

The Earthly Life of Jesus Christ

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C. The earthly life of Christ

1. Doctrinal importance

- a. It proved the validity of His claims and thus His worthiness to be the Savior. It was the time when He was tested and proved to be a proper sacrifice for sin.
- b. It furnishes as example for His people to follow. This particularly means the example of His self-sacrificing love (1 John 2:6).
- c. It was during His earthly life that His teachings were given. Some of those teachings concerned the Jewish people directly, and some were given in anticipation of the founding of His church.

2. The events of His life

The life of Christ may be divided into three parts:

- a. Years of preparation - beginning with His birth in Bethlehem, through the years of infancy, childhood and growth into full manhood, and concluding with His baptism and temptation.
- b. Years of public ministry: included His early ministry in Judea (John 2:13-4:3), His ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14-9:50), and the Perea ministry (Luke 9:51-19:28).
- c. Passion Week: the events leading up to His death and the crucifixion itself (Luke 19:29-22:46), included the betrayal and arrest (John 18:2-13), the trial before Annas (John 18:12-24), the trial before Caiaphas (Mark 14:53-15:1), the first trial before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5), the trial before Herod (Luke 23:8-12), the second trial before Pilate (Mark 15: 6-15) and the crucifixion itself with its various words spoken from the cross (Luke 23:33-46).

3. The offices He occupied

During His life the Lord occupied and exercised the three offices of prophet, priest and king.

- a. The prophet was the channel through which God's message was delivered to man. Jesus called Himself a prophet (Matthew 13:57) and was without doubt the greatest of all prophets because He not only delivered God's message to man, but He also revealed God in His life and person.
- b. Our Lord was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:14-17) although He performed many functions that were illustrated by the Aaronic priests. He was appointed by God, fully-qualified, offered a sacrifice for sin and represented His people before God (Hebrews 5:1-10). His priestly ministry in behalf of believers continues today in His interceding for us and His sustaining us (Hebrews 7:25; Revelation 2:1).
- c. The office of Christ as King was predicted before His birth (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33). When He came He fulfilled the requirements of that promised King although His people rejected His claims. The result of that rejection was not an annulment of the kingdom promises, but simply a delay in their fulfillment until the second coming of the King.

In the meantime, Jesus is building His church. The delay does not lessen the certainty of future fulfillment, nor does it alter the fact that He is always the King in His person.

Taken together, the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King are the key to the purpose of the incarnation. His prophetic office was concerned with the revelation of the truth of God; the priestly office was related to His work as Savior and Mediator; His kingly office had in view His right to reign over Israel and over the entire earth. In Christ, the supreme dignity of these offices is reached. [John F. Walvoord, Jesus Christ Our Lord (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p.137.]

D. The resurrection and ascension of Christ

1. The fact of the resurrection

a. The empty tomb

Many explanations have been offered to explain why the tomb was empty, but they are all unbelievable except the one that says He arose from the dead. Some say that the disciples went to the wrong tomb and happened to find one that was empty. This requires a lot of faith since there were Roman soldiers and angels stationed at Christ's tomb making it rather easy to find.

To say that the body was stolen by outside parties was known to be a fabrication in those days (Matthew 28:11-15). If it was stolen, why didn't the thieves produce it when the disciples began to preach the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead? That would have quickly put an end to their preaching. If you accept the explanation that the disciples stole the body then you must also accept that they were willing to die as martyrs for something they knew to be a lie! The empty tomb is impossible to explain apart from bodily resurrection.

b. The appearances of the Lord after the resurrection

The risen Christ appeared at various times, to various people and under various circumstances - all of which show that they were not staged (John 20:11-17; Matthew 28:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:5; Luke 24:13-35, 36-43; John 20:26-29; 21:1-23; 1 Corinthians 15:6). If nothing else, the sheer number of witnesses to the appearances of Christ after the resurrection makes it impossible to conceive of the story being fabricated by a few.

c. Subsequent events of history

On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus had been raised less than two months before in the same city where he was preaching and he was not challenged or contradicted. Instead, 3,000 people believed his message (Acts 2:14-41).

2. The nature of the resurrection

Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. It was not a resurrection of "influence" or "spirit" as some would say. Nor does it mean simply that His memory lives on. His was a physical, bodily resurrection. The physical characteristics of His resurrection body were felt and seen by the disciples (Luke 24:39; John 20:27) and He demonstrated physical functions when He ate with them (Luke 24:42-43). Jesus' resurrection body was definitely identified as the same one that was crucified and buried (John 20:27), but it was different in some ways in that it was not subject to normal limitations. For instance, after the resurrection Jesus could pass through closed doors (John 20:19), but most important He cannot die ever again (Romans 6:9).

3. The significance of the resurrection

The resurrection proved the validity of Christ's claims about Himself and the truth of all that He said (Matthew 28:6).

The resurrection is the everlasting guarantee of the forgiveness of our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The resurrection is the guarantee of the certainty of future resurrection of all men - those who believe to everlasting life and those who do not believe to everlasting condemnation (John 5:28-29). Future judgment is also certain because the Judge has been raised from the dead (Acts 17:31).

Concerning the life of the believer, the resurrection provides power for His service and relationship to his risen Head Jesus (Ephesians 1:19-22), and assures him of a sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16).

4. The importance of the ascension

It marked the conclusion of the period of the Lord's humiliation and limitation on earth.

It marked the beginning of the period of His exaltation at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20-23).

As Forerunner, it made Jesus the anchor of our faith (Hebrews 6:20). It marked the beginning of His present ministries of being our High Priest and preparing a place for us (Hebrews 4:14-16; John 14:2)

It gave Jesus headship over the church and is especially related to His giving gifts to His body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:8).

E. The present ministry of Christ

The present ministry of the Lord is mainly related to His people in contrast to the present work of the Holy Spirit which includes ministries to unbelievers, like enlightening and regenerating them.

1. The risen and ascended Christ is praying for His people. This has several benefits: it guarantees the security of their salvation (Hebrews 7:25); it assures continued fellowship with God (1 John 2:1); and it is a powerful preventative against sin in their lives (John 17:15).
2. The Lord is preparing a place for us to dwell forever (John 14:3).
3. Christ is now building the church which is His body (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:22).
4. Jesus as the Head of the church is involved in many activities on behalf of the members of His body. He gives gifts to men which are essential to our edification and preparation for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), He nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29) and gives it union and direction (Ephesians 2:19-22).
5. The Lord is also involved in answering our prayers (John 14:13).
6. He gives special help for particular needs (Hebrews 4:16). The help is promised at the particular time that the need arises including times of temptation (Hebrews 2:18; 1 Corinthians 10:13).
7. He is concerned with the fruitfulness of His followers (John 15:1-16).

F. The future ministry of Christ

1. Jesus' coming for believers in the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
2. The pouring out of His wrath on the earth during the tribulation period (Revelation 6:3-18:24).
3. The return of King Jesus to defeat the armies who fight against Him at the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19:11-21.
4. Jesus' future rule as King of kings and Lord of lords, first during the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20:1-6, and then forever in the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21:1-22:5.