

# Talk 2 – Who is Jesus?

Duration 30 Minutes

HTB Transcripts



Alpha

**Key:**

**P – Personal story** that Nicky Gumbel tells in his Alpha talk. These may be replaced with a live speaker's personal story or the speaker may tell the story about Nicky in the same way Nicky tells stories about others.

**S – Story** that Nicky tells about someone else (about a friend or a story he heard or read about).

**Q/Q\* – Quotes** are key to the talk to emphasise a point and to enable guests to engage and relate the material. We acknowledge that some of the people quoted may not be well known in your local context, however, please be mindful of the value of what is said in the quoted material; not just the guests' knowledge of the person being quoted. If you choose to replace a quote, it should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources. In general, we encourage you not to omit or replace quotes unless absolutely necessary. Quotes marked in the margin with a \* symbol are key quotes and should not be omitted from the talk.

**Key Bible Passages** are identified and you may wish to display these visually for your guests.

**Red type** identifies a part of the key teaching text that could be removed or altered for contextualisation.

Text left untouched is the standard key message content of the Alpha talk.

## **Talk summary:**

This session starts by showing the impact that the man Jesus has had on world history – then decides to investigate who Jesus is. First by looking at whether we can be confident that he really existed in history, then by looking at his own claims about who he was and what he did – then by assessing whether his claims can be taken seriously.

- Jesus is arguably the most significant human figure in history
- Jesus claimed to be more than a great religious teacher – claimed to be 'the way, the truth, the life' and it seems clear from his claims that he considered himself to be the Son of God
- There are only three possibilities: he was a fraud, insane, or he was who he said he was – God
- Christians believe Jesus is God – a step of faith based on evidence
- Even so, a full understanding of Jesus can't happen historically or intellectually – still has to drop from head to heart – experience of a relationship
- This has been the experience of millions of Christians down the ages.

**NOTE:** Parts of the talk may need to be contextualised for other contexts or cultures but make sure you maintain the key elements of humour and personal testimony. Notice how quotes, and stories are used throughout to add emphasis to the main points of the talk (theology and testimony).

**KEY:**   **Personal Story**   **Story**   **Quotes**   **Key Bible Passages**

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*At the start of this talk, try to begin with a brief version of your own journey to faith. If your experience is similar to Nicky's then replace this story with your own. Alternatively introduce the talk with your own story, followed by Nicky's story as an introduction to the exploration of the evidence for Christianity.*

I come from a family of lawyers. I practised as a barrister for a number of years. My father was a barrister, my mother was a barrister. My sister is a barrister. My son qualified as a barrister, my daughter qualified as a barrister. My grandfathers on both sides were barristers. My uncle was a barrister. If we had a cat, it would have been a barrister!

But I didn't come from a Christian background. I wasn't brought up as a Christian – I was brought up as a barrister, not a Christian! And my father was a Holocaust survivor. Many of his family had perished in concentration camps. He was Jewish, a secular Jew. He would have described himself as an agnostic. My mother was not a churchgoer. And so I didn't have any kind of Christian upbringing.

But I kind of did my own investigations, just into the philosophy of life, and I came to the conclusion that I was an atheist. And I was quite a vociferous atheist. I wasn't kind of proselytising – I didn't think that other people had to be atheists, I didn't go around trying to convert other people to atheism. But if anyone tried to convert me, then I had quite a lot to say on the subject! And I was quite argumentative.

And I didn't really like Christians. I was very suspicious of Christians. I'd come across one or two of them in my gap year between school and university, and I was deeply suspicious of them. They had these kind of smiles! They were a bit odd, really. Why were they smiling like that?! It seemed like a bit cult-like. And so I avoided them.

I had a room next door to my great friend Nicky Lee; we'd been at school together and we ended up in rooms next door to each other. And I said to him: 'Nicky, whatever you do, don't let those Christians into your room – they are dangerous!'

But, unbeknown to me, he had been thinking about it quite seriously. And one evening he and his then girlfriend, now his

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	<p>What evidence is there for Christianity? You can't prove Christianity mathematically. You can't prove it scientifically. Science, of course, is very, very important. But science answers different questions to faith. Science answers the questions, 'When and how did this world come into being?' What it can't</p>
<p><i>Decide whether you will use a similar visual aid or omit example from the script.</i></p>	<p>Let me use a visual aid.</p> <p>I've got here a cake. Now, this cake, supposing we sent this cake off to the top scientists in the world. They would be able to tell you, possibly, what ingredients were put into this cake. They might be able to tell you how it was made. They might even be able to work out when it was made. But they wouldn't be able to tell you who made it and why it was made.</p> <p>Actually, the answer is I made this cake! It's a very nice cake! It's not... Well, to be honest, I had a bit of help, but it's still a bit of a mess. But it's only me who can tell you why I made it. The reason I made it was for this visual aid! And also for my small group to eat at the end of the evening. But only the creator can</p>

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*Personalise this text in red so that you can speak from your own experience.*

So that's the difference between science and faith. Science is very important because it deals with the scientific questions. But equally, faith is really important because it answers some very fundamental questions about life. And everyone has faith. An atheist has faith that there is no God. You can't prove *that* mathematically or scientifically. And those of us who believe in Jesus do so on the basis of *evidence*.

**I myself could not be a Christian if it was kind of like a blind leap of faith: if there was no evidence at all; you just had to believe. I believe there is good historical evidence.**

You know, historical evidence is evidence. Scientific evidence is not the only kind of evidence. A lawyer uses what you might call historical evidence. Every time a jury brings back a verdict, they're doing it on the basis of things that happened in history: evidence of history. And every jury decision is a step of faith. And so it is that we have to make up our minds about Jesus. And that is a step of faith.

**I came to believe in God because of Jesus. It seems to me** that the resurrection of Jesus, **which I came to believe in** – and we'll come back to this – strongly suggests that this world has a Creator, and that that Creator is to be seen in terms of, through the lens of, Jesus.

**And to me** it makes a lot of sense. You can't get to know someone unless they reveal themselves. No one can get to know you unless you reveal yourself. And if there is a God and he wanted to reveal himself to us, what would be the best way to do that? It seems to be logical that he would reveal himself in a way that we could understand: in a human being like us.

So what is the evidence? First of all, what is the evidence that Jesus even existed? Some people say, 'Well, you know, maybe Jesus didn't even exist.' But there's overwhelming historical evidence. No serious historian would suggest that Jesus didn't

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The first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote this, about Jesus: ‘There was about this time Jesus, a doer of wonderful works.’ And he then goes on to talk about the crucifixion of Jesus and his alleged resurrection.

So there’s evidence outside the New Testament. But most of our evidence comes from *inside* the New Testament. Now, of course, the New Testament was written a long time ago, and people say: ‘How do we know that what we have here hasn’t been changed over the years?’ And the answer is we do know, through a science called ‘textual criticism’.

Essentially, the way textual criticism works is like this: the more manuscripts that you have, and the earlier they are, the more you can be sure about what the original said.

It is useful for guests to be able to see a copy of this table. It can be found on page 15 of the Alpha Guide, which can be ordered on [alphashop.org](http://alphashop.org) or downloaded from [alpha.org/run](http://alpha.org/run)

WORK	WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME LAPSE	COPIES
HERODOTUS	488–428 BC	AD 900	1,300 years	8
THUCYDIDES	c. 460–400 BC	c. AD 900	1,300 years	8
LIVY’S <i>ROMAN HISTORY</i>	59 BC–AD 17	AD 900	900 years	20
CAESAR’S <i>GALLIC WAR</i>	58–50 BC	AD 900	950 years	9–10
TACITUS	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000 years	20
NEW TESTAMENT	AD 40–100	AD 130 (full manuscripts AD 350)	30–310 years	5,000 + Greek 10,000 Latin 9,300 others

Herodotus and Thucydides were both written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Earliest copies we have are 900 AD. So there’s a 1300-year gap, and we have only eight copies of each. Yet no classical scholar would doubt their authenticity. Livy’s *Roman History*: 900-year gap, 20 copies. Caesar’s *Gallic War*: 950-year gap, 9–10 copies. Tacitus: 1,000-year gap, 20 copies. Then we come to the New Testament: written between 40–100 AD, earliest manuscript AD 130, 5,309 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin,

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One of the greatest ever textual critics, F. J. A. Hort, said this: 'In the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone amongst ancient prose writings.' And no secular historian would disagree with that.

So we know from evidence, outside and inside the New Testament, that Jesus existed. But who is he? We know he was fully human. He had a body, emotions, experiences. But many today would say, 'Yes, he was a human being. We know he existed. Maybe he was a great human being. Maybe he was a great religious teacher – but no more than that. To suggest he was the Son of God, to suggest he's God, that's going too far.'

So there are two parts to this argument. First part of the argument is: what did Jesus think about himself? Because if *Jesus* didn't think that he was God, that's kind of the end of the argument. And even if he did, the second part of the argument

## Talk Point 1

### WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HIMSELF?

So what did Jesus say about himself? The first bit of evidence here is that Jesus' teaching was centred on himself. Great religious teachers point away from themselves. They say, 'Don't look at me. Look at God.' Jesus, who personified humility, said: 'Look at *me*. Come to *me*.'

This question of ultimate meaning and purpose: what is our life about? This sort of sense of what you might call a spiritual hunger – this sense that other things don't quite satisfy:

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John 6:35	Jesus said: <b>'I am the bread of life.'</b> 'If you want that hunger satisfied, come to me.'
John 8:36	There's stuff in our lives that we don't like. I have stuff in my life I don't like. I have things, habits that I find quite addictive. Jesus said: <b>'If the Son sets you free,'</b> if Jesus... He was saying: 'If I set you free, <b>you really will be free.'</b>
Matthew 11:28	Then there's all the stuff we carry around: worry, anxiety, fear, guilt. Jesus said: <b>'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I'll give you rest.'</b> 'If you want peace, peace of mind, come to me.' He said: <b>'If you receive me, you receive God.'</b>
Matthew 10:40	'If you welcome me, you welcome God.' He said: <b>'If you</b>
S	A little child was drawing a picture of God in class one time. The teacher said, 'What are you doing?' The child said, 'I'm drawing a picture of God.' She said, 'What do you mean? You can't draw a picture of God. Nobody knows what God looks like.' The child said, 'Well, they will do in a minute!' Jesus said: 'If you want to know what God looks like, look at me. If you've seen me, you've
	And then there were his indirect claims. Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins. He went up to people and said: <b>'Your sins are forgiven.'</b> Now, of course, if someone offends you, you can forgive them. But you can't go up to some random person and say, 'Your sins are forgiven.' When Jesus did that, the lawyers said, <b>'Who can forgive sins but God alone?'</b>
	Forgiveness is at the heart of what Jesus came to do: to make forgiveness possible. It's at the heart of Christianity.
Q	C. S. Lewis says: 'A Christian is someone who forgives the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us.'
	And then there were his direct claims. There are so many of them, but... We haven't got time to look at them all, but I'd love us to just look at one.

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<p>John 10:30–33</p>	<p>If you have a Bible there, you might like to turn to it: John 10:30–33. Jesus said this:</p> <p><b>‘I and the Father are one.’</b> A claim tantamount to a claim to be God was blasphemy in the eyes of the people at the time, and they picked up stones to stone him.</p> <p>Jesus said: <b>‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’</b></p> <p><b>‘We’re not stoning you for any of these,’ they replied, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere human being, claim to be</b></p>
	<p>I think if you look at all the evidence, it’s clear that Jesus did make that claim. It’s an astonishing claim. But, of course, a claim like that needs to be tested. And really, if you think about it, there are only really three possibilities. Either it was not true and Jesus knew perfectly well it was not true, in which case he was a fraudster. Or else it was not true and he just simply didn’t realise it was not true – he genuinely thought he was God – in which case he was deluded, or, we would say, insane.</p> <p>But logically there is only really one other possibility, and that is that it’s true.</p>
<p>Q*</p>	<p>C. S. Lewis, one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century and, of course, best known as the author of <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>, said this:</p> <p>‘A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He’d either be insane or else he’d be the devil of hell. You must make your choice: either this man was and is the Son of God, or else insane or something worse. But let’s not come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not</p>
	<h2>Talk Point 2</h2> <p>WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE TO SUPPORT HIS CLAIMS?</p>

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<p>Mark 12:31 Luke 6:31 Matthew 5:44</p>	<p>So, second part of the argument: was he right in what he said about himself? What's the evidence to support his claims? Here's the first piece of evidence: his teaching.</p> <p>The teaching of Jesus is widely acknowledged to be the greatest teaching of all time. <b>'Love your neighbour as yourself.'</b> <b>'Do to other people as you would have them do to you.'</b> And then this, totally revolutionary, the first person to say this: <b>'Love your enemy.'</b></p> <p>Jesus' teaching has been the foundation of our entire civilisation in the West. Many of our laws were originally founded on the teaching of Jesus. We've advanced in every field of science and technology. Think how much we've advanced in the last ten years in science and technology. Yet in 2,000 years no one has ever improved on the moral teaching of Jesus. They're the greatest words ever spoken. They're the kind of words you'd expect God to speak.</p> <p>So the first piece of evidence: his teaching.</p>
<p><i>Either personalise or omit the text in red.</i></p>	<p>Secondly, his life: what he did. <b>I thought Christianity was boring. I thought Jesus would be a bore! You know, I thought Jesus would be the kind of person who would turn wine into water! I was amazed to read of Jesus going to a party</b> – it would have been such fun to be with Jesus: he went to a party; the wine ran out. He said, 'Go and get those jars. Fill them with bathwater and start pouring it out for the guests,' and they started pouring it out, and out came Château Lafite '45 – BC, that is!</p>
<p>John 15:13</p>	<p>Not just his miracles but his love for the marginalised: feeding the hungry, healing the sick and, ultimately, laying down his life for us. Jesus said: <b>'Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.'</b></p>
<p>Q</p>	<p><i>Time Magazine</i> described Jesus as 'the most persistent symbol of purity, selflessness and love in the history of humanity'.</p>

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	<p>His enemies could find no fault. And his friends, who knew him really well, said, 'This guy's without sin!'</p> <p><b>I often think</b> the real test of character is when we're under pressure. And Jesus when he was being tortured said about his torturers: <b>'Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.'</b></p> <p>And then his fulfilment of prophecy. No one else in the history of the world has had a whole collection of books written about them before they were born. Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies, twenty-nine of them in a single day. 'Well,' you might say, 'maybe he got hold of the Old Testament, he read all these prophecies and he thought, "Right, I'd better go around fulfilling all of these!"' The problem about that is the sheer number of them – and, humanly speaking, he had no control:</p> <p>The exact manner of his death was prophesied. The place of his burial. His resurrection. Even the place of his birth was prophesied. You know, reading through: 'Oh, I'm supposed to be born in Bethlehem' – it's too late!</p> <p>And then his conquest of death. This is the cornerstone of</p>
Q	<p>There was a headline in <i>The Onion</i>, the satirical magazine: 'World death rate holding steady at 100 per cent.' That's the</p>

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You know, the Victorians used to talk a lot about death, but they never talked about sex. We talk a lot about sex, but we don't talk about death. It's kind of just something you don't mention. Even in hospitals now they try to avoid using the word 'death'. I heard of one hospital where they said: 'You must never use the word "death".' They had a politically correct way of describing it: 'negative patient care outcome'.

But people die nevertheless! And when you go to a funeral, and the coffin goes into the ground, it looks absolutely final. And it is – unless death has been conquered; unless when Jesus died and was buried he was raised to life. If he was, then there's hope beyond this life.

But is it just wishful thinking? It is, unless there's evidence. What is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? First of all, his absence from the tomb. No one has ever satisfactorily explained why Jesus' body was not there the first Easter Day. People have come up with all sorts of explanations: the authorities stole the body. Well, in that case, why didn't they produce it when everyone was saying that Jesus had been seen? They couldn't.

**I find this piece of evidence fascinating:** that when the disciples heard that Jesus had been raised from the dead, they ran to the tomb, and when they got to the tomb, they looked in, and what they found was the grave-clothes of Jesus were still there. The only valuable thing for a robber to steal was still there. And they'd collapsed, like a caterpillar's cocoon when the butterfly has vanished. And the piece that had been around his head had been folded up and put in another place. And it says when they saw that, they believed.

So not only his absence from the tomb; then his presence with the disciples. Jesus was seen on several occasions, on one occasion by more than 500 people. That's probably the number of people downstairs here in the church tonight. All saw him on

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	<p>So when we look at what Jesus claimed about himself – the first part of the argument – it’s clear that Jesus did claim to be a man whose identity was God. Was he deluded? Was he a fraud? When you look at – <b>when / look at</b> the evidence of his teaching, the things that he did, his character, his fulfilment of prophecy, his resurrection, it seems <b>to me</b> absurd, illogical, unbelievable to say he was insane or a fraud. On the other hand, it provides the strongest possible supporting evidence</p>
<p><b>P</b></p> <p><i>Conclude the talk with a brief testimony of your experience of a relationship with Jesus and how this convinces you that Jesus was and is who he said he was. Use Nicky’s version as an example of tone and conclusion of the argument.</i></p>	<p>And that’s how I came to the conclusion it’s true. But it’s one thing to believe it here. And for me, I tried to put it off, because I wasn’t keen on the implications of it being true for my life. I thought I could put it off till my deathbed, maybe! But then I sort of thought that wouldn’t be intellectually honest. So I basically said, ‘Okay, yes!’ And at that moment I experienced in my heart a real encounter with Jesus, which changed my life in a very radical way.</p> <p>And I experienced that rather than it being some kind of, you know, ‘terrible thing that was going to happen’, that when Jesus said <b>‘I have come that you might have life and have it in all its fullness’</b>, that’s what I’ve experienced for the last forty years.</p> <p>Of course it’s not always easy. Of course there are ups and downs. Of course I mess up. But I’ve found that it really is true! Jesus really is who he claimed to be. Jesus really did rise from</p>

The Alpha Transcripts are taken from *Alpha with Nicky Gumbel* filmed 2014–2015, which are based on *Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel.

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#### Acknowledgements:

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C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001; Originally published 1949)  
C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (London: William Collins, 2012)  
*Time*, Monday June 21, 1971, 'The Alternative Jesus: Psychedelic Christ' © Time inc.

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