

Only A Suitable Redeemer Will Do

One of the most startling pieces of information that we are given in relation to Jesus is the fact that he was **made like us**. Jesus' redemptive work *on behalf of humanity* was deeply connected to *his own humanity*. Although he was born "[the Son of God](#)", and radiant with His Father's glory, he participated in every way in all the experiences of what it means to be human. His ability to sympathise with us and to reconcile on our behalf springs from a complete understanding of what it is like to be human; with all our doubts, fears, temptations and failures. He understood humans because **he was** human.

"For this reason he (Jesus) had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." – Hebrews 2:17, NIV

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." – Hebrews 4:15, NIV

These remarkable concepts of atonement, redeeming and redemption were subtly foreshadowed many times throughout Old Testament stories; one such example is the well known tale of Joseph of the multi-coloured coat and his descent into slavery at the hands of his brothers.

However, the law of *the kinsman* or *the kinsmen redeemer* had been written into the weave of Israeli life from very early times, clearly foretelling what Jesus' work was to be and how it was to be accomplished. We find the narrative of **the**

redeemer and the redeemed poignantly depicted in the [story of Ruth](#)

A Story Of Redemptive Love

The [story of Ruth](#), the inconsequential outsider, is one of joy and heartbreak, desolation and hope. Ruth, of all people, was an unlikely heroine. Not only was she a woman, in a time when women were of minor importance, she was also a widow, poor and foreign and would have been considered an outsider to any true-born Israelite. Yet the conclusion of this seemingly insignificant tale brings us to the interesting discovery that Ruth eventually became an incredibly significant and vital part of [God's plan of salvation](#) for the world – she was an ancestor of [Jesus Christ](#).

Ruth's story powerfully underscores the importance of love's redeeming power to transform lives. (You can read more about it [here](#).)

Yet hidden within the narrative lies a deeper significance; a story within a story, that has remarkable bearing on the work and purpose of Jesus himself. Hidden, in plain sight, is the way in which God intended to save the world, through His Son.

'The Nearest Kinsman Redeemer'

The book of Ruth is set during the time of Israel's history known as 'the Judges' (circa 1220 – 1050 B.C.). It was a period of religious and moral decline, frequent foreign oppression and national disunity. The people of Israel were often at the mercy of enemies from without and discord from within. Yet although it was a time of great instability, certain laws and customs helped to form an integral part of Israelite society. Many of these laws can still be found throughout the Old Testament, in the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

One law, in particular, was known as the law of the *nearest kinsman* or the *kinsmen redeemer*. The kinsman-redeemer was a **male relative** who, according to various laws of the [Pentateuch](#), was responsible to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. The Hebrew term for kinsman-redeemer (*go el*) designates *one who delivers or rescues*, either property or person. **The redeemer had to be related to the person being redeemed and could not be a stranger.**

The *kinsman-redeemer* or *guardian-redeemer* was the proper legal term for the nearest male kinsman who was able to redeem or vindicate a relative (Leviticus 25:25-55).

*“If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his **nearest redeemer** shall come and **redeem** what his brother has sold.” – Leviticus 25:25, ESV*

*“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and **perform the duty of a husband’s brother** to her. – Deuteronomy 25:5, ESV*

*“If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger’s clan, then after he is sold he may be **redeemed**. One of his brothers may **redeem him**, or his uncle or his cousin may **redeem him**, or a close relative from his clan may **redeem him**.” – Leviticus 25:47-49, ESV*

While these laws may seem strange and somewhat archaic to us in the 21st century, they were instituted to protect the impoverished or marginalised members of society who might otherwise suffer permanent loss of life, freedom or property.

The Law Cannot Redeem

Ruth appealed to a wealthy landowner and relative of her mother-in-law, named Boaz, who was eligible to undertake the rights and responsibilities of the *nearest kinsman*. Boaz immediately tells Ruth he is willing to redeem her, however there was a kinsman nearer than himself. If this kinsman could not, or would not, then Boaz promises Ruth he will certainly redeem her.

“And now do not be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you request, since all my fellow townspeople know that you are a woman of noble character. Yes, it is true that I am a kinsman-redeemer, but there is a redeemer nearer than I. Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, good. Let him redeem you. But if he does not want to redeem you, as surely as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie here until morning.” – Ruth 3:11-13, BSB

Boaz’s conversation with the nearer kinsman soon makes it clear that this kinsman cannot redeem Ruth. He offers Boaz this right of redemption, which Boaz accepts.

“Take my right of redemption, because I cannot redeem it...At this, Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I am buying from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, to raise up the name of the deceased through his inheritance, so that his name will not disappear from among his brothers or from the gate of his home. You are witnesses today..” – Ruth 4:6, 9, BSB

The nearer kinsman in this narrative represents the Law of Moses, under which Israel was governed. Instituted soon after the Israelites had migrated from Egypt, an event also known as ‘The Exodus’, this law remained in place until Jesus’ time and

still forms a central part of [Judaism](#) today. Yet, while the Law came first, prior to Jesus, and imposed many values of morality and justice, ultimately it could never put a man or a woman right with God. ***It was unable to redeem.***

“The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent His own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.” – Romans 8:3, NLT

No amount of doing good or attempts at obedience can remove the stain of sin from a person’s life. All believers must come to understand that obeying God’s laws cannot produce the righteousness needed for salvation. It is only [dependence on God](#), in faith, to put things right, that makes it possible to be [‘right with God’](#).

The law was only a shadow of better things to come; acting as a guardian until all humanity could come to understand their need of a Saviour.

Jesus’ Humanity Was Crucial To Redemption

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, [the devil](#).” – Hebrews 2:14, NIV

Only a human could break the power of sin and death which had gripped humanity in a stranglehold for over 4000 years. Only the **kinsman-redeemer** could redeem.

Yet no ordinary human could possibly have achieved this remarkable feat. God, in His infinite love, did not leave anything to chance, causing His Son to be born, with the mind

and character of Himself, the exact representation of His being and radiant with His glory (Hebrew 1:3), yet flesh and blood like us. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus became *Emmanuel*, “*God-With-Us*”, strengthened in will and purpose and redeemer of the world.

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Jesus was human and ‘our brother’ in every way, made like this so He could be a suitable redeemer.

He fulfilled the essential requirements of being made ‘like his brethren’, human in every respect necessary, so that he could conquer sin and death for all those who shared in his same humanity.

Only in this way, being completely mortal and subject to pain and death, could it be said of Jesus that “*he must suffer and that, by being the **first to rise from the dead**, he would proclaim light both to [the Jews] and to the Gentiles*”, thereby giving the rest of humanity hope of also escaping the finality of mortality and death.

True Religion

Religion is defined as “*a cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organisations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.*”

Yet, there is no actual consensus among scholars as to what precisely constitutes a religion.

Nearly 85% of the world's population identifies as being religious, claiming affiliation with one of the five largest religions; [Christianity](#), [Islam](#), [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#) or forms of [folk religion](#). These different religions all have distinct rules, regulations and beliefs that form part of that particular religion.

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with over 2.4 billion followers. Growing out of Judaism – its earliest converts were Jews who were followers of Jesus Christ in the first century – it quickly spread from Judea into Asia Minor and then further abroad. By the fourth century, Christianity had become the official state religion of the [Roman Empire](#). Christianity has, in fact, played a major role in the shaping of western civilisation.

What Is Religion?

When the [Latin](#) word *religio* found its way into the English language as *religion*, around the 1200s, it took the meaning of “life bound by monastic vows” or monastic orders. It eventually came to distinguish the domain of the church and the domain of civil authorities.

Yet the ancient and medieval world understood the word *religio* quite differently. For the ancients, it carried a meaning of *individual virtue of worship*, never as doctrine, practice, or actual source of knowledge. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, there is no precise equivalent of the English word *religion*. The Greek word *threskeia*, used in the New Testament, is sometimes translated as religion, however, the term was more correctly understood as ‘worship’, well into the medieval period.

In the Quran, the Arabic word [din](#) is often translated as religion in modern translations, but up until the mid-1600s, translators expressed *din* as law.

Religion, in itself, is a modern, western concept and it was understood in quite a different way by those who lived in the ancient world. Today, religion would perhaps be explained as a system of rules or practices governed by certain beliefs. The ancient world would have viewed this concept as *law* and saw *religion* quite differently; as the idea of worship or reverence of God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things and piety, or diligence.

Religion Has A Bad Reputation

Discussion about religion is often long, complex, divisive and inconclusive. It doesn't come as any surprise that the IPSOS Global Poll released in 2017 shows that a majority of Australians (63%) believe that religion does more harm than good. Only one in four Australians say religion defines them as a person.

Religion has been much maligned – and [perhaps with good reason](#). Unfortunately, when men and women get their hands on religion, it is often for the purpose of control and manipulation of others. Many [terrible acts](#) have been committed 'in the name of religion' and supposedly with a divine blessing – yet God is often furthest from the minds of those perpetrating such acts. In reality, God is often the last priority; intolerance is the driving force behind many actions that claim permission on religious grounds.

“Christianity itself has a long history of such intolerance, including persecution of Jews, crusades against Muslims, and the Thirty Years' War, in which religious and nationalist rivalries combined to devastate Central Europe.” | [The New York Times](#)

What Is True Religion?

The aim of this article is not to impress on any reader the

'rightness' of our particular beliefs or doctrines. Whether a man or woman chooses to be religious, or not, should be a deeply personal consideration, without manipulation or coercion from others.

Rather, it is intended to be an honest examination of what 'true religion' should be for any committed Christian, professing belief in Jesus' saving work and God's divine plan for the world.

If we have accepted Jesus as our saviour, our beliefs and our practices must line up and work together in harmony. We must profess and practice true religion, not merely an inadequate form, which hasn't touched our hearts. Timothy warns against a form of godliness, which appears righteous from the outside but in reality denies the power that godliness has to radically transform us (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

The word *religion* is only used a few times in the Bible. But the concept of religion, as it was originally understood, actually permeates the entire Bible. True religion, at its core, is about the relationship between God and ourselves and how this transforms us from the inside out.

This understanding began early on in the book of Genesis, where men began to call on the name of God (Genesis 4).

"Now men began to worship God, not only in their closets and families, but in public and solemn assemblies. The worshippers of God began to distinguish themselves: so the margin reads it. 'Then began men to be called by the name of the Lord' – or, to call themselves by it. Now Cain and those that had deserted religion had built a city, and begun to declare for irreligion, and called themselves the sons of men. Those that adhered to God began to declare for Him and His worship, and called themselves the sons of God." | Benson Commentary

Another commentary has this to say:

“The name of God signifies in general ‘the whole nature of God, by which He attests His personal presence in the relation into which He has entered with man, the divine self-manifestation, or the whole of that revealed side of the divine nature, which is turned towards man’. In Genesis 4, we have an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of God. Those of the family of Seth began, by united invocation of the name of God of grace, to found and to erect the [kingdom of God](#).” – Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament

True religion – pure religion – is the acknowledgment of our need for God’s mercy, our worship of Him and what He has done for us and the application of His character in our lives, because of our thankfulness.

True religion is the seamless unity of believing *and* doing and it’s demonstrated throughout the Bible by countless examples of [faithful men](#) and [women](#). (Hebrews 11:1-40). It’s an **active faith**, shown by both word and deed and not just empty talk.

“Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless (‘the fatherless and the widow’) in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.” – James 1: 26-27, MSG

Jesus put it in another way:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest

commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Matthew 22:37-39, NIV

And again, in Hosea:

"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." – Hosea 6:6, BSB

What True Religion Isn't

True religion isn't rules-based or rituals-based but is instead firmly rooted in faith. Faith, in response to God's action in our lives, [alters everything about us](#); our daily relationships, our perspective on life, our interactions with family, neighbours, friends and community. When God is present and completely sovereign in our lives, when we adhere to God and declare for Him and His worship, God calls us His children and part of His family. This is religion in its purest and most true form.

God's gift of freedom is easily perverted and often squandered by men or women placing religious burdens and rituals on their fellow man. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day for exactly this, commenting that *"they tie up heavy, burdensome loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them..."* (Matthew 23:4).

God is not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways. He is a deeply real and loving Father who invites us into a personal relationship with Him. It is always an invitation, never coercion or guilt-driven; we are given space and freedom to answer His invitation. [Through Jesus](#), we have been set free and are invited to participate in God's saving work with humanity.

How important it is for any sincere and genuine Christian to

constantly promote this extraordinary message of God's grace and ensure we don't unwittingly return to a life of rule-keeping, which God finds no pleasure in.

What people need to see and experience from us is **true religion** – active, transformative and inspiring. The kind of religion that Jesus demonstrated every day.

*“Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, **then Christ died unnecessarily.**” | Galatians 2:21, MSG*

The modern concept of the meaning behind the word religion is an abstraction that involves distinct sets of beliefs or doctrines. Its usage, in this way, began with texts from the 17th century, resulting from events such as the splitting of Christendom during the Protestant Reformation and globalisation in the age of exploration.

However, the word religion, from the Latin *religio*, meaning 'to bind', is a word which in the ancient and medieval world was used to refer to *individual virtue of worship; respect for what was sacred, and a reverence for the divine*. It described an attitude of *being* rather than *creed*.

You may be interested to read more in the article: [From Religion To Cruciformity](#).