

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 14 – The CHRIST: Jesus' Title and Mission

Introduction

The life and ministry of Jesus, as recorded in the 4 gospels, divides in to two halves. The first half is the *presentation* of Jesus to the world. Jesus arrives and begins His public ministry. He announces who He is – *the Christ, the Son of God*. He does many miracles and makes many claims to verify His identity. Controversy erupts because of His words and deeds. Then, the first half comes to an end with Jesus posing the identity question to His disciples: *Who do people say that I am? And who do you say that I am?*

The second half of the life of Jesus, in the 4 gospels, focuses on *His mission* as *the Savior* of the world. The narrative turns toward His journey to Jerusalem and to the cross to give His life as the payment for sins. The overall two-part story looks like this:

First Half – Second Half

Presentation of the Christ – Suffering of the Christ

Person of Christ – Work of Christ

Who is Jesus? – What was His mission?

If there is one great theme that ties the two halves together, it is the issue of Jesus being *the Christ, the Son of the Living God*.

The Hinge of the Narrative: Peter's Confession

The “hinge” of the gospel narratives is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16, Mark 8, Luke 9). We focused on this scene previously (see notes on Message 12). Now it serves as a doorway into the second half of the life of Jesus.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (16:13-17).

Peter made the good confession. Why is that the culmination of the first half of the gospels? Because the gospel writers were trying to bring their readers (and us) to that critical decision concerning the true identity of Jesus. Do we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God? That's the key question.

When you jump forward in the story to the final hours of Jesus' life, you find Him standing before Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest in a trial scene. The High Priest is interrogating Jesus concerning His claims about Himself:

The High Priest said to Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God?" (Matthew 26:63).

Jesus affirms that He IS the Christ, and He cites the key passage from the O.T. book of Daniel so that there will be no mistake as to what He is claiming about Himself (Daniel 7:13,14). He is the Son of God, the One authorized by the Father to rule the world!

Upon hearing Jesus' clear answer, the High priest tore his robes and condemned Jesus for blasphemy (claiming to be God). They decided He must die for this claim, and they began to spit upon Him, beat Him and mock Him. Hours later, Jesus was dying on a Roman cross.

By placing the confession of Peter that Jesus IS the Christ at the beginning of the second half of the narrative, and the decision of the high priest that Jesus IS NOT the Christ at the end of the second half, the gospel writers are signaling to us that *this is the critical question: IS JESUS THE CHRIST, or IS HE NOT?*

The Sticking Point: A Dying Christ

So, if Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, and if He did so many things to prove it, WHY did people have a hard time accepting Him as the Christ? It was because He didn't fit their preconceived ideas about what the Messiah should be like.

- They thought He would align with their views more exactly.
- They thought He would be more 'royal,' more 'stately.'
- They thought He would initiate a political revolution.
- They thought He would associate only with the religious elite.

Many people had many different expectations as to what the Christ would be and do, and Jesus *did not* meet the common expectations.

But there was one thing about Jesus that caused even His most devoted followers to stumble. Even the disciples had a hard time believing that Jesus was the Christ **when He talked about His upcoming DEATH in Jerusalem.**

Back to Peter's great confession and the words that were exchanged between Peter and Jesus immediately following:

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (Matthew 16:21-23).

Peter was shocked. A dying Christ? No way! That's not part of our picture of the Christ. God would never allow that to happen to His Son. Especially not to the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

This idea of a "suffering Messiah" was surely a great stumbling block for Jewish people back then. It would have been especially difficult for them to believe that *a crucified person could be God's anointed One.* Why? Because it was written back in the book of Deuteronomy:

"Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23).

If a person was hung on a tree, it was clear they were an evildoer who was *cursed by God.* So how could the Christ end up hanging on a tree (a wooden cross)? How could the Messiah be cursed by God? It didn't make any sense. This is why even the disciples had difficulty putting this all together.

It all comes down to understanding THE MISSION of JESUS. Which is the key point in the 2nd half of the gospels! That's why the gospel writers spent so much time on this. Here's an interesting statistic that will help you see how much emphasis the gospel writers placed on the suffering and death of Jesus (especially the last week of His life):

Amount of each gospel focused on the final week of Jesus' life:

Matthew 1/3 Mark 1/3 Luke 1/4 John 1/2

They all wrote significant amounts of material focusing on the Passion Week, telling us in great detail how Jesus went to the cross and then rose from the dead. Because this IS the key issue. Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God . . . but: *He was sent by the 'Living God' to be the 'Dying Christ'!* And that was the sticking point for people.

Many people will say that they believe in God, and even believe in Jesus. But what they often mean is that they believe in the existence of God and of Jesus. It is another thing to believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. And it is yet another thing to believe that He was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah who was appointed by God to give His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the entire human race for all time. How about you? How would you describe the Jesus that you believe in? Have you come to the same conclusion that the gospel writers did – that the Living God sent His Son to be the Dying Christ?

Jesus' many predictions of His death

This idea of Jesus being a *dying Christ* is key to our understanding of His real mission. He did not primarily come into the world to be a teacher, a prophet, an example, or a ruler. He came into the world to die for sins. This explains why Jesus talked *so often* about His death. Early on in His ministry, He had this interchange with a group of religious leaders:

The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So, when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken (John 2:18-22).

As the first half of His public ministry neared a conclusion, He caused great division with words about His death:

"For this reason, the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." A division occurred

again, among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?” (John 10:17-21).

People were having trouble squaring Jesus’ words about His death with the commonly held pictures of the “Messiah.”

As the second half of the gospel narratives began to move toward the cross, Jesus spoke more often about His death:

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt.16:21).

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (Matt.17:9).

“The Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands” (Matt.17:12).

And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved (Matt.17:22,23).

As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matt.20:18,19).

“But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ They took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Matt.21:38,39 – Parable of the rejected son).

When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion” (Matt.26:1,2).

Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23,24).

So, WHY did the gospel writers spend so much time on the Passion of the Christ? Why did Jesus predict His death so many times? Because: Salvation depends on our acceptance of this fact.

**Jesus was sent by the Living God to be the Dying Christ,
so that our sins could be paid for.**

We must believe that He was the suffering Messiah; the sacrificial lamb – Messiah; the dying and rising Messiah. We not only have to believe in His PERSON (first half of the gospels); we also must believe in His MISSION (second half of the gospels.)

Yes, we must believe Deuteronomy 21:23 – “*Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.*” But we also must make the connection between that verse and what happened to Jesus when He hung on a tree (a piece of wood) for us.

The apostle Paul, who also spent his pre-Christian years stumbling over this issue of a crucified Christ, finally made the connection. He explained for us in the book of Galatians when he quoted from the 5th O.T. book of Deuteronomy 21:23.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse FOR US—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13).

He became a curse FOR US.

He took the punishment FOR US.

He became the sacrificial lamb of God FOR US.

He died FOR US.

It was the work of the Christ in becoming the *substitutionary atonement for our sins* that baffled everyone back then, including the disciples of Jesus. It is the core of Christianity. We cannot save ourselves from the death penalty, caused by our sin and rebellion toward God. Nor can we make ourselves spiritually alive to God again. So – Jesus, God’s Son, came to save us by giving His life as the ransom FOR US. By taking on human flesh, God Himself could fulfill His own LAW, and conquer sin and death. Such a mystery and hard to fully comprehend!

God is merciful and compassionate toward us, even when we turn away from Him. The first humans chose to rebel against God's command to not eat of the one tree, as a test of their reciprocal love and obedience to Him (who actually WAS 'God the Son' in pre-human form). God had already warned the man that if he did eat, 'they would surely die' (Gen. 2:16,17). After their turning away from God, they experienced an immediate spiritual death in their relationship with God. (And they died physically many years later.) As an act of mercy and redemption, God killed an animal and clothed them in the animal skin (3:21). Later God explained the purpose of the animal sacrifices, "For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11). Thank God, right now, that He is a God of mercy and compassion, Who is willing to take your sin upon Himself in order to restore your relationship with Him.

Summary:

In most epic hero-narratives, we are first introduced to the key characters. Then, we are taken on a journey into their real mission. That's what the gospel writers did. They first showed us that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Then they took us on a journey to Jerusalem, where we see in detail the fulfillment of His real assignment from the Father:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

John, the oldest living disciple of Jesus, and writer of the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John (letters), and the last book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation, recorded many unique accounts and conversations of Jesus. One account was John Ch. 11 where a dear friend Lazarus had died of an illness and Jesus raised him from the dead. When Jesus arrived outside of Bethany to visit the family, He was initially met by Lazarus' sister Martha. She had listened to Jesus' teachings, along with Lazarus and her sister Mary, and learned many truths. Without knowing that Jesus had come to call her brother back to life after 4 days in the tomb, she still firmly believed in Jesus and declared to Him, "*I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world*" (Jn 11:27).

At the end of John's gospel, we read his purpose-statement for choosing his unique accounts, and we learn the importance of

grasping a *complete view* of Jesus, *the Christ*:

“Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30,31).

Receiving the gift of eternal life depends upon believing that Jesus is the dying Christ, the Son of God. That’s why the gospel writers made such a big deal about this. It’s literally the key to life forever, in relationship with God.

The Judeo-Christian belief in God the Father, sending His Son into this hostile world to live a sinless life and show us the way back to God is something only taught concerning this God of the Bible. What God would be His own sacrifice because humanity couldn’t possibly conquer sin and death! It is incredible! Apart from Him revealing these truths to us, we would never know and believe in the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Was there a time in your life when you believed in God and even believed that Jesus existed, but did *not* comprehend or believe the Bible’s teaching that Jesus was sent by the Living God to be the Dying Christ?
2. When and how did you come to your understanding and belief that Jesus was your Savior? If you are still exploring these teachings, where are you in your current understanding?
3. The Old Testament taught that Messiah would come. What people did not see was that Messiah would come *two times*: 1st to suffer and die for the sins of humanity; and 2nd to come at the end of human history as the LORD of all. Jesus is the 2nd person of the Trinity, ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’. Share your current understanding of these 2 comings of Messiah.
4. Read Isaiah 53, which is Isaiah’s grand prophecy of the “suffering Servant”, written 700+ years before Messiah’s 1st coming. How do you think this prophecy would have impacted you if you were living *before* the story of Jesus unfolded? How does this chapter impact you, in light of the story of Jesus?

JESUS

15. SEEKER: Jesus' Heart for People (Luke 15)

STUDY AHEAD

Luke chapter 15 is a “Bible in one chapter.” It captures the central theme of the entire Bible: God lost something, and He wants it back. Take some time to ponder this incredible chapter.

Luke 15:1,2. How would you describe the setting, or backdrop for this chapter? What was happening around the ministry of Jesus?

Luke 15:3-7. The trilogy of parables opens with the story of the shepherd with one lost sheep. What stands out to you the most?

Have you ever lost something that was so valuable to you that you went on a diligent search to find it?

Luke 15:8-10. There is balance in these first two parables, as one involves a man, and one involves a woman. If you have a Bible Dictionary, or can type in a search on Google or Safari on your computer or phone, do some digging about the possible meaning and importance of this woman's 10 precious coins in Luke 15. Why were they so valuable? Where did she get them from? Why was it such a big deal when she lost one of them, and she *had* to find it?

Luke 15:11-32. The parable of the prodigal son is the longest of the three, and it is only found here in Luke's gospel. It is truly one of the most monumental parables that Jesus ever spoke.

Describe the characteristics of the younger brother.

Describe the characteristics of the older brother.

What did the older brother think about his younger brother?

What did the older brother think about his father when the younger brother came home?

Describe the heart of the Father toward each of his sons.

As you consider the ending of this chapter, what do you think Jesus was trying to say to the Pharisees who were listening?

In all 3 parables, the emphasis Jesus makes at the end is about the JOY of a person in the story who finds the ONE that was LOST. And spiritually the JOY in heaven over ONE lost ‘sinner’ who has been FOUND. God is interested in each and every ONE of us. How does that truth impact you?