

Our Christian Faith



Holy

Yahweh

Hell

Law

Preservation

Our summer devotion series is entitled, "Our Christian Faith--One Word at a Time." The invisible, eternal, personal God has chosen to reveal himself to us most intimately and completely through words. Words have the wonderful power of to open hearts and change minds. To be sure God uses many unique and precise words to show himself and his will for us. Our study will investigate some of these terms with a twofold goal in mind: 1.) Growing in our personal understanding and appreciation of what God has done and 2.) Becoming more comfortable sharing these truths with our neighbors. But where to begin? Our series title and the Scriptures themselves suggest there is not better place to start than with Jesus Christ—for without him there is no Christianity. How a person considers Christ largely determines if they are a Christian or not.

CHRIST

Many today see the word "Christ" as something like Jesus' last name, but like the word "President," "Christ" is actually a title meant to convey an official office. "Christ" in Greek and "Messiah" in Hebrew both mean, "the Anointed One." This is one among many titles used to refer to the promised Savior. When Adam and Eve fell into sin God promised a divine rescuer. This One would be the son of the woman¹ and the Son of God² anointed with the Holy Spirit³ to make payment for our sins⁴ and crush Satan⁵ and death⁶ underfoot. The entirety of salvation history (and in fact, all of human history) is centered on the Anointed One and his all-important mission. As Jesus once said to the Jewish leaders: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me."⁷

So, who is Jesus Christ? That is a question every person needs to answer, but how best to find the answer? We live in an age of incredible hubris, where our scientists, historians, and ethicists imagine that we now have the definitive answers to what is fact and fiction, right and wrong, even as we are removed from people and places by thousands of years. To find the truth we must go back to the original sources, allowing the people who lived through these events and witnessed them firsthand to speak for themselves.

Well then, what did Jesus say about himself? As a twelve-year-old boy, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the first time to celebrate the Passover festival, but unbeknownst to Mary and Joseph he stayed behind in the Temple. When they found him there three days later sitting among the teachers, they asked him why he hadn't come home with them. The child Jesus told them he had to be in his Father's house.⁸ Already then, he recognized that he is the Son of God. At about age 30 Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, thereby officially marking him as the Christ, the One who was baptized with the Holy Spirit.⁹ Soon thereafter Jesus preached in his hometown of Nazareth, and he read from the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." Jesus began his sermon affirming, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," telling his countrymen that he was the promised Anointed of God.¹⁰ He told the Samaritan woman at the well that he was the

¹ Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14.

² Psalm 2; 2 Samuel 7:13-14a.

³ Isaiah 11:2-3a.

⁴ 1 John 2:1-2.

⁵ Genesis 3:15.

⁶ Isaiah 25:8a.

⁷ John 5:39.

⁸ Luke 2:41-50.

⁹ John 1:32-34.

¹⁰ Luke 4:18,21.

Messiah.¹¹ Finally, as he stood on trial before the Sanhedrin, with his life on the line, Jesus testified under oath that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.¹² No one can deny that Jesus claimed to be God's Anointed One.

But what of those who knew him, who heard his words, touched his person, and saw his glory?¹³ Already at his birth of the Virgin Mary, Jesus was considered God's divine Son, entirely worthy of the worship and reverence due God alone.¹⁴ A special star brought the wise men to Jerusalem searching for the King of the Jews, and when they finally found the toddler with his mother, they bowed down to worship him.¹⁵ After Jesus calmed the raging storm with a word, his disciples were bewildered by his power and worshipped him.¹⁶ When Jesus asked the disciples whom they thought he was, the Apostle Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ On Easter morning as the women returned to Jerusalem from the empty tomb, the resurrected Jesus appeared to them. They too bowed down, clasped his feet and worshipped him.¹⁸ Seven days later the risen Jesus suddenly appeared among his disciples inside a locked room, Thomas identified him as, "My Lord, and my God."¹⁹ On none of these occasions did Jesus once deny their worship (even though the worship of any creature or created thing is expressly forbidden by God).²⁰

In addition to Jesus' own testimony and the testimony and actions of his followers, hundreds of Old Testament prophecies written hundreds and even thousands of years before his birth made exact predictions about the Christ so that he could be readily identified once he came. Among these details is that the Christ would be born of a virgin²¹ in Bethlehem of Judea,²² minister in Galilee,²³ be rejected by the Jewish leaders,²⁴ ride into Jerusalem on a donkey,²⁵ be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver,²⁶ he would silently go to his unjust execution,²⁷ and rise again.²⁸ The odds of any person fulfilling even a handful of these prophecies, much less ALL of them, far exceeds the total number of people who have ever lived on earth multiple times over. All of these evidences point to only ONE individual being the chosen Christ of God: Jesus of Nazareth.

What one does with that information will be the subject of our next devotion when we look at the word "faith."



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1.) Christian author and apologist, C.S. Lewis once wrote that "Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord." Why is it impossible to be "neutral" in one's opinion about Jesus' claims of his identity?
- 2.) Imagine you are telling a new friend about Jesus, who had never been taught about him before. What details from his life might you include? (cf. the Apostles' Creed for additional guidance)



PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, you alone are the Christ, the promised one from God, sent to rescue me and all people from sin, death, and the devil. Help me to treasure how truly extraordinary you are and fully deserving of all my worship, praise, and obedience now and forevermore. Amen.

¹¹ John 4:26.

¹² Matthew 26:63-64.

¹³ John 1:14; 1 John 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:16; Luke 1:1-4.

¹⁴ Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 6:13; 13:4.

¹⁵ Matthew 2:11.

¹⁶ Matthew 14:33.

¹⁷ Matthew 16:16

¹⁸ Matthew 28:9.

¹⁹ John 20:28.

²⁰ Exodus 20:1-5.

²¹ Isaiah 7:14.

²² Micah 5:2.

²³ Isaiah 9:1-7.

²⁴ Psalm 118:22-23.

²⁵ Zechariah 9:9.

²⁶ Zechariah 11:13.

²⁷ Isaiah 53:7-9.

²⁸ Isaiah 53:11; Psalm 16:9-11.