

# John Writes A Letter

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*“God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day – our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life – fear of death, fear of judgment – is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love – love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.” – 1 John 4:17-21, MSG*

## Authentic Christianity

**Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.**

John’s words on this subject are blunt and straight to the point. *“You cannot be a Christian and hate other people”*. It’s incompatible and hypocritical. Not only that, it’s a blatant subversion of everything that is intrinsically bound up in a Christian’s salvation by God’s grace. We love God, because He **first** loved us and, despite our complete unworthiness, He sent His son to die for us. There is no greater love than a man dying for his friends, and there could be no greater demonstration of what love looks like, to die, even for those who were your enemies.

*“What marvellous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it – we’re called children of God!” – 1 John 3:1, MSG*

Of all the people on this earth, it would seem obvious that Christians would understand the implications of this. We are the recipients of a love so deep and vast and completely undeserving, it should be impossible for us to not respond to this in our relationships with others. We haven’t received from God what we should have. And what we shouldn’t have received, we have. Grace, freely given, has been demonstrated by a love lavished on us in abundance. This recognition of grace should empower and transform us to demonstrate the same kind of love in all our relationships, and especially to our Christian family.

Grace is, perhaps, the easiest concept to speak about in the enthusiastic language of a born-again believer ([John 3:1-21](#)) but, in reality, the hardest virtue to assimilate into our Christian lives. Legalism, not grace, is one of the first lessons we learn in life; that all things come with a price and that nothing is given for free. We can tend to persist in this mentality after our conversion, even on an unconscious level, viewing God and each other in this light.

*“The one who won’t practice righteous ways isn’t from God, neither is the one who won’t love a brother or sister.” – 1 John 3:10, MSG*

## **Are We Really Born Again?**

There’s a serious crisis amongst Christians. It seems we can talk a lot about love, but we’re actually woefully inadequate at demonstrating it. Instead of showing real, authentic love, demonstrated in graceful, multi-faceted ways, we see the opposite in many of our Christian communities. We’re often religiously wealthy but morally bankrupt; devoid of any real expression of a grace-led life. We say we’re born again but

are we really? Has grace really touched our hearts?

Jesus told a story to illustrate what a life untransformed by grace looks like – that of the *ungrateful* servant ([Matthew 18: 21-35](#)). Despite having been forgiven a massive debt of some several million dollars by his master, the servant proceeded to demand repayment of a debt owed to him by a fellow servant, of only a few dollars. When the fellow servant was unable to immediately repay, he had him thrown into prison, ‘until he could repay the debt’ – which would have been practically impossible from his prison cell. The master soon heard of the ungrateful servant’s behaviour and the conclusion of the tale is sobering:

*“Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”* [Matthew 18:32-35, ESV](#)

The parable was designed to impress upon the listeners the importance of their attitude towards each other in response to the forgiveness they had received from God. In fact, there is a direct connection between our professed love for God and our love for our ‘fellow servants’. John puts it this way:

*“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”* [1 John 4:20, NIV](#)

## What Does Real Love Look Like?

*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it*

*is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, ESV*

These are all attributes of a life that is lived walking with God; [led by the Spirit](#). The implications of a Spirit-led life find their way into every aspect of our lives: affection for others, understanding and compassion for their failings, forgiveness of their mistakes (and our own!), confidence in God’s love and kindness, a commitment to cultivate close and loving relationships built on mutual respect and sacrifice.

These are attributes of a person who has fully grasped the weight and implications of saving grace and whose life is being transformed, day by day, following the example of the One who went before – Jesus Christ. They are choosing every day to put aside the unfruitful works of darkness and to walk in the Spirit, producing the fruit that comes from living God’s way (Galatians 5). The bright light of Christ makes their way plain.

## **Hate Will Destroy Us**

The opposite of love is hate. And let’s get real. Hate, in all its forms, whether displayed passively or aggressively, is like a poison that destroys our soul. It will ruin our life – and not just ours. It causes havoc in our families, our relationships, our churches and, critically, to our witness of the Gospel. We may think that we have never been guilty of ‘hating our brother or sister’, but when we harbour bitterness in our heart, when we gossip about them to others, when we withhold doing good on the basis of preference, when we are angry at them, when we don’t treat them with dignity and honour, ‘esteeming all better than ourselves’, we are hating them.

So heinous is the position of hate before God that John says that a person who hates is said to be walking in darkness and not the light ([1 John 2:9, 11](#)). It's entirely possible for a person to continue professing religion but remain at enmity with their Christian brother or sister. The Bible states unapologetically that such a person is a liar ([1 John 4:20](#)).

They may fool everyone else but they cannot fool God.

## **Hate Is An Issue Of The Heart**

We need to be on our guard in our Christian communities that we are not unwittingly or, worse, complicit in allowing lives to be ruled by hate, in all its insidious forms. While we may be vocal on what are perceived to be more serious sins (such as murder or immorality), we tend to overlook or excuse things like slander, gossip, envy, enmity, strife, jealousy, bitter disagreements, divisions or backbiting. Do we speak against these things and model a better way? We are all capable of such things and we are all responsible for preventing the spiritual disease that results from overlooking these things in our Christian communities.

We are warned over and over in the Bible of how hatred and bitterness can destroy us. We are encouraged to love one another, keep short records of wrongs, and forgive others, not harbouring bitterness or anger in our hearts.

We know that all these issues find their source in the darkness of the human heart.

*"For from within the hearts of people come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery." – Mark 7:21, ESV*

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. – Ephesians 4:31, ESV*

When we struggle with issues like gossip, slander, bitterness, anger or envy, the problem lies inside us, deep in the recesses of our heart. The issue is not with the person at whom our hate is directed but with us. And if it were not a problem that all Christians face, the many writers of the epistles, especially John, wouldn't have taken the time to warn us of it.

If we can't love our Christian brother or sister, then, quite simply, we don't [understand grace](#).

## How Can We Change The Narrative?

The imperative first step for anyone struggling with these issues is to spend some time considering God's grace and work of salvation in their life. Make it personal. Consider what it meant for God to give His Son for you, that you might live. Consider the weight of your guilt and inability to fully satisfy God's righteousness, and comprehend the fact that, in Jesus, you are forgiven and set free, fully reconciled and made right with God.

Perhaps you don't truly believe this to be true for yourself and this is the root cause of your fear and judgment of others. Make it a priority to [find peace and true reconciliation](#) with the God who is for you and not against you. Allow the dark places of your heart to be flooded with the light of Jesus. Ask for God to soften your heart, for Him to remove the bitterness, envy and hate. Confess to Him how ashamed you are of allowing that root of bitterness to grow and ask Him to help you prune it from your life.

And, as Christian communities, we must all love enthusiastically, hating sin but loving the sinner, remembering that we were all at one time enemies of God. We must not tolerate those things that allow hate or division to flourish but show our faith by cultivating [works of the Spirit](#), against which there is no law! (Galatians 5:22-24).

*“So don’t lose a minute in building on what you’ve been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.”*  
– 2 Peter 1:5-9, MSG

**“Anyone who claims to be intimate with God, ought to live the kind of life that Jesus lived.” | 1 John 2:6, MSG**

## **A Powerful Witness To The Truth Of Jesus Christ**

Jesus tells his disciples in John 13:35, that by loving one another as he has loved them, all the world will know that they are his disciples. *The world will see your love for each other and know, without even having to ask, that you are followers of the King.* How we love, as Christians, therefore, is either a powerful witness to the truth and reality of the risen King and our allegiance to him; or a public denial of our belief in the King and his ability to truly transform our hearts. By not loving as the King loves, we demonstrate for all to see that the *ruler of this world* still controls us; that we are allowing this rule to flourish in our lives and govern our actions towards others.

Real faith in the King is more than the words we say, the emotions we feel, ideas we debate or a truth we believe. Real faith is something we do; expressed in visible ways, deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that “one man died for everyone.” Real faith shows up in our life – particularly in the way that we love the King’s people.

‘Sometimes called “the Proverbs of the New Testament”, the

book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians exactly how to live so as to be compelling witnesses for the name of Jesus Christ. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one's tongue, submitting to God's will, and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ.

Many have claimed that James and the Apostle Paul differed on the question of faith versus works, but in reality, the spiritual fruit that James talks about simply demonstrates the true faith of which Paul wrote.' (taken from the introduction to James, ESV 2000). *If you claim to be a Christian*, James says, ***prove it by your actions***.

The kind of faith that is real, saving faith is shown to be vital, living and demonstrable in action. Depending on God and accepting His gift of grace – truly accepting it – will radically transform our lives. It will challenge everything we do, our belief systems and possibly even misplaced prejudices about others. It will compel us to behave justly to others, with impartiality, even though the world around us might not be just or impartial. It will compel us to do better and be better, not so that we 'earn God's favour' but so that our faith can be seen as a reality, not just a matter of empty words.

Awareness of, and responding to the love of God is at the heart of our Christian lives. We are who we are, first and foremost, because of God revealed in Christ. Yet if our 'loving union with God' doesn't result in a living faith, shown by our good works to others, then, as [1 John 4:7-21](#) says so eloquently, our love for God **simply isn't real**. This kind of faith is a counterfeit Christianity and nothing more than a corpse.

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# What Is A Disciple?

The word disciple occurs frequently throughout the Bible and [‘discipleship’](#) is something that the Bible references often. But what does the word *disciple* actually mean? And what does it mean to be a *disciple of Jesus*?

## What Is A Disciple?

Our English language Bibles were translated from manuscripts written primarily in two languages; Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament). The translative history of the Bible is a fascinating journey, from an academic and historical perspective, and is well worth exploring. You can [read more about the translation process here](#).

In the original language of the New Testament, the word *disciple* is translated from a Greek word, *mathētēs* (μαθητής), from *manthano*, meaning “to learn”. *Mathētēs* therefore means (unsurprisingly) *a learner, a pupil or a scholar*. More accurately though, it means to be a learner *in the style of an apprentice*, that is, someone who not only accepts the views of their teacher but is also practising the same so as to eventually become like their teacher (Matthew 10:24, Luke 6:40).

It’s a word that would have been in common use during ancient times and its meaning was applicable beyond a Christian or religious setting (ie as a disciple of Plato or Socrates). Although the word has several applications, in the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone,

not only in belief but also in life and practice.

## Who Is A Disciple Of Jesus?

When we come to the Bible, we see the word *disciple* used most often in the context of a follower of Jesus and sometimes of John the Baptist (Matthew 27:57, Luke 14:27, Matthew 11:1, John 3:25). Throughout the gospels, it's the only name used for those who followed Jesus, and even those who had only been baptised with the baptism of John the Baptist (and hadn't received the Holy Spirit) were called disciples (Acts 19:1-4).

It would be accurate to say that a disciple of Jesus was someone who [believed the teachings of Jesus](#), who surrendered to his leadership, and who endeavoured to imitate his life.

When we move into the early history of the church (found in the book called the Acts of the Apostles), we see these disciples began to be called *Christians* (from the Greek word Χριστιανός (Christianos), meaning "follower of Christ") (Acts 11:26).

## The Acts Of The Apostles

The book of the Acts of the Apostles provides a unique glimpse into the story of the early Christians, and to a time when these disciples of Jesus took their faith and began boldly proclaiming it to the world. In Acts, we are observing the very birth of Christianity – the movement which recognised and preached a resurrected Jesus as the promised saviour and king of the world.

The Book of Acts opens with this introductory paragraph by its author, Luke, also one of the four Gospel writers and one of Jesus' 12 closest disciples:

*"Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said goodbye to the Apostles, the ones he had chosen through*

*the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God.” | Acts 1:1-4, MSG*

The book's narrative describes the disciples as first-hand witnesses to the resurrected Jesus; witnesses to the astonishing truth of the Gospel message, and how they took that Good News to the world, beginning first in Jerusalem, then moving throughout Judea and eventually to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

The interactive map below shows the power of their witness to the gospel message, demonstrating not just areas where professing Christians are the majority of the population, nor where Christianity has been declared the national religion, but also the true extent of the global spread of the gospel since the first century. It's a powerful, visual reminder of God's promise to save people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9)

## **What Was The Good News?**

Peter the Apostle, when making his speech to the Jews in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost, summarised the Good News in this way:

*“Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited by God to you – the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through him are common knowledge – this Jesus, following [the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God](#), was betrayed by men who took the law into their own hands, and was handed over to you. And you pinned him to a cross and killed him. But God untied the death ropes and [raised him up](#). Death was no match for him...All Israel, then, know this: There's no longer room for doubt – God made him Master and Messiah, this*

*Jesus whom you killed on a cross. Change your life. Turn to God and [be baptised](#), each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.” | Acts 2:26-40, MSG*

Peter is attesting to the validity of Jesus of Nazareth, as God’s appointed saviour and king. He is witnessing to the truth of the resurrected Jesus and the confirmation of his true identity as Son of God. And he is urging his listeners to believe this truth, to surrender their lives to Jesus and receive God’s promise of forgiveness of sins and the hope of life, even after death. In short, he is urging them to become disciples of Jesus, followers and imitators of the Christ. He is urging them to become Christians!

The number of people who heard his message and believed his words on that day was incredible! The book of Acts tells us that over 3000 people [were baptised](#). And not only that, every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2:47)

*“That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptised and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, [the life together](#), the common meal, and the prayers.” | Acts 2:41-42, MSG*

## **The Teachings Of Jesus: The Gospel Of Good News**

Peter was, in reality, only reconfirming the teachings of Jesus; that of the Good News of salvation for humanity and truth of the kingdom of God; God’s rightful rule and sovereignty over all the earth ([Matthew 16:27](#), [Luke 21:26-27](#), [James 2:5](#), [1 Corinthians 2:9](#), [Numbers 14:21](#), [Psalm](#)

[22:27](#), [Habakkuk 2:14](#)).

*“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” | Mathew 4:23, NIV*

*“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. “The time is fulfilled,” He said, “and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!” | Mark 1:14, BSB*

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.” | Isaiah 61:1, NLT*

*“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” | Matthew 9:13, ESV*

*Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” | Luke 17:20-21, NKJV*

## How Do I Become A Disciple?

Becoming a Christian and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ **is the same thing**; we just don't really use the word disciple much anymore. The basis for us to become Christians remains the same as for those in the first century, who were Jesus' followers. So what is it that makes us a *disciple of Jesus*? What is it that makes us a *Christian*?

We need to look no further than Peter's words to the people at Jerusalem (Acts 2:22-42):

- We must believe that Jesus was **God-sent and God-endorsed, as the appointed saviour and king of the world**. We acknowledge that Jesus came as one of us, [like us in every way](#), so that he could defeat sin and death on our behalf (1 John 4:14, Galatians 4:4, John 3:16, Hebrews 2:14-17, Romans 5:12).
- We must believe that Jesus **died for the sins of the world** and was [raised to life, never to die again](#) (1 John 2:2, John 4:42, 1 John 3:5, Acts 2:32, Acts 3:15, 1 Corinthians 6:14, Romans 8:11).
- We must be **convicted of our sin, acknowledging our need for God's forgiveness and recognising that [the name of Jesus](#) is the only name under heaven by which humanity can be saved** (Ecclesiastes 7:20, 1 John 1:9-10, Romans 3:23, James 1:15 Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5).
- We must believe in the teachings of Jesus and **surrender to his [guidance and leadership in our life](#)**, not only as an apprentice to a teacher, but as a willing subject of God's designated King. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he has first claim on our affections, he is the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of [our soul](#) (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22. 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).
- We must **follow [the example of Jesus and be baptised](#)**, as directed in Mark 16:16. Baptism is God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised 'for the

repentance of our sins'. The Bible compares baptism to burial, 'dying' to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6).

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of our faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news. It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common union with the work achieved in and through Jesus.

## **Not Just A Disciple Of Jesus But Family Of God**

Welcome to the family! When God puts you in Jesus, He also puts you [in community](#). When you believe and are baptised, you become a disciple of Jesus – a Christian – but not only that, you also become a valued member of God's family (1 Corinthians 12:27, Galatians 4:7, Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:26, 1 John 3:1-2, Ephesians 2:18-19, Ephesians 3:14-19). Becoming a Christian means you join a great cloud of faithful witnesses to the truth of the resurrected Christ (Hebrews 12:1), as believers of the message of Good News and disciples of Christ the King.

*"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." | [Romans 10:10, NIV](#)*

# 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.

## Only A Suitable Redeemer Will Do

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.