

- I. During the last six weeks we've been focused on Christ.
- A. The daily devotions have been reflections on his life and teaching.
  - B. The lectures – such as the one tonight on the nature of Christ – are deeper theological and historical explorations about him.
  - C. The book you've been reading – many of you anyway – has tried to follow Christ from before time began up to the present. We've noted that Christ was the one through whom all things were made, had several cameo appearances in the Old Testament, was a frequent topic of the Old Testament prophets and the hope of the Jewish people. We followed the announcement of his virgin conception, his incarnation, a few high points around his birth and 12<sup>th</sup> birthday and then his baptism and testing. We followed his emergence as a rabbi, eventual march to Jerusalem, Holy Week, betrayal, Last Supper, arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, 40 days of post resurrection appearances – where he helped them understand everything that had just happened and his ascension into heaven. And finally – in the book we've noted that there is more to come.
  - D. In these sermons I've been trying to build the case that He is God.
    - 1. I've been doing my best to assure those of you who already believe that He is Savior and Lord, that you have good reasons to believe as you do.
    - 2. And I've been trying to persuade those of you who are still on the outside looking in, to jump in. Step over the line. Place your faith in Christ. He is the answer to your biggest problem – your broken, sinful and selfish heart and corresponding estrangement from God.
    - 3. I've been doing my best to persuade you that Jesus is unique and powerful, that he stands out in so many ways not just because he is a man among boys but because he is God among men.
    - 4. In the first message I argued that he's made the greatest impact of anyone ever – and that he impact was good.
    - 5. In the second I noted that he gave us the greatest ethical system we have and claimed to be God.
    - 6. In the third message we looked at the power he demonstrated over sin, death, evil and nature. The kind of power you would expect God to have.

7. Last week we saw how he fulfilled the prophecies made about the Messiah. I explained that: God had given descriptions about who the Messiah would be and what he would do; I noted that the odds that any one person could fulfill even a few of these by accident were unthinkable; and I then went on to note that Jesus had fulfilled them all.

II. Though it may be piling on, let me briefly come at this again from a different angle – this time with visuals. Sometimes a picture really is worth a thousand words.

A. Slide One: The Bible is not a book of morality lessons and inspirational stories designed to motivate you to try harder to be good so that you might earn God’s favor. It is a book about Jesus – what God has done and is doing, all of which focuses on Christ. The Old Testament points ahead to him. The Gospels are all about him and the rest of the New Testament points back at him.

B. Slide Two: In this second slide we see some of the different ways everything points to him.

1. The Old Testament opens with “The Situation” – not the guy from the reality TV show – but the situation we are in. In Genesis 1 – 11 we learn that: A good and all powerful God created everything everywhere, including us; we were made in his image and given responsibility to manage his world; and everything was wonderful until we rebelled and fell.

2. On the very first pages we learn that:

a) We are profoundly broken by our sin. That instead of loving God first – which is the right order of things – we love ourselves and other things we shouldn’t. We are full of pride and greed and lust.

b) We learn that our sin separates us from the one we were made for – God himself. We can no longer have a perfect relationship with a perfect being because we are sinful.<sup>1</sup>

c) It is very bad news with this caveat. God promises to send help – One who will defeat evil and rescue us.

3. This is the first of many prophecies I spoke about last week. They run throughout the Old Testament and point ahead to Christ.

4. The Law also points to him. It was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai and served in three ways:

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<sup>1</sup> See Habakkuk 1:13

a) First, it helped keep the Jews alive long enough so that the Savior can be born. One of the early prophecies was that the Rescuer would come through Abraham's descendants – the Jews. God gave the Law to the Jews to help them build the kind of healthy society that lasts. (There are healthy societies that grow and unhealthy societies that implode. One of the purposes of the Law was to help the Jews be healthy and grow. God's Law is full of very practical advice about how to live in a way that works).

b) Second, the Law was designed to help everyone realize what God's standards are and that we do not meet them. It reinforced the idea that we are unable to be good enough for God on our own. Our tendency is to look around at other people – judge them by their actions while we judge ourselves by a very skewed rationalized view of our intentions and think: I'm not bad. If God grades on the curve – and surely he will – I'll be fine. The Law was given to make it clear that we are all sinners and unable to qualify for a relationship with God. We deserve to be punished for our sin. This points us to our need for someone to help us – to rescue us.

c) Third, the Law also ends up pointing us to Christ because He is the only one who fulfills it. He keeps it. No one else ever has.

5. Next up we have an arrow for the Sacrificial System.

a) Starting in Genesis and moving throughout the Old Testament – first at altars, then in the Tabernacle and finally in the Temple – the Jews were instructed to offer sacrifices to God to atone for their sins.

b) Over and over and over and over and over again they would bring an animal to the priest who would kill it and pour out its blood to atone for – to pay for – their sins.

c) This was the plan to make two things very clear: when we sin we deserve to die – and indeed, someone will. But, substitute deaths are allowed. If an innocent third party will give up its life, guilty people can go free. An idea that... points to Jesus!

6. In the Old Testament we see the development of the offices of prophet, priest and king. I've not said much about this. But it should be noted that Jesus will perfectly fulfill all three. He is the perfect prophet – speaking for God. He is our final High Priest – we have no need for any other. And He is the King of Kings who sits on the throne of David. In a variety of ways those who occupied these offices were pointing to Christ.

7. There is yet another line I've labeled Foreshadowing to capture a number of events that are designed to point ahead to Christ. You do not understand that this is what they are doing at the time. In fact, this isn't clear the first, second or even third time you read through the book, but at some point you start to realize how everything lines up.<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller captured this brilliantly in a sermon he gave. Let me simply read what he said. He said, "you realize that:

- a) Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test in a much tougher Garden, and whose obedience is imputed to us.
- b) Jesus is the true and better Abel, who, though innocent, was slain and whose blood cries out, not for condemnation but for redemption
- c) Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who answered God's call and left the comfort of the familiar to go into the void – a place not known – for us
- d) Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who was not just offered up but who was sacrificed by his father. God said of Abraham, "Now I know that you love me, because you did not withhold your son." That whole event – the binding of Isaac – was set up to help us understand what God did for us.
- e) Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who was sold into slavery but who rose to sit at the right hand of power, and forgives those who sold him
- f) Jesus is the true and better Moses, who stands in the gap between God and man, and mediates a better covenant.
- g) Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory over Goliath became the people's victory, even though they didn't lift a stone to earn it
- h) Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn't just risk losing an earthly position but lost a heavenly one, and didn't just risk his life but gave his life. Who didn't just say, "If I perish, I perish. But who send 'when I perish I do so to save my people.'"
- i) Jesus is the true and better Jonah, who was cast out from the boat into the storm so that we can be saved, and who survived three days in the belly of the beast
- j) Jesus is the true and better Passover Lamb

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<sup>2</sup> This list is from a sermon given by Tim Keller.

k) Jesus is the true and better Temple.

8. Men and women, the Book is about Jesus. All roads lead to Jesus. He is the star. In so many ways, the Old Testament is simply setting up the context for the arrival of the Rescuer – the King of Jews, the Messiah, the Son of Man and Son of God and Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

9. It can take a while for some of this to come into focus. In fact, my experience is that even after thirty years I keep finding different ways this story all fits together.

C. Final Slide: And we get more of the same on the other side of the Gospels.

1. The Gospels are all about Christ – and then the other New Testament books point back to Christ, helping us understand who he is and what he did. The Book is about Jesus.

2. And as I've already argued at some length, one of the takeaways of the last 2,000 years is, there is no one like Him. He is "the biggest and the best." Most people's fame starts to decline at their death. Christ's influence and renown has only grown.

3. If we had more time we could talk about what comes next – the banquet. The celebration.

D. Please understand, there is more here to build this case. We could focus on:

1. The fact that those around him worshipped him

2. The ultimate and final confirmation of the story – his resurrection from the dead - something no one else had done before or since.

3. We could look at the fact that he launched the church. He took a bunch of misfits – a group of guys everyone else passed over – and used them to launch the most successful institution of all time: the church. Yes it has problems. Many! But it has done many things right. And it now stands as the oldest, largest, most economically, ethnically and geographically diverse institution in the world.

E. There is more. But we are going to shift gears. I'm going to assume that you are with me in my claim that:

1. The Book is about Jesus. That He is the center of the story. And that He is unique among all people.

2. And I am going to assume that most of you are with me in my claim that He is God. He is not just the star of the book, he's not even just the Messiah. He is God. Jesus has existed from eternity past as God – the logos through whom all things were created – and that at the incarnation he added humanity to deity - that somehow, while remaining fully God he became fully man.

3. The question we now take up is: why?

III. Why did Christ become a man? Why did God show up on earth? What was the point? What was the mission?

A. Well, this is the third of the four big ideas I want to be sure are really clear.

B. So far I have established that: 1) The Book is about Jesus; 2) Jesus is God; We now come to point three: He was born to die... in your place.

C. Let me pause here to note that this is not a complete answer. Jesus did many things while he walked among us.

1. He revealed God. The writer of Hebrews drills down on this point. You want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."<sup>3</sup>

2. He showed us how to live and how to love. He is the perfect person. You want to know what life is supposed to look like? We can do no better than to study Christ.

3. He cared for people – especially the poor. In this he showed us God's heart.

4. He fulfilled the Law. He finally passed the test that we have all been failing.

5. He brought the kingdom. He established a beachhead for the new order of things. He set in motion the plan so that God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

D. Jesus did many things. But when you ask him why he came – what his chief task was – and when we look at the trajectory of the Old Testament – we realize that he was born to die.

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 1:3

E. The Bible points to the Gospels – to the account of Jesus – and the four Gospels point to two events: Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus was born to die.

IV. So why was this the mission?

A. As virtually anyone who is paying attention realizes, Jesus is famous for his death. The Christian logo is the cross – a cruel, horrific form of death. Why?

B. Famous people are almost all famous for their lives not their deaths. Christ’s death is central to the whole book. Why? What could he do by dying that he couldn’t do by living?

C. Well, no single answer is sufficient. No one metaphor is able to adequately capture all that goes on in Christ’s death.<sup>4</sup>

1. We need to understand that in dying Christ defeated evil. It limps on, but its destruction is certain.<sup>5</sup> He crushed the head of the serpent just as the Father promised he would back in Genesis 3.

2. And we need to understand that by dying Christ demonstrated God’s love for us.

3. And we need to understand that in dying Christ modeled how we should put ourselves out for others. There is an example here – a moral imperative for us.

D. More than one thing is happening here. But the key reason he went to a horrific death – one he did not want! Judas betrays. Peter denies him. The disciples flee and he not only faces a cruel, shameful and painful physical death, he takes on the sins of the world and bears the wrath of the Father against sin. He did not want this. Why did he do it? So that he could pay our debt.<sup>6</sup> Your debt.

1. Christ’s died in your place so that you could be released from a debt that would otherwise keep you eternally separated from the Father – a debt that would point you to eternal death not eternal life; a debt that sends you to hell not heaven.

2. God became man so that he could die because this was the only way to satisfy the demands of justice and the love of a Father.

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<sup>4</sup> Theologians refer to the answers to this question as theories of the atonement.

<sup>5</sup> This is the *Christus Victor* theory

<sup>6</sup> This is referred to as the penal substitutionary theory

3. Holiness made it impossible for God to ignore our sin. Love made it impossible for him to walk away. Only by dying in our place could God satisfy the demands of justice and love.

4. His death was the perfect solution. As a man he could represent us in way the animal sacrifices never could. As a man who had lived a perfect life he was qualified to do so. His death was not required as payment for his sins. He had none. And as God his death had infinite value. He was able to pay the debt of more than one person.

V. All of which brings us to the fourth point

A. One: The Book is about Jesus – He is the center of the story; Two: He is God; Three: He became a Man – he entered our domain – to die in our place; to make a way back for us. Four: You have to opt in. You have to choose.

B. In the third chapter of John’s Gospel, John quotes Jesus saying, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have ever lasting life.” You can choose to believe or not. You can choose to follow or not.

C. In his first letter John writes: “If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” We can choose to follow or not – to obey or not. If we want to follow it’s on his terms. He is God we are not. We start by confessing our sin – by repenting, by agreeing with God that we are broken. If we do that then God is just to forgive us of our sins. You might think, “Wait, how is that just? Shouldn’t this say, “God is merciful to forgive us of our sins?” No, because if we confess our sin and trust in Christ, then Christ pays that penalty – and because he has it would be unjust for someone to pay it again. We are free!

D. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains that if we come to faith in Christ then God gives our sins to Christ and his righteousness to us.<sup>7</sup> We get to take part in what is commonly known as the Great Exchange. We not only are released from our debt we get the credit of Christ’s righteousness. It’s as if we kept the law – it’s as if we lived the perfect life that He did.

E. Peter writes to the followers of Christ – not to everyone, but to the followers of Christ – and says, “Christ himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 5:21



- F. Christians are those who accept Christ's offer:
1. Who repent and follow him.
  2. Who worship him as God.
  3. Who seek to follow his example in loving and serving others.
  4. And who tell others about him.
- G. But please note: you have to opt in. You have to accept.
1. One: The Book is about Jesus
  2. Two: He is God.
  3. Three: He became a Man in order to die for you.
  4. Four: The choice is yours. You have to opt in.

VI. Some of you have never done this. You have been looking on. It's time to put your weight down. It's time to take advantage of the best offer you will ever be given. You can go your own way – stand before God on your own merits, in your sin – and fail. Or you can say, "I'm with Jesus. I want Jesus. I am going to follow Jesus."

A. I am going to close today by giving you a chance to do just that. If this makes sense to – if you want in, if you are persuaded that Jesus is God and that He was born to die, and you realize that you have fallen short of God's standards and need help – then I invite you to put your weight down.

B. Right now I invite you to silently pray a prayer like this: Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. I am sorry for my selfishness, greed, pride, anger and many other sins. Please forgive me. Thank you for dying on the cross so that I could be forgiven. I now turn from everything I know that is wrong. Spirit of God, thank you for coming to live in me now. Please guide and direct my path. Help me to become more like you. Thank you. Amen

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 2:24