

PART 7: JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is arguably the most dominant figure in all history. More books have been written about Him than any other historical person on record, and His name is spoken everyday in prayers, cries for help, swears and even curses. His prominence in the history of western civilization over the last 2,000 years cannot be overstated. As the famous British author H.G. Wells once said: "I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history."

But just who was (and is) Jesus?

This very question was posed by Jesus Himself to His disciples when He asked them: *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* So they said, *"Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* He said to them, *"But who do you say that I am?"* (Matt 16:13-15)

And again He asked the same question to the Pharisees: *"What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"* (Matt 22:41)

There are those who consider Him a mere political figure. Mikhail Gorbachev, once head of the former Soviet Socialistic Republic of Russia, said: “Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind.”

Desiderius Erasmus, a 15th century Dutch Humanist and contemporary of Martin Luther, considered Him the great redeemer of mankind saying: “By a Carpenter mankind was made, and only by that Carpenter can mankind be remade.” But the late singer and former member of the Beatles, John Lennon, did not think much of Jesus or His moment, “Christianity will go” he said. “It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue with that; I’m right and I will be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first, rock and roll or Christianity.” But in contrast to the skeptics, there was His disciple Thomas who fell at His feet declaring: “*My Lord and My God*” (*John 20:28*).

In order to answer the question of the identity and mission of Jesus Christians have relied on the testimony of the Gospels, which they consider to be based on the eyewitness accounts of those who knew Him personally.

His Apostles, John and Peter wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and

bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. (1 John 1:1-2)

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

The authors of the Gospels attest to the uniqueness of Jesus, that He was unlike any other human they had met or unlike any other human being recorded in history. The most important and startling thing we are faced with, when we read the accounts of His life, is His claim, and the claim of those who knew Him, concerning His deity.

Jesus said He was the Son of God, equal to God the Father, who has existed from eternity. Jesus spoke of His deity when he told the Jews: *I and My Father are one. (John 10:30)*

It is important to note that in this statement Jesus does not simply claim to be just a deity, or that He and Yahweh were separate deities along side of each other, but that they were one and the same. Here Jesus reminds us of the Trinitarian nature of God. The basic confession of Judaism is that God is one (Deut. 6:4) and Jesus does not deny it, but He does claim to be one with the God who is one.

The Jews whom Jesus was speaking to that day understood this as much because it says that: *Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."* (John 10:31-33)

Paul, a former Pharisee, acknowledged the same when he wrote of Jesus saying: *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;* (Col 2:9)

But probably the most explicit claim of Christ being one with Yahweh comes from the Apostle John: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* (John 1:1)

The word John uses here when describing Jesus as the "Word" in Greek is "logos" which according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon means "a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea;".

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary says that John's use of "logos" conveys: "*most expressively the mission of Jesus as the revealer of the Godhead.*" In other words, if you want to know what the one true God, Yahweh, is like, then look to Jesus.

In his book Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem writes that John: “does indicate that among the members of the Trinity it is especially God the Son who in his person as well as in his words has the role of communicating the character of God to us and of expressing the will of God for us.”

But the Apostles did more than simply claim deity for Jesus. They made the claim evident in the legacy of His life—His conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary by a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary...But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ...Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God...For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:26-37)

There are many stories in pagan literature of human beings being impregnated by one of the gods with the ensuing offspring being sort of demi-gods (Achilles is a famous example from ancient Greek literature). What stands out in the Gospel account is how much trouble the Apostles took (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to distinguish the facts of Jesus conception from the old myths. Jesus was not conceived in the wake of Yahweh taking bodily form and having sex with Mary (this was how the story would typically go in pagan literature) but by impregnating her in some supernatural way without any sexual intercourse at all. This is why the language is so precise here—the Holy Spirit is said to have overshadowed Mary and thereby supernaturally implanted the Holy seed within her. So here is a story of God taking on real human flesh but without the participation of a human male. Jesus receives His flesh from Mary, so He is fully human. But He was never created, for He has always existed along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In some tremendous, glorious way, the Holy Spirit put the second person of the Trinity into the womb of Mary. So Jesus is at one in the same time fully God and fully human. No pagan author ever thought of that one! It is too wonderful to come from the mind of anyone but God Himself!

Because He was God the Son, Jesus was born sinless. That is, He was and is the only human being to ever live who unceasingly loved God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. He is the only human being who ever pleased the Father in all things. However, it is precisely because Jesus was fully human, as

well as fully God, that His obedience was not always easy to achieve. Jesus was tempted and the temptations were real to Him. Moreover, He had to endure real human agony on the cross. Because He suffered as a real human being, His suffering can be an example to us.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; (1 Peter 2:21-22)

He was not, as some non-believers have claimed, a trickster who gave the false impression of being able to perform supernatural events. Jesus was no mere magician. He performed amazing miracles, supernatural events that benefited those He encountered such as healing the sick, the lame and the blind, and even raising the dead.

...and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. (Matt 4:24)

He cast out demons who testified to His authority and ultimate rule over them.

When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly

fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt 8:28-29)

He spoke of Himself as being the one who could satisfy the deepest spiritual longings of people.

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

He raised the dead.

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

(John 11:41-44)

And He Himself was also raised from the dead with a glorified body, giving to us evidence of His deity, assurance of our salvation, and an idea of what we will be like in the coming age.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken 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. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. (John 2:19-22)

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor 15:17-21).

And most important, He forgave people of their sins, which the Jews understood as an act that only God could do.

Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the

roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:3-7)

While the Jewish scribes were perfectly correct in their belief that God alone could forgive sins, their mistake was in not realizing that Jesus was God.

Not only did Jesus claim to be God, but He also claimed to be the only way to salvation and eternal life.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

And yet, while exhibiting so many qualities that could only be possessed by God, Jesus also showed Himself to be human with human needs and limitations. He experienced natural birth like every other human being (even though His conception was supernatural, an event brought about by the Holy Spirit), and while on this earth He went through the normal needs of thirst, hunger and weariness, was tempted, and ultimately died at the hands of evil men when crucified.

How do we explain this fact of a being who is fully (not partially) human and at the same time fully (not partially) God? As with other mysteries of the Bible (“mysteries” in the sense that they are too wonderful for human beings to fully understand) we are not given a full explanation. However, we can say with some certainty that in the act of incarnation Jesus took on human flesh and, in some wondrous way, by a voluntary act, suspended His right to exercise His divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, became a servant and submitted Himself to the cross in order to obtain salvation for His people.

Paul, in describing this wondrous event in simple terms wrote: *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil 2:6-9)*

As Bruce Milan writes: “Here we arrive at the staggering truth which lies at the heart of the Christian religion, that Jesus Christ while truly human was also true God. This is one of Christianity’s distinctivenesses. Jews and Muslims also acknowledge one supreme God, and revere the patriarchs and prophets of the OT, but in claims made for Jesus Christianity stands alone.” (Know the Truth).

Why did Jesus come to us as God-Man and what was His mission?

We know that His main desire and mission was to do that which the Father wanted Him to do. For He says: *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38)*

But what was that will of the Father?

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

Jesus' very name and the titles that go with His name give us further clues concerning His mission. Look at the way Paul greets the Christians at Rome. He says: *To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 1:7)*

Let's unpack that title and name: Lord Jesus Christ. In biblical times it was often considered that a person's name said something about them and revealed something about their character and His personal name was "Jesus".

Easton's Bible Dictionary says that the name Jesus is: "the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which was originally Hoshea (Num 13:8,16), but changed by Moses into Jehoshua (Num 13:16; 1 Chron 7:27), or Joshua. After the Exile it

assumed the form Jeshua, whence the Greek form Jesus. It was given to our Lord to denote the object of his mission, to save.” (Matt 1:21).

But His titles were Lord and Christ.

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, the Greek word for “Lord” is “*kuros*” which is “properly an adjective, signifying “having power” or “authority,” is used as a noun, variously translated in the NT, “‘Lord,’ ‘master,’ ‘Master,’ ‘owner.’”

The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament writes that the Greek word Lord is also the “equivalent for the Old Testament Hebrew, “Jehovah.”

In fact, when the translators of the Greek translators of the Old Testament (their version is known as the Septuagint, was written around 250 B.C., and is the version most quoted by the authors of the New Testament) looked for a word that they could use for the Hebrew word Jehovah used they chose the word “*kuros*.”

The Lordship of Jesus is something that cannot be overemphasized. God, and God alone, has the right to be called Lord. Jesus is called Lord because He is one with God. He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Jesus has God the Father’s power and authority and He is master of all that exists because all that exists came to be through Him.

Paul points to this fact when he writes: *For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.* (Rom 14:9).

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, ad we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. (1 Cor 8:5-6)

In other words, Jesus is not just one of many gods as the polytheism His day taught. No! He is Lord of all, the only Lord of life, for time and eternity.

It is His Lordship that will be contested in the final cosmic battle between the armies of the Kingdom of righteousness and the armies of the Kingdom of spiritual darkness.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." (Rev 17:14)

And it is His Lordship that will finally be acknowledged by the whole world in the last Day of Judgment.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Phil 2:9-11)

The acceptance of His Lordship is one of the keys to our salvation:

...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9)

Paul in his letter to the Romans, emphasized this personal Lordship of Jesus over his own life when, in his greetings to the church at Roman, he addressed himself as: *a bondservant of Jesus Christ, (Rom 1:1)*

The Greek word for “bondservant” is the word “doulos” which according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words means "to bind," "a slave," originally the lowest term in the scale of servitude, came also to mean "one who gives himself up to the will of another,"

Paul, would go on to write that it in being a bondservant to the Lord Jesus which brings liberation from being a bondservant to sin and spiritual death

But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. (Rom 6:17)

Another title Paul uses for Jesus is Christ.

According to the Easton's Bible Dictionary the title Christ means “anointed”, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word rendered "Messiah" (q.v.), the official title of our Lord, occurring five hundred and fourteen times in the New Testament. It denotes that he was anointed or consecrated to His great redemptive work as Prophet, Priest, and King of His people”

Smith's Bible Dictionary states that this term “refers to the expected Prince of the chosen people who was to complete God's purposes for them and to redeem them”

Jesus claimed this Messianic anointing for Himself when in Luke 4:16-21 it says that: *So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:*

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

*Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."*

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The nation of Israel looked for a coming Messiah to deliver them from their enemies and establish the long awaited Kingdom, but in God's mind, the mission of Jesus was more than just the redemption of the Nation of Israel from its enemies. It was in truth, the redeeming of all His chosen people now held captive in the Kingdom of Darkness by sin and its power.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)"

Paul talks about this deliverance when he wrote:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

(Col 1:9-14)

Finally, and most important of all, His name and His titles signify what He came to do for us personally in the life He led, in the death He suffered, and in the burial and resurrection He experienced for all that believe on Him.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:1-4)

And what did this achieve for us? The ability to be adopted into God's own family, to have eternal fellowship with all the other children God has adopted since the time of Adam and Eve, and, most wonderful of all, to have eternal and unbroken fellowship with the eternal Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus achieved for us! Praise be to Him forever and ever!