

We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
TWO

THE CHRIST



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Two

The Christ

INTRODUCTION

In most parts of the world today, people have at least two names. For example, they might have both a family name that identifies them as part of a particular group, and a given name that identifies them as individuals. So, when we teach children about Jesus Christ, they often assume that “Jesus” is his given name and that “Christ” is his family name. In fact, sometimes even adults have this misconception. But this shouldn’t be surprising. After all, even the Bible sometimes uses the word “Christ” as if it were Jesus’ name. But in reality, the word “Christ” is a title that identifies Jesus’ service and honor in God’s kingdom.

This is the second lesson in our series *We Believe in Jesus*. And we’ve entitled it “The Christ.” Our strategy in this lesson will be to focus on events and characteristics of Jesus’ life that help explain what it means for him to be the Christ.

The word “Christ” simply means anointed one. It translates the New Testament Greek word *Christos*, which itself translates the Old Testament Hebrew word *Mashiach* or Messiah.

Many people are surprised to know that the Bible doesn’t use the term “Christ” or “anointed one” exclusively for Jesus. It’s actually a fairly common term in the Old Testament, referring to people that were anointed with oil to mark them as God’s special servants. At certain stages in Old Testament history, all prophets, priests and kings could be called “anointed ones,” in a general sense.

For example, one of the most important meanings of the term “Messiah” or “Christ” in the Old Testament was its reference to the descendants of David that served as kings over Israel and Judah. We see this in places like 2 Chronicles 6:42; Psalm 89:38-39, as well as verse 51; and Psalm 132:10, 17.

But portions of the Old Testament also created the expectation that a very special Anointed One was going to come in the future. He would embody all these roles in unique ways, and would accomplish all of God’s saving purposes in the world. And this person came to be known among the Jews simply as the Messiah or the Christ. And of course, Christians around the world know that Jesus was this great Messiah, the final Anointed One, the Christ.

Our discussion of Jesus the Christ will divide into four parts. First, we’ll look at the theological significance of some events from the period of his birth and preparation for his role as Christ. Second, we’ll explore his public ministry as the Christ. Third, we will examine his passion and death. And fourth, we’ll investigate the events that comprise his exaltation as the Christ. Let’s begin with Jesus’ birth and preparation.

BIRTH AND PREPARATION

In this lesson, we'll describe Jesus' birth and preparation for his messianic service as the period stretching from the announcement of his coming birth to his victorious return from his temptations in the wilderness. We'll look in depth at several events from this time of his life, but first we'll quickly summarize the whole period.

Before Jesus was born, angels announced his birth to both his virgin mother Mary and her fiancé Joseph. The angel Gabriel foretold Jesus' birth to Mary in Luke 1:26-38. And an angel of the Lord delivered a similar message to her fiancé Joseph in Matthew 1:20-21. Joseph and Mary lived in the nation of Israel, which was part of the Roman Empire. And late in Mary's pregnancy, Augustus Caesar required Joseph and Mary to register for their taxes in the town of Bethlehem. We read about this in Luke 2:1-5.

According to Luke 2:6-20, Jesus was born during this stay in Bethlehem. His birth was announced by angelic hosts to nearby shepherds who came to see him and then spread the news about what they had heard. Based on the political rulers and contemporary events mentioned by Luke, as well as extra-biblical history, historians have generally calculated that Jesus was born around 4 B.C.

The Bible doesn't record many events from Jesus' early life, but Luke 2:21 says that he was named and circumcised eight days after his birth. Also, when Jesus was presented in the temple, two faithful servants of God, Simeon and Anna, recognized him as the long awaited Christ, as we read in Luke 2:22-40. And Magi from the east recognized him as the King of the Jews, whose birth was marked by supernatural movements of the stars, as we read in Matthew 2:1-12.

Jesus didn't remain in Israel for long, though. When the Jewish king Herod the Great learned from the Magi that the new king of the Jews had been born, he wanted to kill the newborn Messiah. So, he ordered the slaughter of all boys aged two and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem. But the Lord warned Joseph, who fled with his family to Egypt. When Herod died, the family returned to Israel. But in response to another warning from God, Joseph settled them in the small town of Nazareth, far from the new Jewish king, Herod's son Archelaus. These accounts are recorded in Matthew 2:13-23.

As Jesus grew, his family attended the annual feasts of the Jews in Jerusalem. And according to Luke 2:41-52, on one of these trips, when Jesus was twelve years old, he greatly impressed the religious leaders and teachers with his knowledge and wisdom.

When Jesus was about 30 years old, he began preparing himself for public ministry. First, he was baptized by John the Baptist, as we read in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-23.

Then, immediately after his baptism, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days, as we read in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13. During this time, he resisted Satan's temptations, before emerging to begin his public ministry.

While there are many things we could say about the period of Jesus' birth and preparation, we'll focus on just three events: his incarnation, his baptism, and his temptation. Let's look first at Jesus' incarnation.

INCARNATION

The theological term incarnation refers to Jesus' permanent assumption of a human nature, including both a human body and a human soul. Scripture speaks of the incarnation in many places, such as John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-7; and Hebrews 2:14-17.

In this lesson, we'll focus on the theological significance of Jesus' incarnation by looking at his virgin birth, his status as the heir of David, and the hypostatic union of his divine and human natures. Let's begin with his virgin birth.

Virgin Birth

Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin when she conceived, carried and gave birth to Jesus. She conceived him through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, and she remained a virgin until she had given birth to Jesus. These facts are taught explicitly in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38.

Jesus' virgin birth has at least three important implications. First, because Jesus was born of a woman, he is truly human.

According to passages like Genesis 1:21-28, God's original order was that his creatures reproduce according to their own kind. One specific result of this fact is that human women always give birth to human babies. This means that Jesus developed in his mother's womb in the same way that every other human baby does, so that he was endowed with a true human nature, consisting of both a body and a soul.

Gregory of Nazianzus, the bishop of Constantinople who lived from A.D. 325 to 389, wrote about the importance of Jesus' true humanity in his *Epistle 51*. Listen to what he said:

For that which He has not assumed He has not healed... If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of [Adam's] nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity.

Echoing Hebrews 2:17, Gregory recognized that the salvation of human beings requires a savior that is like us in the fullness of our humanity.

Second, because Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, his human nature was completely uncorrupted by sin. According to Romans 5:12-19, all human beings bear the guilt of Adam's first sin. And according to Romans 7:5-24, we're also corrupted and indwelt by that sin. But the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was born without sin. We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 John 3:5, and it's implied in Jesus' birth announcement in Luke 1:35. While theologians have always recognized that there is some mystery involved in how Jesus avoided the guilt and corruption of sin despite his birth from a human mother, most agree that the virgin birth points unmistakably to the

supernatural sustaining presence and preservation of God by which this was accomplished.

It was important for Jesus to be sinless because Jesus was coming to redeem sinners, and so the whole typology, for example, of the Old Testament sacrificial system, expecting that the animals that are brought for sacrifice are without blemish, without fault, foreshadows the necessity that Jesus himself would be without sin and blameless when he came to atone on our behalf. The one who's coming to atone for sinners must himself be sinless.

— Dr. Rob Lister

In order to fulfill the Old Testament imagery of substitutionary sacrifice, the sacrifice must itself be a sinless, or perfect, sacrifice. I think we can imagine that if Christ was in any way a partner with us in the sinful nature and disposed to sinful behavior, he himself would automatically need someone to substitute for his need in the eyes of a holy God. But it was his sinlessness that qualified him to be an advocate, for other needy individuals. Another perspective — not contradictory to this but supplementary to it — is the understanding of Jesus as the second Adam, as the one who did it right where the first Adam had failed. Where Adam had failed to provide a life of perfect obedience, Jesus Christ fulfilled that. So whether you look at it in terms of him becoming the second Adam or becoming the perfect and adequate sacrifice for sin, the sinlessness of Christ is critically important and a very important element of the good news about the Messiah.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

A third implication of Jesus' virgin conception and birth is that he really is the promised Messiah, who was sent to deliver his people from sin and death. In Matthew 1:21, Joseph received this prophecy in a dream:

Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

And in Matthew 1:22-23, Matthew interpreted the prophecy this way:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" — which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23).

In this explanation, Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14, and indicated that because Jesus' birth fulfilled this prophecy, it proved that he was the Christ.

Some Evangelical scholars believe Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin birth directly referred to Jesus. Others believe that it pointed to Jesus typologically. But all Evangelicals agree that the Holy Spirit miraculously caused Mary to conceive, and that Jesus' virgin birth proves he was the prophesied Messiah, through whom God would save his people from sin and death.

Having considered Jesus' incarnation in terms of his virgin birth, let's turn to his status as the heir of David.

Heir of David

In Matthew 1, Matthew begins his genealogy of Jesus showing how he's a son of Abraham, son of David. And this is really important to Matthew. The reason for that is back in the Old Testament, the time of King David, God effectively had established the pattern of his kingdom, how his rule was going to be exercised in the world. And David had been an advance type, or template, of a rule that God was intending, God's rule over God's people in God's place. And so it's really important, having set up that pattern back in the Old Testament, that Jesus should come and fulfill that pattern. So that's one really important reason. Another reason is, back in 2 Samuel 7, a book of the Old Testament where there is a promise given to David that one will sit on his throne forever and will be the one who institutes God's kingly rule. And that promise had actually been, in one sense, broken when there were no longer kings in ancient Israel — for five-, six hundred years, no kings. And so then Jesus comes, and we read in the Gospels that he's the one who is now sitting on David's throne. That's vitally important, that the Messiah, when he comes, comes from David's line.

— Dr. Peter Walker

It's critical to recognize that Jesus was the heir of David because this is what gives him the legal right to be the Messiah or Christ. In the 10th century B.C., God made a covenant with David, promising to establish an unfailing kingdom on earth under the kingship of one of David's descendants. We find references to this covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.

David's kingdom was divided after the death of his son Solomon. But the Old Testament foretold that a future king from David's line, known as "the Messiah" or "the Christ," would eventually restore the kingdom. We read about him in places like Psalm 89:3-4, Psalm 110:1-7, and Psalm 132:17. He would renew David's kingdom and return the exiles to the Promised Land. And he would bring God's greatest blessings to the restored nation. These promises can be seen in many places, including Jeremiah 23, 30 and 33, as well as Ezekiel 34:20-31, and 37:20-28. This is why Jesus' genealogies in

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 highlight the fact that he descended from David. They are intended to demonstrate that Jesus had a lawful claim to the office of Messiah or Christ.

Having explored Jesus' virgin birth and status as the heir of David, we're ready to address the hypostatic union.

Hypostatic Union

The technical term "hypostatic union" refers to the fact that:

Jesus is one person with two distinct natures (a divine nature and a human nature) with each nature retaining its own attributes.

Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. For all eternity he has possessed full divinity with all its attributes. And when he was conceived and born as a human being, he added to his person a true human nature, consisting of all the essential attributes of a human being.

The ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, which met in A.D. 451, summarized the Bible's teaching about the hypostatic union in a statement variously called the *Chalcedonian Creed*, the *Chalcedonian Symbol*, and the *Definition of Chalcedon*. Listen to this excerpt from it:

Our Lord Jesus Christ [is] perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ... in all things like unto us, without sin ... to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence.

This definition is rather technical, but for our purposes we can summarize it in three parts. First, it says that Jesus has two natures, namely, a divine nature and a human nature.

In the hypostatic union, we talk about a nature. We say two natures and one person and the natures are united to the person. We mean by "nature" that this is the stuff, this is the material, the properties, the substance of his human nature and also a different nature, his divine nature. So human nature is normally going to include two substances, a body and a soul, or a spiritual and physical element and that is complete kind of existence that you have to have if you want to live as a human being. And then the divine nature is going to be all the properties, all the powers, the essence of God. And when we say the word nature, we're saying Jesus has both kinds of existence, both modes of being, both ways of living. And so he is fully man, a hundred percent man and nature is just the label for being able to say, he's got

all the stuff that it takes to count as a human being. Divine nature, he's got all the stuff that accounts to be a deity, a divine person.

— Dr. John McKinley

The eternal Son of God always has possessed and always will possess every attribute that is essential to God. For example, he is infinite, eternal and immutable in his being, wisdom and power. As a result, anything the Old Testament says about the nature of God is also true of Jesus. We see this demonstrated in passages such as John 1:1-3, and 10:30; and Hebrews 1:2-3. This means that Jesus is an absolutely perfect Christ. He always does God's will, and he's utterly incorruptible. He will never take back a promise, or fail to fulfill it. And his innate perfections preserved him as an infinitely valuable sacrifice when he died for us on the cross.

At the same time, Jesus also possesses every attribute that's essential to human beings, such as a physical human body and a human soul. This is why he was subject to weakness, injury and death; and why he had normal physical limitations and so on. We read about Jesus' full humanity in passages such as Hebrews 2:14,17, and 4:15; and Philippians 2:5-7. And his human nature is critical to his role as Christ. It's what allowed him to be David's heir, and to hold human offices like prophet, priest and king. And as we read in Hebrews 2:14-17, it's what qualified him to be our substitute when he died on our behalf, since only a real human death could atone for human beings.

And in the incarnation, God, who is eternally generating the Son, overshadows Mary at the point that the Holy Spirit conceives in her our human nature. So we have everything that relates to us as humanity, everything that is essential to how God created us as people in his image. Jesus had affections that were human, he had a mind that was human; he made his decisions the way humans make their decisions on the basis of all the things that they consider. As Edwards said, "the final dictate of the understanding" was what he finally did. So everything that relates to our being and our actions as a human, Jesus took to himself. But also mysteriously, at the same time, though he emptied himself of the external manifestation of the glory he had with the Father, he did not empty himself of any of the central attributes of his eternal being as the Son of God. He still was omnipotent. He still was omniscient. He still had immutable holiness. He still had perfect knowledge as the Son of God of why redemption was taking place. And so, all of these things that were a part of his eternal deity, he surrendered none of them... So when we're asking the question about natures that exist in the hypostatic union, what we have affirmed is that we have a full human nature because it's humans that have to be redeemed. We have a full divine nature because only God can accomplish such redemption. God is Savior. So, full deity, full humanity, existing in one person.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Second, the *Chalcedonian Creed* also insists on a distinction between Jesus' two natures. Jesus doesn't have a hybrid nature that combines both divine and human attributes. His human attributes don't hinder his divine attributes; and his divine attributes don't somehow enhance his human attributes. Instead, each nature remains entirely unchanged. For example, we see this in the way John affirmed both Jesus' divinity and humanity in John 1:3, and 8:40. This is why Jesus needed to grow in knowledge, experience and favor, even though he was God. From the perspective of his human nature, Jesus still had to learn to walk, to talk, to reason, and so on. He still had to learn God's will. And these things are important to Jesus' role as Christ because they allowed him to grow in knowledge and experience from a human perspective, so that he could be even more merciful and sympathetic toward us in our weakness, just as we read in Hebrews 2:17-18.

Third, the *Chalcedonian Creed* affirms that Jesus is only one person.

When we're thinking about the hypostatic union, the meaning of person in that formula, the hypostasis, is the subject, or the agent. It's the entity that possesses the two natures. It's the one, the ultimate reality that is behind all the actions done through his natures, whether being an actor as God or an actor as man. So, "person," we can think of as whoever it is that possesses the nature. Whose body is this? This is my body, it's I, it's me, that's "person." Nature is the stuff that I have, and so person is kind of the deep reality of relating to others and self-consciousness.

— Dr. John McKinley

And the wisdom of God, this is the mystery of the incarnation, that there are these two natures in which you have a human will, a divine will, human affections, divine affections, human knowledge, and human ignorance along with divine omniscience all dwelling in this single person. And there are many things about Scripture that we come to understand when we realize there are times in which Jesus is speaking, peculiarly out of his role as the Christ in his humanity in obedience to and submissive to the Father. There are sometimes he is acting singularly in his deity. I tell you, "I forgive your sins." Who can forgive sins but God alone? But both of these are done by this one person, this one face. And so again, for redemption there has to be the unity of the person, the singularity of this person in which we have both God and man.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Jesus doesn't have two persons or two minds, as if a human person hosted a divine person in his body. And he isn't one person that is somehow a combination or hybrid of two distinct persons or minds, as if a divine person merged with a human

person. As we see in passages like John 17:1-5 and Colossians 2:9, Jesus is and always has been the same eternal Second Person of the Trinity, known as the Son of God. This is critically important because it means that Jesus still manifests every divine quality in a perfect way. For example, from the perspective of his humanity, he had to learn knowledge. But from the perspective of his divine nature and person, he always has been and always will be omniscient. And because Jesus manifests every divine attribute in a perfect way, we can trust and serve him without question, and rely on him to fulfill his every promise and plan.

Jesus is the only person in existence that is both fully God and fully human. And this special quality ought to be a great comfort to us. Because he's fully human, he can sympathize with us in all of our weaknesses and sufferings. Our savior has lived through them all. And he endured this life without ever falling into sin, so we can trust and follow him completely. At the same time, because he's also God, we can have complete confidence that no human weakness will ever take away his ability to redeem us, and that he has unlimited power and authority to fulfill his promises and plans for us. Because Jesus is fully God and fully man, he's the perfect ruler, intercessor and Savior.

Having considered Jesus' birth and preparation in terms of his incarnation, we're ready to turn to his baptism.

BAPTISM

We'll explore Jesus' baptism by looking at three ways that it prepared him for ministry, beginning with the fact that it confirmed him as the Christ.

Confirmed as Christ

In some sense, Jesus held the office of Christ from the beginning of his incarnation. He was born the heir to David's throne, and proclaimed by angels as the Christ. But his appointment wasn't publicly declared until his baptism, when it was announced to the world by the other members of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit confirmed that Jesus was the Christ by descending on him like a dove. And God the Father confirmed him as the Christ by speaking audibly from heaven.

Although neither the Holy Spirit nor the Father specifically used the word "Christ" at the time, God had already revealed to John the Baptist that the one who received these signs would be the Christ. We find these details in Luke 3:15-22, and John 1:19-36. This confirmation prepared him for office by formally announcing to the nation and to the world that God's Christ had finally come.

A second result of Jesus' baptism is that it anointed him to the office of Christ.

Anointed to Office

One objection that has been raised against calling Jesus the Christ is that he was never actually anointed with oil to the office of Messiah. But the gospel records show that

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. This anointing officially declared Jesus to be the Christ, and also empowered him for ministry. As God incarnate, Jesus was omnipotent. But the office of Christ is a human one. So, he veiled his power and glory in order to be like the people he came to save. Like other anointed human beings, Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit for his ministry. We see this in places like Luke 4:1, 14, and Acts 10:38.

Listen to what John 3:34 says about the power Jesus received from the Holy Spirit:

The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

The third result of Jesus' baptism we'll mention is that it fulfilled righteousness.

Fulfilled Righteousness

When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John objected because Jesus was already righteous. Jesus had never sinned, and therefore didn't need to repent. But Jesus responded by saying that it wasn't enough for him to be personally sinless; he also had to fulfill all the necessary righteous works that had been appointed to him.

Listen to their discussion in Matthew 3:14-15:

John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented (Matthew 3:14-15).

The significance of Jesus' baptism becomes clearer when we understand that John wasn't the only one baptizing people in his day. A variety of Jewish groups, including John's, separated themselves from the corruption of Jerusalem at the time, and considered themselves to be Israel's righteous remnant. And they often used baptisms or washings to initiate their members. So, when Jesus was baptized by John, he performed a necessary righteous act by affirming and identifying himself with the true faithful remnant within Israel.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' birth and preparation in terms of his incarnation and baptism, let's turn our attention to his temptation.

TEMPTATION

The story of Jesus' temptation is a familiar one. Its details are recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13. In summary, the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert where he fasted for forty days before being tempted by Satan. But even in his physically weakened state, Jesus remained spiritually and mentally powerful. Despite his

hunger, he refused to use his divine power to satisfy his needs. Despite his authority, he refused to prove himself by flaunting his privilege. And despite his goal of conquering the world for the Father, he refused to take the easy but sinful path of serving God's enemy.

Many theologians also point out that Jesus' temptation by Satan paralleled the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. As Paul pointed out in Romans 5:12-19, Jesus was the representative of his people, just as Adam had been. But whereas Adam failed and brought condemnation on the whole human race, Jesus overcame temptation, bringing salvation to his people.

Jesus was tempted. He was tempted in every point like as we are, yet without sin, the Bible says. One thinks, of course, of the event known as the temptation, or the temptations, in the wilderness, the threefold temptation following his baptism at the very outset of his public ministry where he encountered the Devil himself. Most of us probably never encounter the Devil — one of his interns will be fine for us — but for Jesus, Satan has to come in person. But the whole of Jesus' life was one of temptation. I think it would be a mistake to think that he was only tempted at that point. I think those temptations were massive in their proportion and very specifically focused as to his identity and mission. But during the whole course of his life, I think Jesus was tempted. The point, I think, is that Jesus is our representative. He is our substitute. He is the last Adam, the second man. And therefore, as Adam was tempted in the garden, so the last Adam, too, must be tempted by the serpent. If he is to represent us, he must be tempted in every way like we are tempted. Otherwise, he is not our substitute. Scripture is very clear that at no point in the course of his ministry did Jesus fall into sin. He was sinless. He was without sin in thought, in word, in deed. But I think it is for the purposes of being our sin-bearer, being our substitute, that it was necessary for him to be tempted.

— Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll focus on three important facets of Jesus' temptation. First, his temptation taught him obedience.

Obedience

As Hebrews 5:8-9 say:

[Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Jesus was entirely sinless; he never disobeyed God. But he was also fully and truly human. So, he had to learn God's righteous requirements, and to overcome challenges and temptations throughout his life. As we see in the temptations he suffered, Jesus obeyed God both by keeping the requirements of his Law, and by submitting to the Father's plan for his life. And this obedience prepared him for his work as Christ, because as we read in Hebrews 5:9, it made him an acceptable sacrifice to God, so that he became the source of eternal salvation.

The second idea we'll mention is that Jesus' temptation gave him sympathy for his people.

Sympathy

Jesus didn't give in to temptation. But he still felt it acutely. He recognized that the things Satan offered him were desirable, and his weakened condition from fasting must have amplified his longing for them. And this experience caused him to grow in compassion and understanding for us as we suffer and struggle with temptation in our own lives. As we read in Hebrews 4:15:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin, gives Christians great comfort because he was fully human in every way. He experienced temptation but did not succumb to it. And there is a sense in which everything that Jesus endured becomes a model for how Christians can deal with temptation.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

When we consider that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin, Hebrews 4 talks about that at length. One of the things that that does is address what's a fear for a lot of us is that we're alone, that we're having an experience that is unique when we are drawn to do something wrong or evil. And in fact, Jesus understood then in his earthly life what it was to be tempted, and today as he is in heavenly places as our great High Priest, he has that understanding. So we can be confident that we're not alone, that there is nothing that we can take to Jesus himself that he hasn't already understood and now is able to turn and to be our helper in the midst of that situation.

— Dr. James D. Smith III

The third idea we'll mention in relation to Jesus' temptation is his impeccability.

Impeccability

The word impeccability means inability to sin. Christians have used it for centuries to refer to the fact that Jesus was incapable of sinning. Theologians often talk about Jesus' impeccability in conjunction with his temptation because this was the time in his life when he would have been most likely to sin, if that were possible.

All Christians understand that Jesus never sinned. He never succumbed to temptation, or had an evil thought or desire, or said a sinful word. His sinlessness is asserted in passages like 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15 and 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; and 1 John 3:5.

But it's also true that he wasn't even capable of sinning. As we've seen, Jesus was the Second Person of the Trinity. And God can't sin, because he can't act in ways that are contrary to his nature. All three persons of God always have been and always will be impeccable. We see this in Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; and many other places.

But this doesn't make his temptation any less real. Because of his human nature, Jesus experienced temptation from a human perspective. He recognized the value of the things offered to him, and keenly understood the benefits they could provide him. So, his obedience and sympathy aren't lessened in any way. In fact, we might even say that because Jesus is impeccable, his obedience and sympathy are actually increased, since he learned perfectly from the experience, and now responds to us in a way that is perfectly suited to our needs.

The period of Jesus' birth and preparation are described rather briefly in the Gospels, so they're sometimes overlooked. But they contain many important truths. And one of the greatest of these is the assurance that the promised anointed one of God has come. Jesus' birth and preparation for the office of Christ reveal God's great love and mercy, because he hasn't left us in the grip of sin and death, but has kept his promises by sending his own Son as our Christ.

Having looked at Jesus' role as Christ in terms of his birth and preparation, we're ready to explore his public ministry.

PUBLIC MINISTRY

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll define Jesus' public ministry as beginning when he started to preach publicly, and ending with his final climactic approach to Jerusalem. Once again, we'll summarize the events that took place before looking into several details from this period.

Luke 3:23 says that Jesus was around thirty years old when he began his public ministry. And based on clues provided in the four gospels, especially John, many scholars believe Jesus' public ministry lasted around three years. In particular, John mentions that

Jesus attended three or four Passover feasts during this time, as we see in John 2:23, 6:4, 11:55, and perhaps 5:1.

According to Matthew 4:13-17, Jesus began his public ministry in Capernaum, a city in the region of Galilee, on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. He preached the kingdom of God and performed miracles throughout the region of Galilee and other cities in Israel, as we see in Matthew 4:23-24. During this time, he also chose twelve disciples and prepared them to join in the proclamation of God's kingdom, as recorded in Matthew 10 and Mark 3. Later he extended his ministry into other regions of Israel, including Samaria and Judea.

At the end of his public ministry, Jesus intentionally traveled to Jerusalem in order to be crucified. Along the way, he prepared his disciples for the fact that he was about to be killed by the people of the very kingdom he had been anointed to save.

Although Jesus' main ministry was to proclaim the good news of repentance and faith because the kingdom of God was near, he felt free to do this in a wide variety of ways. He ministered to different types of people, confronting average Israelites, religious leaders, social outcasts, Gentiles, and every other type of sinner. He met different sized groups, from crowds of thousands, to private households, to individuals. He taught in many different types of places, such as homes, synagogues, and open spaces. And he utilized a wide range of teaching strategies, including parables, questions, prophecies, sermons, and even miracles. And in every case, people recognized that he ministered with unique authority, and they reacted to him strongly — some with belief and repentance, and others with anger and rejection.

The Gospels contain far too much information about Jesus' public ministry for us to do more than merely highlight three key issues: first, Jesus' proclamations of the gospel; second, his demonstrations of power; and third, the affirmations of his anointing to the office of Christ. Let's look first at the gospel that Jesus proclaimed.

GOSPEL

Jesus preached the gospel in many ways and forms, some of them subtle, and others very direct. He used parables, sermons, conversations, prophetic offers of blessing and threats of judgment, predictions of the future, prayers, and even miracles. But when the gospel writers summarized his message, they tended to describe it most fundamentally as a call to repentance in light of the coming of the kingdom of God.

Listen to this summary of Jesus' gospel in Matthew 4:17:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17).

Mark described Jesus' message in similar ways in Mark 1:14-15. And Matthew ascribed the same gospel message to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2.

We'll look at two aspects of Jesus' gospel: first, his message that the kingdom was coming; and second, his call for immediate repentance. Let's look first at Jesus' teaching about the kingdom.

Kingdom

When we open the Gospels and begin to read them, there's one thing that may surprise us but is inevitably going to strike us, and that is that what Jesus was preaching and teaching about and modeling was clearly the kingdom of God. There's no doubt from John the Baptist's preaching which foreshadows Jesus to the very first words of Jesus, "The kingdom of God is drawn near," or "has drawn near," or "the kingdom of heaven has drawn near." And then in all his teaching, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," all the parables about the kingdom of heaven, all the teaching, all the ways in which he shows himself to be the true Davidic king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, all the manifest ways make it very clear that the Gospels, the evangelists, the gospel writers, want us to clearly understand that Jesus' message, his whole life, was about the bringing, the restoration of God's reign or God's kingdom.

— Dr. Jonathan Pennington

Like all Jews in his day, Jesus knew that God was the eternal sovereign over all of his creation. But the Old Testament also revealed that God planned for his eternal kingship to be displayed in his visible kingdom on earth. As we saw in a prior lesson, he began this process when he created the world and appointed Adam and Eve as his vice-regents. But they failed miserably in their assigned task of perfecting the world. God's kingdom moved forward again in the nation of Israel as it grew into a great empire. But it was seriously set back again by Israel's sin and exile. And although God offered to restore the nation in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people's unfaithfulness resulted in the exile being extended for several centuries. By the time of Jesus, Israel had endured hundreds of years of exile, waiting for the Christ to bring the fullness of God's kingdom and all its blessings to earth. So, when Jesus announced the good news that the kingdom was at hand, this was a message of tremendous hope.

Jesus announced the good news that the final stage of God's kingdom on earth was coming in his day. The patterns of heaven were going to characterize the entire world. As we see in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12, all God's faithful people would be tremendously blessed in God's kingdom. Their sorrows would end, and they would inherit the entire earth. No foreign powers would compel false worship. No corrupt religious leaders would compromise with Israel's enemies for the sake of relative tranquility. Those who had sinned would be forgiven. Those who had been exiled would be restored. Those who had fallen under the curses of sickness and disease would be healed. The Lord would personally defeat Israel's enemies, purge the people of their sin, and restore the entire creation.

But as wonderful as Jesus' gospel message about the kingdom must have sounded, it also contained a condition: repentance.

Repentance

Jesus warned that God's kingdom was coming quickly, and that it would be manifested not only in blessings for God's faithful people, but also in judgment against his enemies. So, if Israel wanted to receive the promised blessings, they first had to repent of their sin.

Repentance from sin involves turning from that sin. But insofar as it is evangelical repentance, it's not just turning away from something. It is also at the same time turning towards something. That something is a someone. It's Jesus, and we turn towards him in faith. So, there's an abandonment of my sin and a turn towards Christ in faith. At the same time, we could probably think through or tease out perhaps a couple of different dimensions of what that repentance involves, or looks like. One of those is an intellectual, or cognitive, awareness of my sin. I'm not likely to repent where I don't identify as a sinner and understand that I have broken God's laws in some way, shape or form. So, it has to be a sense of awareness, knowledge, conviction that I am a sinner and that what I've done is wrong in the eyes of God. At the same time, however, it is possible that someone could sort of conceptually recognize, what I've done is displeasing to God and also not care about it. So, the second dimension would be a dimension of remorse, an emotional conviction that not only have I done something wrong, but I regret it. I'm displeased by it. I have sort of the grief towards my sin that God has as well. Those two components then in tandem lead to the third component which is the exercise of the will, or the volitional capacity to turn from that sin as a promise or pleasure that was insufficient to deliver on what it promised, and turn towards Christ instead as the basis of superior promises and pleasures.

— Dr. Rob Lister

It's often helpful to think about repentance like turning over a coin. In a single motion, we turn away from sin and toward righteousness. We begin to turn away from sin by feeling genuine sorrow over having broken God's law, and for hurting our neighbors if they have been affected. And we complete our turn away from sin when we confess our guilt to God and ask for his forgiveness. These aspects of repentance are evident in passages like Jeremiah 31:19 and Acts 2:37-38.

But repentance also means turning toward God by asking him to cleanse and restore us, and by determining to obey him in the future. This doesn't mean that we will never sin again. But it does mean that genuine repentance includes a desire to please God by obeying his commands. We see this in places like Joel 2:12-13 and 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.

Repentance in the Bible is a great word. It's "*metanoia*." And if we're going to repent from our sin, it means this whole understanding of *metanoia* change. We change from our sinful ways. It means if we're going in that direction and Jesus touches our lives, we begin going this direction. We change. We change whatever it is he wants us to change. Truth be told, it's everything. This whole understanding of change of mind. It's not just a change of what you believe intellectually. Actually, I love the Old Testament word for "know." It's "*yada*," and that means to experience and to encounter. So it's not simply the mind that we can know with, but it's our hands, it's our feet, it's our feelings, it's our heart, it's everything about us. Change of mind means change of everything. And I believe insomuch that we change everything, we begin changing, for instance, things that we do and things that we're about. We begin changing our behavior. If there is no change of behavior, there's probably no change. I had an old seminary professor who said, "You do what you believe and you believe what you do." That has a whole lot to do with repentance of the mind.

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

Jesus' message that God's kingdom is coming to earth is wonderful news. But it can never be separated from the necessity of repentance. Only those who repent of their sin and turn to God in faith will be allowed to enjoy the blessings of his kingdom.

In addition to proclamations of the gospel, Jesus' public ministry included many demonstrations of power that testified to the truth of his message.

POWER

In Acts 10:38, the apostle Peter summarized Jesus' miraculous power in this way:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power ... [H]e went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Jesus performed many miracles that exhibited the power of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrated mastery over creation, as when he turned water into wine in John 2:1-11. He showed his authority over evil spirits and their effects, as we see in passages like Matthew 12:22; Mark 1:23-26; and Luke 9:38-43. He healed sickness and disability, as we see in Mark 10:46-52; Luke 8:43-48; and John 9. Jesus even raised the dead, as we see in Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-15; and John 11:41-45. In fact, Jesus performed more miracles than any other prophet in Israel's history. The New Testament mentions at least 35 specific miracles, and the Gospel of John indicates that he performed innumerable miracles beyond these. As we read in John 21:25:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25).

Jesus' demonstrations of miraculous power had at least two implications we should consider. First, they confirmed his identity as the Christ. And second, they assured his eventual success in bringing God's kingdom to earth. Let's look first at how Jesus' miracles confirmed his identity.

Confirmed Identity

Jesus' miraculous works of power confirmed his identity as the Christ, the one specially anointed by God to bring in the final stage of his kingdom. As the Christ, Jesus was God's authoritative ambassador. And his miracles demonstrated God's strong approval of everything that Jesus said. We see this in Luke 7:22; John 5:36, and 10:31-38; and many other places.

Beyond this, many people in Scripture associated Jesus' miracles with the anointed offices that were aspects of the broader office of Christ. For example, they saw them as a fulfillment of his role as prophet in Luke 7:16; and John 6:14, and 7:40. Jesus himself connected his miraculous power to the duties of priests in Luke 17:12-19. And his miracles are associated with his office of king in Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, and 20:30. And listen to what Jesus said in John 10:37-38:

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father (John 10:37-38).

Jesus' miracles proved that his gospel message was true. He really was the Christ, and he really was bringing the last stage of God's kingdom to earth. As he said in Luke 11:20:

If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Luke 11:20).

Jesus' mighty works proved that he was the Christ — the one who had brought the heavenly kingdom to earth in order to end Satan's tyranny over God's people and creation.

Having seen that Jesus' demonstrations of power confirmed his identity as the Christ, let's look at how they also assured his success.

Assured Success

Jesus' miracles demonstrated that he had the power necessary to fulfill his claims and promises. He had all the power he needed to make God's kingdom on earth just like

his kingdom in heaven. And in fact, many of his miracles of blessing provided a foretaste of that very kingdom. For example, when he healed the sick and raised the dead, he prefigured the kingdom where there is no disease or death, as described in Revelation 21:4. And when he fed thousands of hungry people, he provided a concrete example of the abundance that will characterize his everlasting kingdom, as we read in places like Exodus 23:25-26; Joel 2:26; and Luke 12:14-24.

Jesus also demonstrated that he had all the power he needed to destroy the enemies of his kingdom. For example, when he exorcised demons, he showed that he had the power necessary to establish an unshakeable kingdom — one that could never be threatened — as we see in Matthew 12:22-29.

Jesus' power drew the attention of everyone that witnessed it. And while his enemies maliciously dismissed his power as a deception of the devil, the truth is that Jesus' power came from God. And it proved that Jesus was the Christ, and that he had the ability to fulfill every offer, promise and threat he made. And for us as Christians, this should be a great comfort and reason for excitement. It means that our faith in Jesus is well placed. No matter what doubts we might have, and no matter how long God takes to complete the work he began in Jesus, Jesus has given us sufficient reason to trust him — no matter what. He really is the anointed one, the Christ. And if we are faithful to him, we are guaranteed a place of honor and blessing in his everlasting kingdom.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' gospel proclamations and demonstrations of power, let's consider his public ministry in terms of the affirmations of his anointing to the office of Christ.

AFFIRMATIONS

Jesus' anointing as Christ was confirmed in many ways during his public ministry. But for the sake of illustration, we'll focus on two noteworthy affirmations: Peter's apostolic confession that Jesus was the Christ; and Jesus' transfiguration in glory. Let's look first at Peter's apostolic confession.

Apostolic Confession

Listen to Matthew's record of Peter's confession in Matthew 16:15-17:

[Jesus asked,] “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-17).

This same event is recorded in Mark 8:27-30; and Luke 9:18-20.

Peter's confession plays a pivotal role in the Gospels really, because it appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the three Synoptic Gospels.

And the first half of all three gospels really focuses on Jesus' divine authority; the demonstration of his authority through his miracles, through his exorcisms, through his healings, through his nature miracles and through his teaching. And so, Peter gets it, and recognized that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. And then from that point on it really launches into the role of the Messiah which is the suffering role. Having said that, Matthew, or, Mark and Luke seem to place a slightly different emphasis on Peter's confession. In Mark and Luke, all those miracles leading up to that point, apparently demonstrate for Peter, confirm for Peter, that Jesus is in fact the Christ; is in fact the Messiah. So he acknowledges that God has been at work through Jesus and recognizes kind of in his humanity he recognizes that Jesus is the Christ. Matthew, in what follows the confession, the first thing Jesus says is, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven." So Matthew has a greater emphasis on the fact that this is a divine revelation through Jesus' work, no doubt, through his signs of authority, but that Peter is only really getting it because God has revealed it to him. So that sense of divine revelation is more important, it seems, in Matthew's gospel.

— Dr. Mark Strauss

Peter's affirmation of Jesus' anointing to the office of Christ was a direct revelation from God. As we've seen, people should have been able to deduce that Jesus was the Christ simply by looking at his miracles. But Peter's confession as the spokesman for the apostles was more than that. It was an authoritative prophetic revelation from God. As such, it was an infallible confirmation of the fact that Jesus really was the Christ.

One of the most remarkable things in the Gospels is that moment when Simon Peter declares, in response to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are the Messiah." It's a defining moment. Now, what's so remarkable about it? Well, it is, as Jesus himself says, a moment of revelation, when God himself has revealed to Simon Peter something which he could not have understood himself. But it's also because there's been such longing and expectation — over what, 500 years — that this Messiah figure would come. And now Peter is declaring that this person who is standing in front of him, "You are the Messiah," and so you've just got to feel the incredible amount of expectation and buildup, and now suddenly, this is the moment.

— Dr. Peter Walker

Having seen that Peter's apostolic confession affirmed Jesus' anointing to the office of Christ, let's look at Jesus' transfiguration in glory.

Transfiguration

“Transfiguration” is the name theologians have given to the event when Jesus was revealed to his disciples in glory. It refers to the fact that his appearance was radically transformed, revealing a portion of his divine glory. This event is recorded in Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36. It’s also referred to in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

In summary, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. And while they were there, Jesus’ appearance changed. His face shone with glory and his clothes became dazzlingly white. While Jesus’ appearance was altered, Moses and Elijah appeared with him, and God’s voice was heard from heaven, affirming that Jesus was his Son. And when Peter suggested that the disciples build shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, God singled out Jesus as being worthy of the greatest honor and obedience. This was significant because Moses was the lawgiver and liberator of God’s people, and Elijah was the faithful prophet that called the nation of Israel back from apostasy. It meant that Jesus stood in continuity with the law and the prophets, and that he was fulfilling the expectations set by the greatest leaders of Israel’s past. But it also meant that he was the greatest anointed one of all, the final Davidic heir who was bringing God’s kingdom to earth.

The transfiguration is this amazing scene where Jesus goes up on the mountain, and his disciples, just three of them, go with him. And they get this display of the glory of Christ. And so, first we get a glimpse of these two natures of Christ, where this man, nevertheless, is transfigured and we get a display of his glory that had always been true of him, but as that Christmas hymn says, was veiled in flesh, but we see the Godhead. We get this blinding display of his glorious presence, so glorious that the disciples come down off the mountain and they themselves are glowing. But when we think about the fulfillment of the covenant, that’s powerful, because who does he meet with in the transfiguration? He meets with Elijah and Moses. And so in this we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, and the fulfillment of the prophetic office, fulfilling his messianic identity in these ways. So the old covenant is coming to its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, as he meets with the giver of the Law, Moses. And then the fulfillment of the great prophetic office in Elijah, Jesus here comes, meets with them, and establishes his Messianic identity in that amazing transfiguration.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Now that we’ve looked at Jesus’ birth and preparation for the office of Christ, and at his public ministry, we’re ready to turn to his passion and death.

PASSION AND DEATH

We use the term “passion” to refer to the sufferings that Jesus endured, especially during the week before his crucifixion. In many ways this is the darkest part of Jesus’ story, because during this week Jesus was rejected by humanity, denied and betrayed by his followers, and executed by his accusers. And worse than this, Jesus’ Father in heaven poured out divine wrath and judgment on him in our place. But even in this dark story there’s a ray of hope and light. Jesus’ passion and death show us just how far the Triune God was willing to go to save us. They testify to the divine love and sacrifice that deserve our thankfulness, obedience and praise.

In this lesson, we’ll define Jesus’ passion and death as the period beginning with his arrival in Jerusalem and ending with his time in the tomb after his crucifixion. While this part of Jesus’ life lasted only about a week, it contained many significant events. Once again, we’ll begin with a brief summary of the period.

Around the year A.D. 30, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When he approached the city on the colt of a donkey, many people recognized him and hailed him as Israel’s king. For this reason, his entry into the city is commonly known as the Triumphal Entry. We read about it in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; and John 12:12-19.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus was angered by the money changers in the temple. So, in an act of prophetic condemnation and royal judgment, he overturned their tables and drove them from the temple. The Gospels record this temple cleansing in Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; and Luke 19:45-48. For the next several days, Jesus engaged in disputes with the religious authorities and taught everyone that came to listen to him.

Then, on the night before the Jewish feast of Passover, Jesus gathered with his disciples and shared a final meal, often called the Last Supper. During this meal, he instituted the Lord’s Supper as an ongoing commemoration and communion until his promised return. This event is recorded in Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; and Luke 22:7-23. That same night, he also gave them many instructions both through teaching, often known as his Farewell Discourse, recorded in John 13–16, and through his high priestly prayer in John 17. On that same evening, the disciple Judas left in order to betray Jesus, as he had planned with the Jewish religious leaders in Luke 22:3-4 and John 13:27-30. Afterward, Jesus and the other disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus was praying, Judas led a group of Jewish religious leaders and soldiers to the garden, and they arrested Jesus. He was accused before the Jewish high priest Caiaphas and the Jewish leadership, and stood trial before the Roman governor Pilate and the Jewish king Herod Antipas. Under the stress of the situation, Jesus’ disciples abandoned him, and Peter denied him three times. Jesus himself was beaten, ridiculed, and sentenced to death. These events are recorded in Matthew 26:31–27:31; Mark 14:32–15:20; Luke 22:39–23:25; and John 18:1–19:16.

Jesus was crucified around noon on the day following his arrest. He was nailed to a cross and publicly hung from it until he died. In the midst of this great agony and suffering, he promised mercy to a repentant thief, provided for the care of his mother, and asked God’s forgiveness for those who were putting him to death. Around 3 o’clock, he

cried out to God and died. These events are recorded in Matthew 27:32-54; Mark 15:21-39; Luke 23:26-47; and John 19:16-30.

At that time, an earthquake shook the land and the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. After a Roman soldier pierced him with a spear to verify that he was dead, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross. Because the Sabbath was about to begin, some of his followers hastily prepared his body for burial and placed it in a borrowed tomb. The record of this horrible afternoon can be found in Matthew 27:51-61; Mark 15:38-47; Luke 23:44-56; and John 19:34-42.

We'll consider Jesus' passion and death by focusing on three events from that period: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his institution of the Lord's Supper, and his crucifixion. Let's look first at his triumphal entry.

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey in order to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9. The donkey was significant because it was the mount ridden by kings during times of peace, when they were confident that there were no threats against them. This symbolic action was intended to display Jesus' confidence as Israel's rightful king; to affirm those that were faithful to his kingdom message; and to rebuke those that weren't.

As Jesus neared the city, the people began to recognize him and to welcome him. In order to honor him, many laid palm branches and even their cloaks on the road, and they praised him loudly. As we read in Mark 11:9-10,

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10).

But not everyone welcomed Jesus. He was rejected and opposed by the Jewish leadership, such as the priests and teachers of the law — the very ones who should have been most excited by his arrival. By rejecting God's Anointed One, they proved that their own ministries were opposed to God and his work. Listen to Jesus' words to Jerusalem when he entered the city, recorded in Luke 19:42-44:

If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will ... not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you (Luke 19:42-44).

This rejection continued as the religious leaders spent the early part of Jesus' final week asking all manner of questions in their attempts to discredit him before the people. They also tried to provoke the Roman authorities to oppose him, and repeatedly challenged Jesus' identity and authority as Christ.

At his triumphal entry and for days afterwards, the people praised and accepted Jesus while the religious authorities rejected him. Why did people have such diverse reactions to him? Well, we can understand it at different levels. First of all, those in authority had the most to lose. And we can see there is a general orientation to power and authority. It's just human nature, and Jewish authorities were no different than any other human beings. Those who have power want to hold on to it, and Jesus came as a threat to their power. They understood the kingdom of God in a narrow way, in a nationalistic way, in an ethnocentric way, in a tribal way, and they had the most to lose. And just as it was told to Mary in Luke's gospel, this child shall be the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sign to be opposed. John's gospel begins with the anticipation that this is the light which came into the world and the darkness did not, some translations say, "comprehend it," but I think, rather, we should understand, "overpower it." Jesus came as the light of the world, and the darkness had everything to lose. And so the religious authorities manifest that. But we also should remember that it's not very long, it's late in holy week, as we call it, where everyone, even the crowds that had followed Jesus, cried out for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. That Jesus came not fulfilling people's expectations of what they wanted God to do. Instead, he came manifesting what God was determined to do, and that means a threat to our own independence, a threat to our own autonomy. And we don't like to die to self, and so Jesus brought the threat of overturning our human wills, and that's why he was ultimately, from a human level, rejected.

— Rev. Michael Glodo

Having looked at the triumphal entry, let's turn to a second major event from the week of Jesus' passion and death: his institution of the Lord's Supper.

LORD'S SUPPER

As we've mentioned, Jesus' passion and death took place during the Passover week. So, one of the things that Jesus did during this week was eat the Passover meal with his disciples. He did this immediately before his arrest and crucifixion, and the event is commonly known as the Last Supper. During this Last Supper, Jesus did something very special that Christians have been commemorating ever since: he instituted the Lord's Supper as a Christian sacrament or ordinance.

As we've said, the Last Supper was a Passover meal. It commemorated the fact that God had rescued the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. But at the end of this meal, Jesus used the symbolism of Passover to draw attention to his own work as the Christ. Specifically, he selected two items from the dinner — the unleavened bread and a

cup of wine — and assigned new meaning to them. According to Luke 22:17-20, Jesus associated the bread with his body, which he was about to present to God as an offering for sin. And he associated the cup of wine with his blood, which would also be part of that same offering for sin. Moreover, when we combine his teachings in Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25 with his instructions in Luke 22:19, we see that Jesus taught his disciples to use these elements on a perpetual basis as a memorial to him, until he returns and finishes the work he began.

The Lord's Supper in Christian tradition has often been described as the visible words of Christ because they give a visual demonstration of what happened on the cross. So broken bread, wine poured out, point us to Christ whose body, nailed to the cross, his blood shed for us, and the way in which the symbolism works, or the sacrament works, is to point us back to Christ, to enable us to partake of the benefits of his death by eating and drinking in memory of all that he did for us. And there is a sense in which believers also feel that there's a great spiritual strengthening that happens when we eat and drink, we participate in the benefits of all that Christ has done for us at that point.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

There are two aspects of the meaning of the Lord's Supper that we should mention specifically, beginning with its reference to Christ's atonement.

Atonement

The basic symbolism of the Lord's Supper is easy to understand. The bread represents Jesus' body, and the wine represents his blood. But why are these significant? Because his body was given for us, according to Luke 22:19, and his blood was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, as we read in Matthew 26:28. In other words, his body and blood are significant because they're what he offered to God on the cross, in order to atone for our sin. We'll explore this topic in just a moment when we discuss the crucifixion.

The second aspect of the meaning of the Lord's Supper we'll mention is that it signifies the inauguration of the new covenant.

New Covenant

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 22:20:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).

Here, Jesus referred to the renewal of the covenant that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

The new covenant is both the guarantee and renewal of the covenant promises previously made by God in the days of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. These prior administrations of God's covenant expressed God's benevolence to his people, but also required their loyal obedience, promising blessings to those who obeyed God and curses against those who disobeyed him. And as the Christ, Jesus was the administrator of the last stage of God's covenant with his people — the stage in which the covenant was “ratified” or “sealed” by the shedding of his blood. As we read in Hebrews 9:15:

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

Now that we've looked at Jesus' triumphal entry and his institution of the Lord's Supper, we're ready to turn to his crucifixion.

CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion was a form of the death penalty used in the ancient Roman Empire. Its victims were tied to a cross, or nailed to it, as in Jesus' case, and then hung on the cross until they died, typically by suffocation. Jesus' crucifixion was unique, of course, because it also served as an atoning offering for sin. As the Christ, it was his responsibility to die on behalf of his people, as we read in Hebrews 9:11-28.

There are far too many doctrines associated with the crucifixion for us to mention them all, so we'll limit ourselves to just two: the imputation of our sin to Jesus; and the fact that he died as a result of divine judgment against sin. We'll begin with the idea of imputation.

Imputation

Imputation simply means assignment or reckoning. But when we speak about the imputation of our sin to Jesus on the cross, we're referring to the act in which God assigned the guilt of sinners to the person of Jesus. So, when we say that our sin was imputed to Jesus, we mean that God blamed him for our sins. Jesus never actually sinned, and his person was never corrupted by sin. But from a legal perspective, God counted Jesus as if he had personally committed every sin imputed to him.

In continuity with the patterns of Old Testament sin offerings, Jesus offered himself on the cross as a substitute for his people. The book of Hebrews speaks of this extensively in chapters 9–10. Christ's role as our substitute is reflected in the fact that the Bible often refers to him as our sacrifice, as in Romans 3:25; Ephesians 5:2; and 1 John

2:2. It's also why he's called our ransom in places like Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; and Hebrews 9:15.

Before our sin was imputed to him, Jesus was blameless and perfect. But as strange as it may sound, once our sin was reckoned to his account, God viewed him as being guilty of all the sins that were assigned to him. This is what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he said:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And so when we start to ask a question such as this: “Would it be just, would it be fair, would it be righteous for God to impute our sin to Christ?” Well, we tend to go to a human law court and think, “Would we impute someone else’s guilt in a murder case to someone who didn’t commit the murder?” The answer would be “no.” From a human scale of justice that would be wrong. But the first thing we know about God’s justice is that it’s perfect and so, because he is perfect, we know that whatever he does is right. But, you know, the Bible actually tells us why it’s right. Now, for instance, if God had just chosen someone random, and had just arbitrarily imputed my guilt to him, that wouldn’t be fair, that wouldn’t be just. That wouldn’t meet God’s own standard of righteousness. But what if before humanity was ever created God determined to redeem sinful humanity through his own Son, the only one who actually could bear our sin and make atonement for our sin because of his perfect righteousness, his perfect obedience? And what if this wasn’t an arbitrary assignment, an unwilling assignment to someone who simply was told, “You’re gonna have to bear the sin.” What if Jesus said in the Gospels, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay down my life willingly for my sheep”? Then you come to understand that the justice of God is never more perfectly displayed than in his perfect plan to redeem sinful humanity through his own Son, who would willingly give his own life and would bear our sin in order that we might have peace with God. God’s justice is perfect. Never more perfect than in the picture of what happens on the cross.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Now that we’ve considered the imputation of our sin to Christ, let’s turn to our second topic related to the crucifixion: divine judgment.

Judgment

Human death is always a divine judgment against sin. We see this in Genesis 3:17-19; Ezekiel 18:4; and Romans 5:12-21. Death entered the human race when Adam

sinned in Genesis 3. And it has continued ever since because Adam's sin has been imputed to us.

Jesus' death was also a divine judgment against sin. Before God laid our guilt on him, Jesus couldn't die. But once our sin was imputed to him on the cross, his death became not only possible but necessary. It was the only just response God could make to such tremendous guilt.

As part of this judgment, Jesus also remained under the power of death for three days before his resurrection. But the good news is that he has borne the full wrath of God against our sin, so that there isn't any divine judgment remaining to threaten us. As Jesus said in John 5:24:

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).

If I was to define sin, I would come up with a warped view of what that is. But God's understanding of sin and its seriousness requiring his judgment is actually the best news that I can receive. Of course, I don't like to look at my sin. I don't like the effects of sin in my life or in the world. But unless God judges it, it never truly is dealt with. I'll try to find any way I can to circumvent the nature of sin. But God's judgment means he knows exactly what sin is, what I've committed, but also what sin does around me to me. And so the Lord's giving himself in his sacrificial death to meet those needs and all those difficulties and problems is exactly the answer to my sin problem. Without that judgment, without that understanding and that righteous dealing with that horrific thing called sin, there would be no redemption. So Christ's atonement is the only good news there is. Every other religion in the world has tried to deal with a thing called sin, or a vision of sin, to get rid of it, to sublimate it, to say it doesn't happen, to deny the body. But Jesus comes with his full righteous judgment, and he tells us exactly what sin is. And as he does that, then he takes all of that into himself upon the cross. So for Christians, and for anyone, this is the best news of all.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. He is the Word made flesh. The Word who was with God, the Word who was God. He is the Son who has come from the Father's heart to make the Father known. It's important that we remember that, because then, when we see him laying down his life on the cross, taking our judgment, God's judgment against our sins and our judgment into his own life, it is God himself in the Son who is bearing his own judgment against his own sin in the face of our rebellion and our betrayal of God. What's

the good news? God loves us so much that he won't wait for us to pay for our sins so that we can know him. He won't wait for us to bridge the chasm that separates us from him. But he comes to us and he bears in his own being the ugliness, the wretchedness, the wickedness and evilness of our sins so that he can then pour out of himself not only his forgiveness but his divine presence and his divine life and his divine love into our hearts. That's pretty good news.

— Dr. Stephen Blakemore

So far in our lesson, we've looked at Jesus' office of Christ or Messiah during three periods of time: his birth and preparation, his public ministry, and his passion and death. So, at this point, we're ready to address our final topic: the period of Jesus' exaltation as Christ.

EXALTATION

We'll describe Jesus' exaltation as the period of time stretching from his resurrection all the way to his future visible return. We'll begin with a brief summary of the events from this time, and then explore some of them in more detail.

On the first day of the week after his crucifixion and burial, Jesus rose from the dead. Over a period of forty days, he appeared to many of his disciples. He taught them about the kingdom of God, explained his role in the fulfillment of Scripture, and established the leadership of his church through the apostles. These events are recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20–21, and Acts 1:1–11.

At the end of these forty days, Jesus blessed his people and ascended visibly into heaven, while angels proclaimed that he would return again. These facts are reported in Luke 24:36–53, and Acts 1:1–11.

Upon ascending into heaven, Jesus presented his death to God as an atoning sacrifice and sat down at God's right hand. This began his rule or "session" over the affairs of his people, which will continue until he returns in glory to render judgment against his enemies and to bless his people with the new heavens and earth. We find these details in places like Ephesians 1:20–22; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; and Revelation 20:11–22:7.

We'll explore four aspects of Jesus' exaltation. First, we'll look at his resurrection. Second, we'll mention his ascension. Third, we'll consider his heavenly session. And fourth, we'll focus on his visible return. Let's begin with his resurrection from the dead.

RESURRECTION

Death is the greatest tragedy that human beings experience, and the worst manifestation of sin in this world. But the good news is that God's anointed Christ

conquered death for all of us. When he rose from the grave through the power of the Spirit, he proved to all creation that he really is God's favored Son and the heir to his kingdom. And even more wonderful than this, he ensured the future resurrection and blessing of all his faithful followers.

There are so many significant aspects to Jesus' resurrection that we can't mention them all. So, we'll focus our attention on just two, beginning with the way it furthered God's plan of redemption.

Plan of Redemption

God's plan to redeem humanity and the rest of creation depended on him fulfilling his covenant promises to establish his kingdom on earth under the kingship of a descendant of David, otherwise known as the Christ. But he couldn't do this if Jesus remained dead. In this sense, Jesus' resurrection was a critical step that enabled God to fulfill his covenant promises. This is one of the reasons that the New Testament calls the resurrection an affirmation of Jesus' role as Christ, as we see in Luke 24:45-46; John 2:17-22; Acts 17:3; and Romans 1:1-4.

The second aspect of Jesus' resurrection we'll mention is that it provides believers with many different blessings of salvation.

Blessings of Salvation

The New Testament associates Jesus' resurrection with a wide variety of blessings we receive as part of our salvation. It results in our justification, which is the forgiveness of our sins, in Romans 4:25. It's the source of the regeneration of our spirits, and it opens the door to our eternal inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-5. It produces good works and a true witness to Christ in our bodies and lives, as we read in 2 Corinthians 4:10-18. And it's the source of the future bodily resurrection of believers, when we will have glorified bodies just like the one Jesus has, as we read in Romans 6:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-53. Although Christians rarely think of it in these terms, Jesus' resurrection is essential to many of the blessings of salvation we already enjoy, as well as to those we'll receive in the future.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the central point of the New Testament. And out of it flows so many blessings. Firstly, the resurrection teaches us who Jesus is. It's a vindication of him as the Messiah, and the Lord, and the Son of God. So it teaches us great things about Jesus, and there's great blessing in that. But then, moving on, the key thing for Christians is that this means that Jesus Christ is alive today. He's risen from the dead, and this means that he's someone who we can actually know and meet now. More than that, actually, it means that Jesus' power, his risen power, is available

to us. And actually we believe that by the Holy Spirit this new life actually comes to reside in us. So it means that to live as a Christian is not to be trying to follow Jesus in our own strength. It means we actually have his risen power within us. But there's more to it than that. I mean, the resurrection gives us incredible hope for the future, and the resurrection is the pattern of what happens to us when we die. And we see in Jesus' resurrection God's pledge that death is not the end, that after the grave comes new life, resurrection — bodily life. And that, of course, for Christians throughout the generations, has given incredible hope as they, we, face human death. It's trust in Jesus that he will bring us through death into his life. And I'd like just to say one other thing — that the resurrection is also God's pledge to renew his creation. Jesus' body is a physical body, and he doesn't appear as just a spiritual being after that, he has a physical body. And that's a sign that God takes human matter and is going to redeem it and renew it. Creation is not bad; it's something that's going to be renewed. And we get that clearly taught in Romans 8 when Paul says that the whole of creation is going to be renewed. It's the resurrection which gives us that clue and that confidence.

— Dr. Peter Walker

With Jesus' resurrection in mind, let's explore his ascension into heaven.

ASCENSION

Jesus' ascension occurred when he was miraculously lifted into heaven, into the special presence of God. Now, of course, in his divine nature, the Son of God is present in all places at all times. But according to his human nature, the ascension moved Jesus' body and soul from our earthly realm into the heavenly one inhabited by angels and the souls of departed believers. The Scriptures record this event in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11, and referred to it in many other places.

We'll explore two aspects of Jesus' role as Christ that can be associated with his ascension: the apostolic authority Jesus granted to his apostles and his own enthronement at the right hand of God. Let's look first at the matter of apostolic authority.

Apostolic Authority

As a result of his unique accomplishments in atoning for sin and fulfilling all righteousness, God gave Jesus unparalleled authority and power over all creation. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:18:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Moreover, at his ascension Jesus delegated some of this authority to his apostles on earth, so that they could speak with infallible authority on his behalf, in order to establish and build up the church. The apostles who received this authority were the original eleven faithful disciples, Matthias who replaced the traitor Judas in Acts 1:26, and Paul who received his authority by a special dispensation.

As a result of this delegated authority, these apostles were enabled to write and approve new Scripture, and to speak infallibly in matters of doctrine. As we see in Acts 1:24-26, this authority was unique to the apostles who received it directly from Christ, and could not be passed on through human means. As a result, there have never been any other apostles that possessed this level of authority.

The apostle Paul alluded to this fact in Ephesians 2:19-20, where he said that the universal church was:

God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).

The authoritative apostles were a special category of church officers, belonging only to the universal church's foundational period.

With this understanding of apostolic authority in mind, we're ready to look at a second feature of Jesus ascension into heaven: his enthronement.

Enthronement

Now, the seating of Christ with God in heaven means that Christ has been victorious all over all the enemies of God and his people. And particularly in the book of Ephesians where Paul says this in chapter 2, the enemies that Paul's talking about are the cosmic enemies of the universe, the rulers and authorities of this present darkness. Those forces have been conquered by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and Christ is seated at God's right hand. And the wonderful good news is that we are seated also at God's right hand. So, as Christians we too have victory over all the demonic and evil forces of the universe. We do not need to fear the invisible powers that some people claim have power over us. We do not need to fear those because Christ has conquered them, and we are victorious together with him.

— Dr. Frank Thielman

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he presented his sacrifice in the heavenly temple, and then sat down at the right hand of God. This order of events is mentioned in Hebrews 1:3, 9:11-14, and 10:12-14.

The act of sitting down at God's right hand constituted Jesus' enthronement as God the Father's vassal or servant king in heaven. This messianic place of honor was first prophesied by King David in Psalm 110. And the New Testament frequently mentions that it now belongs to Jesus. For instance, we see this in Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Ephesians 1:20-21; and 1 Peter 3:22.

The enthronement completed Jesus' assumption of the office of Christ. He had been chosen before his incarnation and anointed at his baptism. But it wasn't until his ascension that he actually took the throne and began to rule in a formal capacity.

And every aspect of the Lord's actions and all of his movement, all of his personal relationship to every aspect of our time is important for redemption. The fact that he is at the right hand of the Father on a throne, spiritually speaking, is a great affirmation to us that there is victory at the end of all human history for us. He is the king who has won every battle. We don't sense it now, but in reality he has. That's the cosmic concept. The transformation of all the universe, his total lordship, that is all pictured for us as his reigning lordship on a throne. But the great thing about remembering who Jesus is, is the one that reigns is a glorified man. The Son of God who became the Son of Man. So that his incarnation never ceases. He didn't become some spirit alone. He has taken humanity into heaven, and the one who is at the right hand of God the Father is a Jewish carpenter who is the Son of God. He ever lives to intercede for us. There is this marvelous mix of his lordship, his sovereignty, his dominion, his absolute victory over all that has occurred. But also this incredible intimacy, this taking us into himself, that his intercessory life, this powerful prayer and concern for our lives continues. So this perfect Savior is exemplified to us on a throne. Yes, he has all worthiness to be worshipped and adored, but his worthiness is also, if you will, balanced from our perspective with this incredible self-giving, this amazing concept. I thought of all the hymns over the years that talk almost shockingly in present tense form about his bleeding wounds. My response at first was, well he bled and he died. But when the sing about his throne reality, they say five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary. And I think they're trying to say don't forget his incarnation, that his throne life is an incarnate Christ who is the Lord of heaven and earth but also the Lord of your everyday needs. And so there's great implication for the Christian as you think about his work upon the throne even today.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Having explored Jesus' exaltation in terms of his resurrection and ascension, let's turn to his ongoing session in heaven.

SESSION

The word "session" is a technical term in theology for Jesus' ongoing rule and governing from the place of majesty and power in heaven. It refers to all the things Jesus is doing in his current reign as God's vassal king.

When the Scriptures describe what Jesus is doing now, they often say that he's seated at the right hand of God the Father. This language can be misleading to some modern readers. Jesus isn't just sitting next to the Father waiting for the time of his return; he's sitting on a throne. And that means he's reigning over his kingdom. He's the vassal king who sits at God's right hand. And he'll keep reigning over us and interceding for us until he returns. Jesus' session proves that he's victorious over sin and death, and it authorizes him to give his people continual comfort in the midst of every problem we face in life.

Scripture tells us that Christ is seated at the right hand of God. This is an anthropomorphic expression that shows that Christ received the reins of government of the church and of the universe. At his ascension, he is made to share in the corresponding glory that goes with this. But this reference to being seated, however, does not imply that Jesus ascended to a place of rest. He continues in his work as our king and prophet and priest.

— Rev. Jim Maples

We'll speak of the things Jesus does during his heavenly session in terms of the three smaller facets of his role as the exalted Christ: First, his prophetic word and Spirit. Second, his priestly intercession before the Father. And third, his kingly rule over his people. Let's look first at Jesus' prophetic word and Spirit.

Word and Spirit

As we see in Acts 2:33, one of the first ways Jesus' exercised his prophetic ministry was by sending the Holy Spirit as a gift to the church. Acts 2 records that when the Spirit first came, he was attended by tongues of fire, the sound of rushing wind, and the exuberant praise of God in the languages of the dispersed Jews. This was a prophetic work because the Holy Spirit empowered the church as Jesus' prophetic witness in the world. Peter explained that these signs fulfilled the prediction made in Joel 2 that in the end times, the Spirit would empower all his faithful people for ministry.

Since Pentecost, Jesus has continued to send the Spirit to minister to the church in prophetic ways, though the extraordinary manifestations of Pentecost have been far from

the norm. Perhaps the most common example is that he sends the Spirit to provide illumination and insight when we read the Scriptures.

Jesus' prophetic ministry during his session also included the inspiration of Scripture. He sent the Spirit to inspire the apostles to write Christ's infallible word to his people, as we read in places like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and 2 Peter 3:15-16. And Jesus continues to minister to his church through the word by preserving the Scriptures for us, and by sending his Spirit to gift ministers to preach the word to their congregations and to evangelize the lost, as we see in places like Philippians 1:14, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and Hebrews 13:7.

Besides his prophetic word and Spirit, Jesus' session also includes his priestly intercession.

Intercession

At his ascension, Jesus offered his own blood to the Father for the atonement of the sins of his people. This action is unrepeatable. But its benefits — like forgiveness, cleansing, and healing — need to be applied to our lives on a continual basis. Ultimately, we will enjoy unlimited purity, health and prosperity in the new heavens and earth. But in the meantime, Jesus intercedes with us before the Father, asking him to apply a portion of those blessings to us during our lives on earth. His intercession is mentioned in passages like Hebrews 7:25-26, 9:11-26, and 10:19-22; as well as 1 John 2:2.

Christ presenting his whole work as our priest involves two aspects to it. It involves his laying down his life for us, which we think of in terms of the cross — he goes there as our substitute; he takes our place. He takes our sin upon himself, and pays for that in full. The priest also was one who interceded for the people, who was the mediator, the go-between, between God and the people, praying for them, representing them. Christ does both of those works. It's not as if his cross is done and his priestly work of intercession doesn't take place. No. His cross is done. He is our substitute, our representative, yet he still continues to pray for us, intercede for us. Why does he do so? Not because the cross is ineffective, but because he is applying that work to us in an ongoing way. We continue to sin; we're not yet in a glorified state. He continues to plead what he has done before the Father on our behalf. He continues to pray by the Spirit in ways that we don't even know how to pray. And he does that as our go-between, as our mediator, as the one who represents us in every aspect of our life and he does so as both our sacrifice and intercessor.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Sadly, many Christians labor under the false impression that when they sin, they stand helplessly before God on their own, having to answer for their failures. But the

wonderful fact is that just as Christ paid for our sins on the cross, he now intercedes for us before our Father in heaven, ensuring that the Father will continue to forgive and to bless us. We're never alone in God's heavenly court, because Jesus continually prays on our behalf.

Jesus still has an ongoing, personal, relational role that he plays in our lives as our advocate, our mediator, our representation. He's our lawyer that daily, continually goes before the great Judge and pleads our case. The great news is because of his atoning work he never loses a case. He's always appealing to his perfect, completed work on our behalf in his intercessory role as our great high priest, and it's always successful, it's always effective.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

With Jesus' word and Spirit and intercession in mind, let's turn to his rule as King.

Rule

Jesus' ongoing rule consists partly of governing the church, which the Bible describes both as his bride, in places like Ephesians 5:23-29, and his body, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12:27.

As the son and heir of David, Jesus also rules the nations, subduing them to his righteous rule and governance. We see this idea developed in Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; and Revelation 22:16.

Moreover, as the exact representation of God and the true image of restored humanity, Jesus rightfully rules as Lord of all creation, as we see in Hebrews 2:7-8.

And beyond this, Jesus is so highly exalted that he has full authority above all other powers and authorities, such as angels and demons. We see this in Romans 8:38-39; and Colossians 1:16, and 2:15. Listen to how Paul summarized Jesus' royal rule in Philippians 2:9-11:

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Jesus governs all things — the church, the nations, creation, and the spiritual world of angels and demons. His rule doesn't always seem predictable to us. But, he rules according to God's hidden plan. The Bible assures us that because of Christ's rule over all, his followers have nothing to fear. Our eventual victory is assured. Nothing can happen to us that's beyond his control and authority. Everything that exists is under his

authority and power — from the workings of the entire universe to the tiniest sub-atomic particle. And eventually, all the kings and people of the earth, and all spiritual beings, will acknowledge his supremacy and bow down to him.

Having explored Jesus' resurrection, ascension and session, we're ready to turn a future aspect of what Jesus will do as the Christ: his visible return.

RETURN

The New Testament teaches that because Jesus is the Christ, he will return visibly in his glorified body to consummate God's kingdom on earth. The return of Christ is a central affirmation of Christian faith, and is taught in passages such as Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, and 1 Corinthians 15:23.

We'll frame our discussion of Jesus' final return by looking at just two of the things he'll accomplish then: the judgment of all his spirits and humanity; and the renewal of creation. Let's look first at the judgment of spirits and humanity.

Judgment

As Christ and King, one of Jesus' roles is to act as judge on the last day, giving each angel, demon and human being its due. As Jesus himself said in Matthew 25:31-46, every human being who has died will be resurrected, and then all humanity will be judged on the basis of their works. Those who have done good works will be rewarded with eternal, blessed life. But those who have done evil works will be condemned to everlasting torment. The judgment is also mentioned in places like John 5:22-30; Acts 10:42, and 17:31; and 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Now, of course, the Bible also teaches that people can only do good works if the Holy Spirit indwells them with power. And if it weren't for the fact that believers have been justified in Christ, even these would be of no value. There's absolutely nothing about believers themselves that makes them superior to unbelievers. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10:

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10).

On our own, all humanity is guilty before God. But in the last judgment, those of us who have faith in Christ will be counted as having died for our sins in the death of Christ. So, instead of being condemned, we'll be rewarded for the good works God has done through us.

In our blessed state, we'll be completely free from the fear of death. Our glorified bodies will be like the one Jesus already has. And we'll live forever in peace and prosperity, free from the guilt, corruption and presence of sin. Above all, we'll see our God and Savior face to face, and rest in his favor.

As part of our reward, we'll also be given authority in the new heavens and earth, in order to reign over it with Christ. We see this in Romans 8:17; and 2 Timothy 2:12. And one of the first ways we'll exercise this authority is by joining Jesus in sitting in judgment over the angels and demons, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 6:3. The outcome will resemble the judgment on humanity. The righteous angels will be rewarded, and the wicked demons will be condemned, just as we read in Matthew 25:41.

With this understanding of the judgment of spirits and humanity in mind, let's turn to the renewal of creation that will also take place at Jesus' return.

Renewal

As Paul taught in Romans 8:19-22, when God cursed the ground in response to Adam's sin, it affected the entire creation. As a result, the whole universe is subject to corruption. But as we read in Romans 8:21, and Revelation 22:3, when Jesus returns he'll remove the bondage of sin and death from creation. Then we will inherit and rule over a good and perfect earth that is even better than the first creation. The prophets of the Old Testament visualized this restored creation in terms of abundant food, peace between peoples and animals, and joyful worship and service to God. We see this throughout the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah. This renewal of creation will first require the cleansing of the world by fire, as the apostle Peter revealed in 2 Peter 3:10-13. But the result will be wonderful. As Peter said in 2 Peter 3:13:

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

The picture of the new heavens and the new earth that we get in the book of Revelation for example is that it will be both a garden and a city. There are trees there that kind of recollect the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life particularly. But there's also a great city. A great New Jerusalem comes down from heaven with a river flowing through it, which again gets us back to the garden. So there will be all the delights and attractiveness of the garden, but all the sophisticatedness, all the civilization that you would expect in a city. And we look forward to that. There will not be any disasters. Now, I think nature will continue to be a very powerful demonstration of who God is and there will perhaps be great impressive works of God's power in the skies and in the earth, but they won't be disasters because there will be no sorrow, there will be no sadness and God will protect his people from all that. So

practically speaking, we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, says Peter, wherein dwells righteousness. It will be a perfectly righteous, perfectly just society. It'll be something that will be good for all of us. Our sorrows that we have here on earth, all our tragedies that we mourn today and rightly so, that won't happen again when we go to glory, and everything will be made right. All of God's justice will prevail, and we'll be so thankful for God's mercy.

— Dr. John Frame

Think about it this way. We all know that creation can be a wonderful place. Even though creation is still under the curse of sin, at times we can still be astounded by its beauty; we can be amazed by its complexities; we can be overwhelmed by the joys it brings us. Now, imagine what creation would be like without the curse of sin, without pain, without disease, without war, and even without death. Imagine the wonder of living in the new creation when Jesus returns — its beauty, complexity, and joys. Because Jesus is the Christ who reigns over all, he has both the authority and the power to make a perfect world for us, where we'll glorify God and enjoy him forever.

As followers of Jesus the Christ, our great hope is that he will return and grant us the blessings of his kingdom. This vision of the future ought to motivate us to serve God with a sense of urgency as we proclaim his gospel to the lost. It should encourage us to pursue a life of purity, even though we know we can never be condemned for our sin because we're kept securely in Christ. And it should encourage us to love and thank him for the great blessings he has promised us.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Jesus the Christ, we've surveyed the facts and significance of Jesus' earthly life and ministry by looking at the periods of his birth and preparation, his public ministry, his passion and death, and finally his exaltation. Each of these portions of Jesus' life gives us significant insight into Jesus' role as God's Christ.

Jesus Christ is the most powerful, exciting person who has ever lived. What's even more exciting is that he still lives today, serving as our prophet, priest and king from his throne in heaven. And if we serve him faithfully, he assures us in his Word that our blessings in the next world will be far beyond our greatest hopes. In our future lessons in this series, we'll explore Jesus' offices of prophet, priest and king in great detail. But even at this point, we've already seen more than enough reasons to marvel at the wonder and greatness of the Christ and to commit our lives to him.

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