his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and it would be through him that the members of his Church would enjoy true happiness. Anyone who was not with him, though, would suffer and be cast away. However, the joy of Apostles would not be immediate; like Christ, they would first have to suffer. St. Peter thought he was ready to suffer and die for Christ, but Christ told him that he would deny him three times. After Christ's death, Resurrection, and Ascension, the Apostles would carry out his mission on earth and more truly live according to his teachings, and as such, all but St. John would suffer martyrdom at the hands of the world, who despised Christ and his followers.

To help them through these trials, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Divine Trinity. Though Christ would no longer physically be with them, his spirit would live on in them, and through the Holy Spirit, they would receive the grace necessary to perform the work Christ committed to them. The Holy Spirit would also

make plain the sinfulness of men and the righteousness of Christ, and thus would bring judgment down upon those who rejected him.

Before Christ's sufferings began, he said a prayer to God the Father, asking him to preserve his followers from sin and error. This prayer extended beyond the eleven faithful Apostles who still remained, though. The Apostles would all eventually die, but Christ's mission would go on, and so Christ's prayer was for all those who would govern his Church over the centuries.

Chapters 41 - 46

Chapters 41 - 46 Summary and Analysis

The night before he would be taken away to be tortured and killed, Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane, a place where he often took his Apostles. He was accompanied by Peter, John, and James, and had asked them to stay up with him, but they were overcome by exhaustion and fell asleep, leaving Christ alone to contemplate the agony he would soon endure. The conflict between human nature—which wanted to live—and his Divine nature—which knew he must die—was displayed by his prayer to the Father, asking that the "cup of suffering" pass by him, if it is possible. Christ's human nature, though, was totally obedient to God, and thus willingly submitted to whatever his Father's will required. So much did the coming suffering weigh on him—especially contemplating all of the sins of the world, for which he was dying—that he sweat blood.

Judas led the Roman soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane, as he knew that Christ would be there. He gave Christ a kiss on the cheek as a sign to the soldiers of who they ought to arrest, a fitting sign to show the nature of Judas' betrayal. Peter, in his zeal to defend his master, pulled out his sword and attacked the soldiers, but Christ stopped him, reminding him that it was his Father's plan that he be given over to his enemies, and that if he had wanted to stop them, he could easily have done so by his Divine power. Christ submitted to the soldiers and was led to his trial.

Just as Christ had two natures, human and Divine, so would he have two trials: one before the religious leaders and one before Pontius Pilate, the civil authority. The religious leaders had already made up their minds to kill Christ, but needed a reason. After bringing false witnesses forward to accuse him had failed—their lies contradicted one another—Caiphas, the high priest, asked him directly if he was the Messiah and son of God. Christ said that he was and Caiphas tore his garments in outrage. Secretly, though, he was pleased, because now Christ could be executed for blasphemy.

Peter had followed Christ, from a distance, to the temple. Fearful that he might be arrested, he tried not to draw attention to himself, but those standing nearby recognized him and asked if he was one of Christ's disciples. All three times, he denied it, fulfilling Christ's prediction. Immediately, a cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Christ had said and wept in repentance.

When the temple leaders brought Christ to be tried by Pontius—for the Romans had taken away their authority to execute criminals—they accused him of secular, political crimes, knowing that Pilate, a Gentile, would be unmoved by a blasphemy charge. Pilate's situation as governor of Judea was uncertain and he feared a misstep could cause repercussions in Rome. Thus, before condemning Christ to death, he made several attempts to avoid responsibility in the affair. First, after briefly questioning Jesus and concluding he was not a political threat, he tried to plead Jesus' innocence to the Jews. They would not relent, however, and instead he sent Jesus to Herod, governor of

Galilee, hoping to put the matter out of his hands. Herod showed great interest in Christ, but as a spectacle, not as Son of God. Sensing this, Christ refused to talk to him and was sent back to Pontius.

Judas was filled with remorse when he learned Jesus had been condemned and returned the money he earned back to the temple authorities. Guilt weighed heavily on him, but he refused to turn to God for forgiveness, and instead fell into despair which led him to suicide.

Chapters 47 - 50

Chapters 47 - 50 Summary and Analysis

After Christ returned from Herod, Pilate appealed once again to the Jews to let him go, but they were unmoved. He then resorted to a clever ploy: Either Christ or Barabbas, a revolutionary and murderer, must go free. To his horror, though, the Jews chose to free Barabbas. Desperate, Pilate would try to compromise, and so he had Christ tortured but not killed. Once again, however, the Jews insisted on his death. Pontius retired to plan his next action when his wife, Claudia, sent him a plea to let Christ go, as she had been given a warning in her dreams. Ultimately, however, he caved, and he established his legacy as the man who condemned Christ.

Christ was led out to Golgotha, the site of his execution, along with two thieves. Christ was already so weakened and injured by the torture he had endured, a man named Simon of Cyrene was chosen from the crowd and forced to help Christ carry his cross. Along the way, he saw a group of Jewish women weeping for him and told them not to cry for him, but for their city, referring both to the destruction of Israel and the punishment the wicked would receive when he would return to Earth. Out of mercy, he was offered wine mixed with a sedative to dull his pain, but he refused; he was resolved to suffer all of the pain that was required. When he reached his destination, his clothes were stripped, he was nailed to the cross, and he was lifted up to die.

Christ's final sermon on Earth were the seven things he said while he was dying on the Cross. His first utterance— "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing"—shows the love that he had for mankind, and even for his enemies, even while he was being executed by them. His second "word" from the Cross was his promise to the penitent thief that he would join him "this day" in Heaven, showing how readily God gives forgiveness to those who ask for it. Next, Christ addressed his mother, Mary, and his beloved disciple, John: "Woman, behold your son." In this sentence Christ established that Mary would no longer simply be his mother by the flesh, but the spiritual mother of all Christians. Christ would next endure the greatest trial on the Cross: As separation from God is the chief effect of sin, Christ would suffer that loneliness, too, and thus he cried out asking why God had left him.

When Christ spoke the words "I thirst", it may seem that he was finally seeking some comfort in his sufferings, but in fact he was fulfilling the prophecy of the old testament which predicted the Messiah would suffer from extreme thirst. Thus, the soldiers, mockingly filling his request, gave him a sponge soaked in gall and vinegar, which made his thirst even more extreme. All of the prophecies now fulfilled, and his mission on Earth completed, Christ spoke to God: "It is finished." His earthly work was now done, and thus he called out to his Father and gave over his spirit to him.

Just as Christ spoke seven things on the Cross, so too did people watch speak to him seven times. Of these seven, five were mocks, challenging him to come down from the

Cross; if he were truly the Son of God and Messiah, he should be able to do so easily. These mockeries represent the kind of religions that the world looks for. Christ had preached a religion that not only tolerated, but sought suffering; the world wanted a religion that eased suffering and avoided it all costs. The penitent thief, however, amid the jeers of the crowd, asked for forgiveness of his sins, trusting in the power of Christ. Likewise, after Christ died, a Roman soldier showed great faith and declared Christ to be the Son of God.

Chapters 51 - 62

Chapters 51 - 62 Summary and Analysis

When Christ died, the veil in the Jewish temple which separated the holiest place of the temple from the people was torn apart, revealing the Holy of Holies to all. This meant both that the Old Law, which was symbolized by the temple, was no longer in force, and also that the glory of Heaven, which had previously been closed off to mankind, was now open to all.

After his death, one of the Roman soldiers took his lance and pierced Christ's heart, out of which poured blood and water, symbolizing the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism and the forgiveness of sins which Christ offered. Christ's death had fulfilled the prophecy that, despite all of his sufferings, none of his bones would be broken, symbolizing the fact that the Church—"the Body of Christ"—would endure its scandals, but would remain fundamentally intact.

After the Crucifixion, Christ's body was taken down and committed to his mother, Nicodemus, and a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea. The two men covered his body in expensive balms, showing reverence for him, but not faith in his Resurrection, and committed his body into a tomb.

Three women, including Mary Magdalen, went to Christ's tomb the Sunday after his death to anoint his body balm and oil, but were shocked to see the tomb was empty and an angel inside told them Christ had risen. Magdalen ran and told the Apostles Peter and John that someone had taken the body, still doubtful of his Resurrection. The Apostles went to see for themselves and finally understood the prophecies he had made about his rising from the dead. Mary returned to the tomb later, weeping over the loss of the body, when Christ approached her and revealed himself to her. Finally, she realized he had truly risen, and fell on her knees in front of him. The temple authorities, however, immediately realized what happened, and were anxious to cover it up and stop news of it from spreading. Thus, they bribed the guards who were in front of the tomb to lie and say that they fell asleep and Christ's disciples had somehow stolen the body.

Christ then found two of his disciples—probably not Apostles—traveling together who were perturbed over the news of what had happened to Christ and his body. They did not recognize him at first, but he eventually revealed himself to them and then taught them how he fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. He finally celebrated the Eucharist with them and the Gospel writes that "their eyes were opened" by this, hearkening back to how Adam and Eve's eyes were opened when they ate from the tree in Eden.

Christ's Apostles were holed up in a room fearful that they may be arrested when he miraculously appeared among them. In order to prove that he was not a ghost, he ate with them and showed them his wounds. He then gave them the Holy Spirit which he

had promised and entrusted to them the power to forgive sins, establishing the priesthood.

When Christ first appeared to the Apostles, Thomas was not present. Always doubtful, he did not believe the Apostles when they told them Christ had risen. He demanded proof, and wanted to see Christ's wounds. A week later, Christ appeared again to him and gave him exactly that; Thomas immediately fell on his knees and believed.

Christ accompanied his Apostles on a fishing trip, but stayed on the shore. The Apostles could not catch any fish until Christ commanded them to, and then they brought in a large amount. While eating on the shore, Christ asked Peter three times if he loved him, and Peter responded three times that he did, negating the three denials. Christ commanded Peter to "feed his sheep," thus placing him in charge of the Church.

Christ told his Apostles to meet him on a mountain in Galilee and there he delegated the authority granted to him in his human nature by God to them. He charged them with the responsibility of preaching him to all the nations and Baptizing them, assuring them that he would always be with them spiritually.

Christ appeared for the last time before his Ascension in Jerusalem. He summarized his life and mission: "The Messiah is to suffer death and rise from the dead on the third day." His death was a triumph over evil, because it showed that evil, in its finest hour—it had killed God himself—failed: Christ had risen from the dead. If God could accomplish such a victory, then his followers had nothing to fear.

Next, Christ repeated the message which ran throughout his teachings: repentance. Man must turn away from sins and turn towards God. He then told the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem after he left and then they would receive the Holy Spirit. Typically, the Apostles thought this meant that Israel would be restored to political glory, but Christ's promise was spiritual, not worldly.

Christ's time to leave Earth and return to Heaven had finally come. He led the Apostles to Bethany, blessed them, and went up into Heaven. Once there, men could no longer believe in Christ through sight—like Thomas had—but must believe through faith. He would serve as a powerful advocate before God the Father there; since he had taken on human nature, he understood all of the trials of humanity and had unlimited sympathy for mankind.

When Christ left Earth, his presence on earth assumed a new form: The Catholic Church, also known as the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church has four chief characteristics. First, it is unified in doctrine and in authority. Second, it is holy; even if its members sometimes sin gravely, the Church remains capable of sanctifying souls. Third, it is catholic, or universal: It is not limited to one specific nation or people, like the Old Covenant, but it is open to all mankind. Finally, it is apostolic. The authority comes ultimately from the Apostles Christ chose when he was on earth and the successors they chose to replace themselves.

Characters

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Divine second person of the Trinity, who assumed a human nature and lived among men for thirty-three years around the year 0 A.D. He was the fulfillment of the Jewish prophecies about a Messiah or Anointed One, which dated back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when God promised that "the seed of woman" would conquer Satan, who represents evil and sin. He was born of the Virgin Mary in the town of Bethlehem. Immediately after his birth, the family fled to Egypt because King Herod, afraid that the prophecy of the Messiah might come true and threaten his rule, ordered the execution of all children under the age of two. When Israel was once again safe, the family returned and Christ lived a quiet life until the age of thirty.

Christ's ministry began after he was baptized by John the Baptist, a ritual which signified the cleansing of sins. Christ had no sins, but he took part in the ritual to show his unity with all of mankind. Immediately, Christ's teachings were at variance with what the world expected. The Jews had long awaited the Messiah, but they were expecting a political leader who would free them from the Romans. The Romans had conquered the Middle East and were despised by the Jews for their at times intolerant treatment of the Jewish religion and the taxes they required of them. Christ's teachings, however, were spiritual in nature. He preached that man should repent of his sins and voluntarily suffer and forgo the goods of the world.

He also taught that he would have to suffer and die. As his audience was still looking for a powerful political activist, still less did they understand why the Messiah would allow himself to be so powerless as to be executed by the government. He had always taught, however, that his death was necessary for mankind to be redeemed from its sins. Three years into his ministry, his prophesy would come true and he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, at the urgings of the Jewish religious leaders. However, to show that he had conquered death, he fulfilled his prophesy that after his death he would rise again. He spent forty days with his Apostles before ascending into Heaven.

Simon-Peter

Simon was a fisherman who lived in Galilee. He was chosen by Christ to be the head of the twelve Apostles and was given the name "Peter" (which means "rock") to signify that he would be the foundation upon which the Church would be built. Despite his prominence among the Apostles, Peter was not necessarily the most virtuous. Like the other Apostles, he did not understand why Christ had to suffer and die. He wanted Christ to be a strong and powerful political ruler, and he wanted to have a prominent role in his political kingdom.



Peter was often led more by emotions than by reason. When Christ was arrested, for example, despite Christ saying many times that he gave himself up freely to be crucified, Peter took out his sword and attacked the soldiers, only to be rebuked by Christ. When Christ was being tried for blasphemy and put to death, he denied knowing him three times, despite promising Christ the night before he would die for him. Christ had predicted his three denials, and when he realized what he had done, he wept and turned to God for forgiveness. After Christ's Resurrection, Peter was the first Apostle he appeared to and before ascending back to Heaven. He asked Peter three times if he loved him, and Peter responded three times that he did, canceling out the three denials during Christ's execution. He charged Peter with the responsibility of tending to his "sheep"; Peter was to be the head of Christ's Church on Earth. Though he failed in his promise to die for Christ when Christ was arrested, he would keep it later in his life. When the Romans began persecuting the Christians, Peter was crucified on Vatican Hill. Not feeling worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus, Peter asked to be crucified upside down.

Mary, Mother of God

The Virgin Mary was a Jewish girl—probably about sixteen years old—who was asked by the angel Gabriel to bear the Son of God. Her consent to the angel's request canceled out the consent Eve gave to Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. That Mary was a virgin before and after the birth of Christ was necessary to fulfill the Jewish prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah. Mary, who would have no children after Christ and remained a virgin, would live closely with Christ until the miracle at Cana. After Christ miraculously transformed water into wine, and thus publicly demonstrated his Divine nature, his ministry had to begin, and he would have to leave her. It is important that this miracle was done at her request. Just as Christ had received a Divine mandate for his mission, so too did Mary give her human consent to it, even though she knew it would cause him great physical suffering and would cause her great spiritual suffering.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was a woman of ill-repute—probably a prostitute—who, upon hearing of Jesus, threw herself at his feet and begged for forgiveness. When Jesus forgave her sins, those around were filled with wonder, and perhaps a bit of resentment, since it seemed presumptuous for what they thought was a mere man to forgive sins. Mary Magdalene would remain devoted to Christ, and would be among the small number of his followers who would follow him to the Cross. She would also be among the first to hear of his Resurrection, and she was sent by the angel in the empty tomb to tell the Apostles of Christ's Resurrection.



Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve Apostles chosen by Christ to help deliver his word and teachings to the world, and to forgive sins in his name. Judas in particular was in charge of handling the ministry's money, but he was a greedy man and would frequently steal from it. His greed would ultimately lead him to betray Christ; he sold the location of Christ to the temple authorities for thirty pieces of silver. After realizing what he had done, he was so filled with despair that he killed himself.

Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea who presided over the trial of Jesus, since the Jews did not have the legal power to put Christ to death. He was a man who was guided purely by political concerns, and wanted to avoid putting Christ to death. Ultimately, however, he caved to the demands of the Jewish leaders, and sentenced Christ to death by crucifixion.

Caiaphas

Caiaphas was the high priest of the Jewish religion during Christ's ministry and was a central figure in having Christ put to death. A worldly man, Caiaphas was more concerned with obtaining political freedom from Rome than seeing the spiritual promises of the Old Testament fulfilled. If the people made Christ king, then the Romans might respond with military force. Thus, Caiaphas argued that Christ had to be put to death to save the nation.

Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who, upon hearing of Christ, secretly goes to him. He was a wealthy man of status, and thus did not want to be seen publicly talking with Christ. Christ taught him the doctrine of Baptism—that a man must be reborn "of water and the spirit" in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was also present after the Crucifixion and, along with Joseph of Arimathea, helped find a spot to bury Christ.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the herald of Christ, who announced the Messiah's coming to the Jews before Christ began his ministry. After Christ's ministry began, John was invited to speak at a party held by King Herod. Instead of speaking of some irrelevant, trivial topic like Herod had hoped, John reprimanded Herod for marrying the wife of his brother. John was thrown in prison and eventually beheaded.



King Herod

King Herod is the ruler of Judea and the son of the King Herod who called for the execution of all children under the age of two in his kingdom, because the prophecy of the Messiah had been fulfilled and he was afraid his political power might be threatened. When John the Baptist condemned him for marrying his brother's wife, he threw John into prison and eventually had him executed. This murder would haunt Herod's conscience for years, and was part of the reason why he wanted to see Jesus during his trial: He thought Christ might be the risen John the Baptist. Christ refused to speak to Herod, because he realized he had no real interest in hearing his teachings. Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate and mocked him by dressing him up in the robes of a king.

John the Apostle

John was the youngest of the Apostles and probably the most educated. He was referred to in the Gospels as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" and was the only Apostle to follow Christ to his Crucifixion. He would also later write much of the New Testament, including the Gospel of John.

Thomas the Apostle

Thomas was one of the Apostles who was characterized by his lack of belief. When Christ rose from the dead, he refused to believe the other Apostles until he saw Christ in person. However, when he did see the risen Christ, he immediately believed.

Claudia

Claudia was the wife of Pontius Pilate. During Christ's trial, she was haunted by a dream about the consequences of Pilate's participation in his death, and pleaded with Pilate to let him go, but she was ignored.

Objects/Places

Bethlehem

Bethlehem was the town Christ was born into. It signified his status as King of the Jews, since it was also the birthplace of King David.

Galilee

Galilee was the province of Judea which Christ lived in. It was ruled by King Herod.

Nazareth

Jerusalem was the capital of Judea and the location of the temple. When Christ was ready to be given over to the authorities and be executed, he went to Jerusalem, following in the footsteps of all of the prophets who had been murdered in Jerusalem.

Golgotha

Golgotha—"the place of the skull"—was the hill on which Christ was crucified.

The Temple

The Temple was the epicenter of the Jewish religion and the place where ritual animal sacrifice occurred. Christ prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and it would be not longer after his Ascension when the Romans sacked Jerusalem.

Rome

Rome was the great superpower of the world during Christ's life. It ruled most of the known world, including Judea, and was at times rather oppressive to the people it governed. The Jewish people despised the Roman government and hoped that God would send them a Messiah who would free them.

The Eucharist

The Eucharist is the Christian sacrament which is the literal body and blood of Christ. He instituted it at the Last Supper but spoke of it throughout his ministry.

Baptism

Baptism is a Christian sacrament which incorporates the recipient into the Church. The sacrament of Baptism is prefigured in the Jewish law by circumcision, the rite of entry into the Old Covenant. John the Baptist performed baptisms on people who repented of their sins, but until Christ instituted it, the sacrament had no supernatural power.

The Mosaic Law

The Mosaic Law contained all the rules of the Old Testament which the Jewish people followed. Many of these laws were preserved by the Christian religion—such as the Ten Commandments—but many became obsolete when Christ established the New Covenant by offering himself in sacrifice.

Bethany

Bethany is a region near Jerusalem where Christ took his disciples to witness his Ascension into heaven.

Themes

Christ's Spiritual Message Met With Worldly Expectations

Christ came into the world to establish a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of souls which loved God and wanted forgiveness for their sins. Man, in his sinful nature, however, did not want to hear this, because a prerequisite for receiving forgiveness is to repent of one's sins and leave them behind. It would mean renouncing ambitions to political power and vast wealth and leaving behind a comfortable life for a life dedicated to serving God, which often meant ridicule, isolation, and even death. The truly Christian spirit reveled in these rejections, as Christ did, but the worldly men despised it. The spirit of the world is manifested in Satan's temptations in the wilderness, who tried to lure Christ away from his mission by offering him the kingdoms of the world. Even the Apostles, those closest to Christ who should have understood the nature of the Kingdom of God Christ was preaching, looked forward to the establishment of a political kingdom. James and John tried to secure a position sitting on either side of Christ's throne. Since suffering is the path to glory in Christ's kingdom, Christ told them they did not know what they were asking for. When Christ was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter tried to stop the soldiers, thinking that Christ would want to avoid suffering. On the Cross, too, the crowd around him mocked him; if he were truly the Son of God, they thought, he would take himself down from the cross. Only the penitent thief understood: He acknowledged he deserved the punishment he was receiving and only asked Christ for forgiveness.

Christ Was Born to Die

Christ's life differs from every other human: Most men are born to live, and death is an interruption; Christ was born to die. Christ came into a world that was under the power of sin and could not, of its own power, bring itself out of it. The Jewish religion, the precursor to the Christian religion Jesus would establish, ritually sacrificed animals to atone for their sins. However, the sacrifice of a lamb or a dove had no value to God and the debt man owed to God was of infinite value. So, it seemed that man was in an impossible situation: Nothing he could give to God would suffice. God, then, mercifully took on human nature and sacrificed himself in atonement for all of the sins of the world. Since Jesus was Divine, the sacrifice was of infinite value; since Jesus was human, he could atone on behalf of mankind.

Other religious teachers saw death as an interruption to their lives, for if they were no longer living, they could not teach any longer. Christ came to Earth to teach, but it was not his main purpose. It was not even his main purpose to come to Earth to serve as a good example to his followers. Indeed, what he would do, none of his followers could ever really imitate, because he was Divine and perfect, while his followers were merely human and sinful.

Christ as Fulfillment of Jewish Prophecy

When Christ was born in Bethlehem, the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah to come for centuries. His birth was preceded by dozens of prophecies, and the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, were well aware of them. The first of these prophecies to be fulfilled regarded his birth. The prophet Isaiah had said that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and the prophecies predicted that he would be born in the town of Bethlehem, the city which gave Israel King David. The prophets also said that Elijah would return to Earth to announce the coming of the Messiah, and thus John the Baptist, who would announce Christ's coming, lived in the spirit of Elijah: dressed in animal pelts, living in the wilderness.

However, just because the Jewish people were aware of the prophecies, does not mean that they were always willing to see their fulfillment in Christ. The Jewish people were anxious to receive a political savior who would free them from the oppression of the Romans. Thus, even though Isaiah and the other prophets had depicted a suffering savior who would die for the sins of Israel, Christ, when he fulfilled those prophecies, was jeered and mocked for his apparent powerlessness. Even his Apostles, who knew his teachings better than anyone and witnessed many miracles, continued to hope for powerful positions in a political kingdom.

Style

Perspective

Fulton Sheen was an Archbishop in the Catholic Church, and although explicit mention is never made of the Catholic Church, the influence of its doctrines are clear throughout. For example, Sheen emphasizes the role of the Virgin Mary in God's plan of salvation, a kind of emphasis that is usually foreign to Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians. Likewise, when discussing Christ's preaching on the "Bread of Life," Sheen argues strongly that Christ is not speaking symbolically; when Christ says that one must eat his flesh and drink his blood, Sheen argues, he is promising a sacrament which will literally contain his real flesh and real blood. The closest Sheen comes to explicitly tying in the Catholic Church to his discussion of Christ's life is in the final chapter when he talks about the "new body" Christ assumed after his Ascension: his Mystical Body, the Church.

The work probably never mentions Catholicism by name, probably not out of fear of alienating the audience, but rather because the audience is assumed to be Catholic. Sheen, after all, was a Catholic bishop, so it is unlikely many readers would be unaware of his beliefs. The author most likely envisioned most of his readers as Catholics who wanted to learn more about their faith, and thus there is not much time spent trying to convince readers of Catholic positions.

Tone

Sheen's tone throughout the book is one of a teacher. His tone is not academic, however; rather, it often sounds like a pastor addressing his congregation. For one, there appears to be an implicit assumption in the text that the reader is Catholic. Doctrines that are exclusively Catholic, or at least strongly associated with the Catholic faith, are rarely argued for in any great detail; at most, they are explained in such a way that would confirm the faith of a believer, but not convince a non-believer.

There are also many moral lessons for the reader. For example, when contrasting Judas and Peter, Sheen is implicitly commending the route of Peter—who repented of his sin and turned towards God—and condemning the route of Judas—who despaired and killed himself. Sheen is sensitive to the spiritual needs his readers might have and attempts to guide them onto what he, as a Catholic pastor, believes is the right path.

Structure

The book is written in a roughly chronological order, though there are several chapters which are devoted to themes that characterize specific eras of his life.

The early life of Christ is covered in the first two chapters. Considering there are a total of sixty-two chapters, the relative few pages devoted to this period is a result of the fact that little is known of Christ's early life, and nothing is known in the period after his parents found him in the temple at the age of twelve and the beginning of his ministry at the age of thirty.

When he receives the Baptism of John the Baptist, his public ministry officially begins. This period lasts three years and is the period of his life which has the most amount of time dedicated to in the Gospels, so it is logical that the bulk of this book's chapters are devoted to it: Chapter 3 discusses his meeting with John the Baptist, the beginning of his ministry and chapter 38 closes his ministry, when he is betrayed by Judas to the temple authorities.

As the Crucifixion is the focal point of Christ's life, according to the author, it is fitting that a significant amount of time is dedicated to it. Starting with his trial in chapter 39, Christ's sufferings continue all the way through chapter 52, when Christ's dead body is pierced by the spear of a soldier.

The final ten chapters of the book—chapters 53 through 62—discuss the burial of Christ, his Resurrection from the dead, and Ascension into Heaven, when he left Earth and record of him would naturally stop.

Quotes

"We need a Christ today Who will make cords and drive the buyers and sellers from our new temples; Who will blast the unfruitful fig tree; Who will talk of crosses and sacrifices and Whose voice will be like the voice of the raging sea. But He will not allow us to pick and choose among His words, discarding the hard ones and accepting the ones that please our fancy. We need a Christ Who will restore moral indignation, Who will make us hate evil with a passionate intensity, and love goodness to a point where we can drink death like water." p. 21

"Our Lord was not denying that men must be fed, or that social justice must be preached; but He was asserting that these things are not first." p. 65

"What makes the life of Christ unique is that He conditioned the establishment of His reign on earth and in heaven, on His suffering and death." p. 101

"The Beatitudes cannot be taken alone: they are not ideals; they are hard facts and realities inseparable from the Cross of Calvary. What He taught was self-crucifixion: to love those who hate us; to pluck out eyes and cut off arms in order to prevent sinning; to be clean on the inside when the passions clamor for satisfaction on the outside; to forgive those who would put us to death; to overcome evil with good; to bless those who curse us; to stop mouthing freedom until we have justice, truth and love of God in our hearts as the condition of freedom; to live in the world and still keep oneself unpolluted from it; to deny ourselves sometimes legitimate pleasures in order the better to crucify our egotism—all this is to sentence the old man in us to death." p. 119

"As the old city of Troy had but one gate, so Our Blessed Lord said that He is the only Gate to salvation." p. 154

"The death of Christ was the realization of the Kingdom of God for the entire world. Up to the point of Calvary, men had been taught by preaching. After Calvary, they would be taught by His Resurrection and Ascension." p. 236

"In the presence of Divinity, no one can be sure of his innocence, and everyone asked, 'Is it I?' Every man is a mystery to himself, for he knows that within his heart there lie, coiled and dormant, serpents that at any moment would sting a neighbor with their poison, or even God." p. 291

"Self-sacrifice seeks no vengeance. Judas and the others had no power to capture Him unless He freely delivered Himself into their hands. Giving His enemies power to stand, He, as the Good Shepherd, had only one concern, that of His own sheep." p. 325

"The tragedy of the life of Judas is that he might have been St. Judas." p. 353



"There was never a preacher like the dying Christ; there was never a congregation like that which gathered about the pulpit of the Cross; there was never a sermon like the Seven Last Words." p. 372

"In the history of the world, only one tomb has ever had a rock rolled before it, and a soldier guard set to watch it to prevent the dead man within from rising: that was the tomb of Christ on the evening of the Friday called Good." p. 402

Topics for Discussion

How is Christ distinguished from other religious teachers according to the author?

For what reason did Christ come to Earth?

Sheen sees many similarities between Peter and Judas, except that Peter repented after his sin, while Judas merely felt remorse. What distinction is being made here?

What is the relationship between the Virgin Mary and Christians?

What were the motives which drove Pilate's actions during the trial of Jesus?

Explain Christ's teaching on celibacy and voluntary poverty. How can they be simultaneously good but not required of Christians? What does Christ mean when he says some are "appointed" to make these sacrifices?

Christ said that his teachings would not be understood unless he died and rose from the dead. Why is this so?

Explain the political situation in Judea which made the temple authorities eager to have Christ crucified.

Christ often compared himself to the sacrifices of the Old Law. Using examples from the book, explain how, according to Sheen, Christ fulfilled these comparisons during his Crucifixion.