

Christian Ministry Unit 1

Introduction to Theology

Week 2 – Christology

Introduction

The distinctive focus of the Bible and Christianity is Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah). “Christology” means “the study of Christ”—the study of the Person of Jesus Christ. The study of the salvation that Jesus accomplished for us is called “Soteriology,” and will be covered in weeks 3-5.¹

Many views of Jesus

(2 Cor. 11:4) What have you heard people say about who Jesus is?

- “Jesus, like Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed, was one of many great spiritual teachers who taught different, but equally valid, ways to God.”
- “Jesus was a man whom God elevated to divine status because of his obedience.”
- “Jesus was God’s firstborn creation, the brother of Lucifer.” (Mormonism)
- “Jesus was created by God and existed as the archangel Michael before taking human form.” (Jehovah’s Witnesses)
- “The real Jesus was very different from the account given in the New Testament. Other books gave the truth about Jesus—but they were suppressed by the Church elite.” (*The DaVinci Code*)
- “We have no idea who the real Jesus was, what he taught, or whether he even actually existed!”

Two key New Testament passages about Jesus

This week we will survey what the New Testament says about Jesus, introduce important terms that help describe him, and look at important events and roles in his ministry as Savior. Let’s start by looking at 2 key passages that provide a clear picture of who Jesus is.

John 1:1-18 – This passage teaches Jesus’ deity and humanity.

John 1: ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light. ⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe

¹ Christology has many other important theological implications beyond Soteriology, but this is the key implication because Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10).

in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' " ¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

What does this passage say about "the Word?"

(1:1)

(1:14)

(1:18)

This passage describes what is called the Incarnation. "Incarnation" literally means "enfleshment."

At the Incarnation, two *natures* (full deity and full, sinless humanity) were inseparably united in one *Person*, Jesus Christ. This union is called the Hypostatic Union.

NOTE:

Paul makes this same claim about Jesus in Col. 2:9*.

Colossians 2: ⁹ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

The Old Testament also predicted that the Messiah would be both human and divine—see Isa. 9:6.

Isaiah 9: ⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Why is the Incarnation/Hypostatic Union essential for our salvation?

Jesus had to be fully human in order to die for the sins of humanity (Heb. 2:17; 10:4-7). If he were not fully human, he could not be a true mediator-priest who could represent humanity before God.

Hebrews 2: ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Jesus had to be sinless in order to die for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). The penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

2 Corinthians 5: ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus had to be fully God in order for his death to pay for all of our sins (Heb. 10:10-12; Col. 2:9,13,14). God's righteous wrath against sin is infinite, so only a sacrifice with infinite value could satisfy his wrath. (1 Jn. 2:2).

Colossians 2: ⁹ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form... ¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Philippians 2:1-13** – This passage teaches an important implication of the Incarnation, and an important example for us as Jesus' followers.

Philippians 2: ¹ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Phil. 2:6,7 teaches that Jesus emptied himself of certain divine prerogatives when he became a human. This self-emptying is called the Kenosis (from the Greek word *kenoo*, which is translated "emptied"). What did Jesus lay aside?

- vv. 7,8

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- v.8

(Lk. 2:52)

(Jn. 4:3-7)

(Matt. 24:36)

How then did Jesus perform miracles? (Acts 10:38)

(Mk. 4:39)

Why did Jesus lay aside his rights?

(2:9-11)

Because Jesus has loved us this way, we are to lay down our rights and serve others in sacrificial love (2:3,4). Just as Jesus voluntarily left his perfect world to come all the way down here to rescue us, we are to follow him out of our comfort and into the lives of people far from God. As we choose by faith to follow Jesus' example, God promises to provide us the motivation and power to live this life of sacrificial service (2:12,13). And he promises that as we humble ourselves in this way, he will exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet. 5:6)!

Jesus' resurrection

Resurrection vs. resuscitation

The Bible teaches that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This does not mean that Jesus was resuscitated from the dead with his same mortal body (like Lazarus in Jn. 11). Nor does it mean that he merely continued conscious existence without a body (see Lk. 24:36-43). It means that he defeated death and was given a gloriously transformed body that left his grave empty.

Why is Jesus' resurrection so important? 1 Cor. 15:1-23**

1 Corinthians 15:¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹ Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God,

because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. ²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

- vv. 13-15

- v. 17

(Lev. 16:1,2)

- vv. 18-23

What is the evidence that Jesus was resurrected? While we obviously do not possess empirical proof (evidence from observation through our five senses) for Jesus' resurrection, the apostles did receive this kind of proof (Acts 1:3; 1 John 1:1; John 20:25,27), and Jesus states that their witness is an adequate basis for our faith (John 20:29; Acts 17:31).

“A basic principle of evidence is that personal knowledge of the witness or declarant is essential to admissibility. The speaker must have seen, heard, or otherwise perceived the event about which he speaks.” Graham Lilly, “An Introduction to the Law of Evidence”

Positive evidence for Christ's resurrection:² Forensic evidence. We can conclude by several lines of reasoning based on the data available to us that the best explanation for what happened is that Jesus rose from the dead.

- The Christian movement began in the very city where its founder had been executed and buried only days earlier. This movement was based solely on the apostles' claim (along with 500 other people—see 1 Cor. 15:6) that they had witnessed Jesus alive after his execution. The leaders of the city (both Jewish and Roman) were hostile to this movement, and could have easily refuted this claim by exhuming the body. The best explanation for this historical fact is that

² For more information on this topic, see Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Zondervan, 1998).

the tomb was indeed empty and that the witnesses were telling the truth. “If the birth of Christianity leaves a hole in history the size of Jesus' resurrection, with what do you propose to fill it?”³

- With the possible exception of John, the apostles were all executed rather than retract their claims that they had witnessed Jesus alive after his execution. It is very difficult to believe that they would all have done this if they knew were lying. Chuck Colson points out that all of those involved in the Watergate cover-up spoke up as soon as they were threatened with imprisonment. How much more would at least some of the apostles have broken ranks if they knew they were lying about Jesus' resurrection?
- The conversion of Paul is difficult to explain apart from his own explanation. He was a leading enemy of the Christian movement, completely hostile to the Christians' claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet, in a very short period of time, he became convinced that converted that Jesus was the Messiah and he became Christianity's most eloquent and adamant proponent. He claimed that his conversion was the result of an encounter with the risen Jesus (Acts 9,22,26). Attempts to explain Paul's conversion apart from Jesus' appearance (guilt complex; epileptic seizures; etc.) are inadequate.

Inadequate explanations:

- **Stolen Body Theory:** Someone stole the body, which explains the disciples' belief in the resurrection as well as the empty tomb. *But who would steal it?* The Romans and the Jews wanted Jesus to be provably dead. A practical jokester wouldn't risk death. The disciples wouldn't risk imprisonment and execution for what they knew to be a lie.
- **Swoon Theory:** Jesus didn't really die. He was given a drug while on the cross which simulated death, and later recovered, passed himself off to his disciples as resurrected, and then lived out the rest of his life in hiding. *But Jesus would not have had the strength to leave the tomb.* After hanging on a cross for several hours, being pierced in his side and wrapped mummy-style, how did he break the burial linen, roll the stone away, overpower the guards, and after crawling to the upper room (on his elbows and knees), succeed in convincing his disciples that he was resurrected?
- **Hallucination Theory:** The disciples didn't really see Jesus rise from the dead. They hallucinated seeing him, because they wanted so badly for him to be alive. *But this still doesn't deal with the empty tomb.* And evidence for the existence of mass hallucinations under any circumstances is lacking. In addition, Jesus' disciples were not inclined to look for a resurrection (Lk. 24:11). They sometimes didn't even recognize him at first (Lk. 24:16,31). Jesus went out of his way to make sure they knew he wasn't a spirit or hallucination (Jn. 20:25,27; Lk. 24:36-43).

³ NEED REFERENCE

- **Legend Theory:** The story of the resurrection is not factual, but reflects a legend which the early church came to believe. *But the gospels and epistles have been accurately dated to 50-95 AD.* There was not enough time for such a false legend to arise, since eyewitnesses could easily discredit it. Paul speaks of 500 witnesses, most of whom were still alive—thus inviting investigation. Also, this does not explain why the disciples were willing to die for their message when they knew full well that it was a lie.

Jesus' ascension

After his resurrection, Jesus was removed bodily from earth and is in the presence of God the Father, where he continues to work out God's redemptive plan.

- He intercedes for his followers (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).
- He pours out his Spirit on his followers (Jn. 7:37-39; Acts 2:32,33).
- He leads his followers to spread the good news of his victory over sin and Satan (Lk. 24:46-51; 2 Cor. 5:14-20; Eph. 1:20-23).

Jesus' return

At the end of the age, after some from every people-group have become his followers, Jesus will return bodily to earth to establish God's kingdom.

Memory verses

Colossians 2:9* – Jesus is fully God and fully human

Philippians 2:6,7* – Jesus laid aside his divine privileges (including the USE of certain divine attributes) at the Incarnation

1 Corinthians 15:1-23** – Jesus has been resurrected, and his resurrection proves he is Messiah and assures our salvation

Assignment