

B. Christianity | Sample Answer

i. Outline four key characteristics of the Kingdom of God that Jesus emphasize in his preaching. (2015 Section B [a])

There are four characteristics of the Kingdom of God.

1. A place where peace is the alternative to violence.
2. A place where inclusion is the alternative to emergence of elites.
3. A place where the sharing of goods is the alternative to amassing of wealth.
4. A place where a God of the powerless is the alternative to a God who sanctions inequalities.

One of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God is that is a place where peace is the alternative to violence, this is best expressed through Parables: A Parable is a story told by Jesus that had a hidden message or meaning. The stories were always very simple, and they were based on themes that they were familiar with, e.g. farmers, shepherds, and vineyards. Jesus used parables as a teaching tool and a way of communicating with people. Usually the end of the parable surprised the listener and hopefully made them change their ways, examples of parables were: The Good Samaritan. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It is about a traveller who is stripped of clothing, beaten, and left half dead alongside the road. First a priest and then a Levite comes by, but both avoid the man. Finally, a Samaritan comes upon the traveller. Samaritans and Jews despised each other, but the Samaritan helped the injured man. Jesus is telling the parable in response to the question from a lawyer, "And who is my neighbour?". In response, Jesus tells the parable, the conclusion of which is that the neighbour figure in the parable is the man who shows mercy to the injured man, that is, the Samaritan. A broad reading of this story suggests a tale of unconditional love and caring for those in a desperate state, but its true meaning can only be fully grasped when viewed from a Jewish point of view. Priests and Levites were highly respected people in Jewish society. They would have been examples for how all should live their lives. He points out that religious people of the day would rather protect their reputation and partake in religious ceremonies than help a dying man. Most of Jesus' parables challenge the listeners and examine the way they live their lives. In his parables Jesus calls his listeners to Metanoia. He asks his listeners to choose peace over

violence, to include rather than to exclude, to share rather than to hoard and to know God as a loving God. The parables speak of the kingdom of God as a place where the sick will be healed and the poor will be cared for- a place of justice, compassion and forgiveness. "In the Kingdom of God. the last will be first and the first will be last".

Another characteristic of the Kingdom of God is that it is a place that is inclusive and welcomes everybody, this is portrayed through gospels. Jesus loved all he met and many of the most important messages of his ministry came through these people and not the social elites. In the Gospels There are many accounts of Jesus sharing meals. He often ate with the outcasts of society, the sinners, tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes. Jesus had only scorn and anger for those in society who had placed themselves above everyone else and done so through the use of faith in God. On several occasions Jesus scandalised the establishment with the people that he shared meals with but on other occasions he chose the setting of a meal to carry out his teaching and reveal his vision for the future. Christians all over the world today remember Jesus through the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sacred meal where we remember Jesus and the words that he spoke on that night. When we look at some of the meals that Jesus shared, it is clear that he was trying to make the Kingdom of God present: He was sharing and being inclusive. He spoke the term "Abba" a term for God who is inclusive and intimate. As we said, Jesus ate with sinners, tax collectors and outsiders, here he is challenging people's understanding of God, that he loves everybody.

Another characteristic of the kingdom of god is that it is a place that puts emphasis on the sharing of goods rather than the accumulation of wealth. This is shown through the miracles of Jesus. Jesus was an inspired teacher - people were always drawn to him. Wherever he went Jesus announced the Kingdom of. God did this powerfully through the miracles that he performed. At the time of Jesus, Illness was generally seen as a punishment for sinfulness. It was seen as a sign of God's displeasure with the person or their parents. But when we see Jesus curing the blind man, the ten lepers, the crippled woman it is showing that God cares for and loves all those who suffer. These miracles reveal The Kingdom of God to be a place where those who suffer will be happy. By Jesus performing his miracles he showed people that he was allowing god to speak through him to proclaim the kingdom of god. In the words of Moltmann "The Kingdom of the loving God drives out the germs of death and spreads the seeds of life".

The last characteristics of the Kingdom of God is that a God Jesus being a devout Jew would have been very familiar with the Torah and all the prayers and teachings that were contained within it. He obeyed the Jewish customs and laws. Jesus loved God with all his heart, soul and mind, just as the Torah instructed. Jesus, however, used another term for God, Abba, which is best translated as dada or father. This was a term of intimacy and closeness between God and Jesus. He proclaimed God was loving, caring and understanding. He spoke of God as being always present. God was not distant, harsh or judgemental. The prayer most associated with Jesus is the one prayer that he taught his followers, the Lord's prayer.

ii. Compare two of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus with the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus spent three years traveling the Holy Land proclaiming the Good News and teaching to the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God this was a term that the people of the time would have been familiar with.

The Jewish groups that existed at the time were unhappy with Roman occupation in their land, they all expected God to intervene and return to their promised land to them but none of them were expecting somebody like Jesus Christ and his notion of the Kingdom of God.

Each of the groups had different expectations of Jesus Christ. The Zealots wanted a political King who would banish the Romans through force and violence. The Pharisees thought that by keeping to the strict Jewish laws, God would intervene, and rescue them. The Sadducees saw their roles as priests and guards of the temple as being central to God intervening and saving them. The Essenes thought by withdrawing from the world they had hoped God would send a messiah and bring with him a new age.

All of these groups and indeed all Jewish people were expecting a prophet who would come and tell them what God wanted. The prophets preached about repentance and conversion. They called everyone to be obedient to God. The people at the time were very concerned with the end

of the world and what would happen to them. This concern with the end of the world is called Eschatology. The people at the time felt that the “end is near” and that people needed to repent their sins immediately and turn to God. Because of the expectation that the world was ending soon there was a call for immediate conversion and repentance. This immediate conversion is called Metanoia. In his preaching Jesus also called for Metanoia. At this time there was a heightened expectation that God would intervene and save his suffering people from the romans. They had hoped that the ‘Kingdom of God’ would herald a new age for the people.

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Jesus was a Jew himself, born into a politically complex Galilee. Jesus was a prophet who called for people to re-examine their lives and their relationship with God. He emphasised that everybody could have a special, unique and loving relationship with God. He called on those in power to work for justice and equality. He called for peace, love justice, equality, a message best summed up in the term Kingdom of God '.