

The Doctrine of Christ

Lesson 5

His Ministry and Death

Early Christians were not averse to ascribing both humanity and deity to Jesus of Nazareth. Still, while concerned about who Jesus was (Matt. 16:13–17), they showed even greater interest in His mission and work. An increasingly clearer grasp of who He had helped them to understand better what His unique person enabled Him to do for them.

A careful reading of the NT shows that its writers were convinced that there was a purpose to Jesus' coming. He did not simply "appear," nor was He merely a gifted Galilean with special insights in the ways of God. He was "sent" by the Father, a statement that appears some 40 times in John's Gospel alone. The Lord Himself frequently indicated consciousness of being commissioned to His task by God. Jesus felt that there was a decree for Him to execute. Luke brings this out quite forcefully by using the Greek verbal form *dei* ("must" or "it is necessary") some 18 times (Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 24:44; etc.). Rather than considering Himself as merely one among many other divine messengers, Jesus knew Himself to be the Messenger-Son (Mark 12:6, 7). As the Father had set Him apart, sent Him into the world (John 10:36), and given Him authority (John 8:42; Matt. 9:6), it was not for Him to do His own will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). Several purposes of His work and mission are more particularly underlined in the Scriptures.

Reasons for the Coming of Christ the first time.

1. To Confirm God's Promises

a. What was the earliest promise of His coming in scripture? Gen 3:15 _____

Call the Protoevangelium

b. What was prophesied in Isa. 7:14; 9:6 _____

The Word became human to confirm the promises made by God to the fathers, beginning with the Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 and continuing throughout the OT (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2). Two lines of predictions concerned the coming of the Son: He was to come as Saviour from sin as prefigured in the sacrifices of the OT (Gen. 4:3, 4; Lev. 1:3–9; 17:11) and announced by the prophets (Isa. 52:13, 14; 53:3–6; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 13:1, 7), and as King of His kingdom (Gen. 49:9, 10; Ps. 2; Jer. 23:5, 6).

2. To Establish the Kingdom of God

a. What did Jesus say in Matt. 4:17 _____

b. What does He say about the requirements of His Kingdom? Matt. 7:21 _____

It was imperative for Jesus to ensure the recognition of the sovereignty of God and the establishment of His kingdom on earth (Matt. 4:17; Luke 19:11–27). In the Synoptic Gospels the central theme of Jesus’ preaching, the kingdom of God, was announced as something that would appear in the future and yet was a reality already present, manifested in His own person and ministry (Matt. 12:28). The kingdom was where He was. The secret of being part of it, present or future, lay in belonging to Him (Matt. 7:23; 25:41).

3. To Impart the Knowledge of God

a. What was Jesus’ real intend for man to know? John 17:3 _____

b. Who was Jesus trying to revel to man? Luke 10:22 _____

Inasmuch as knowledge of God is essential to eternal life, it was part of the mission of Christ to impart this knowledge (John 17:3). In the OT God was revealed as Creator and Ruler (for instance, Ps. 33:6; Isa. 40:12–17; 45:18; Jer. 10:12), though not infrequently as the Father of the chosen people (such as Deut. 32:6; Isa. 22:21; 63:16; Mal. 1:6). Jesus helped sinners think of God with trust and reverence, with love as well as with awe, as a Father who knows what things we need before we ask Him and who withholds no good things from His children. This revelation could be made only by the Son (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22), through His deeds even more than through His teaching, because it was enclosed in Him (John 14:7–10), an incarnate revelation that appeals to the love of the heart and calls for the surrender of the will.

4. To Be the Servant of God

a. How did Jesus identify himself with people? Luke 22:27 _____

c. What was Jesus’ modus operandi? Matt. 28:20 _____

The servant idea plays an important role in the NT understanding of the work and mission of Jesus. He Himself insisted that He had come “not to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). The idea of the servant of God comes directly from four Isianic songs known as the servant songs (Isa. 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). Though it has been debated whether the servant in these songs is an individual or refers to Israel collectively, the task of the servant in these passages is more intelligible if an individual is in mind. He is God’s anointed (Isa. 42:1), called to establish justice on earth (verses 1, 3, 4), extend a ministry

to Gentiles (verses 1, 4; Isa. 50:4) as well as to Israel (Isa. 49:5, 6a), be God's agent in worldwide salvation (verses 1–6), yet fulfill his task by voluntarily submitting himself to a substitutionary death (Isa. 53:4–6, 8, 10–12).

In a strongly worded fulfillment formula, Jesus directly quoted Isaiah 53:12, attesting His consciousness that the OT servant figure was being fulfilled in Him (Luke 22:37). Matthew, likewise, in the context of Jesus' healing ministry, cites Isaiah 53:4 as fulfilled in Jesus (Matt. 8:17). So does Luke when recording Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, specifically apply to Jesus a direct quotation from Isaiah 53:7, 8 (Acts 8:32, 33). In Peter's first Epistle several direct allusions to the suffering Servant show that the apostle must have had the Isaiah passage in mind (1 Peter 2:22 = Isa. 53:9; 1 Peter 2:24a = Isa. 53:12; 1 Peter 2:24b = Isa. 53:5; 1 Peter 2:25 = Isa. 53:6). As part of His mission, the Word who was in nature very God (Phil. 2:6) took the very nature of a servant (verse 7) in order that the divine life be manifested to humans in servant form (verses 5–7). He became obedient, even unto death, to reveal true humanity and present to the Father the perfect obedience due from humanity.

1. To Leave an Example

a. What was Jesus always showing His disciples? John 13:15 _____

b. What did the apostle Peter say about Christ and His example to us? 1Peter 2:21 _____

Jesus conceived of His mission as one of obedience to the Father's will. In picturesque language He claimed that His food was to do God's will (John 4:34) and clearly stated that He had not come down from heaven to do His own will "but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:39; cf. 5:30). Unlike the first Adam the Second Adam abode in His Father's love (John 15:10; cf. 14:31), was eager to please Him (John 8:29) and to accomplish the work of Him who sent Him (John 4:34). This involved a constant conflict with evil, for "he learned obedience through what he suffered," and was "made perfect" (Heb. 5:8, 9) through suffering (Heb. 2:10; cf. Matt. 26:39–45; Luke 22:42–46).

This truth is used to support an unrelenting appeal to the exemplary nature of Christ's life and ministry. Called to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29), Christians are exhorted to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14; cf. Col. 3:10), to be imitators of Christ (1 Thess. 1:6), to abide in Christ and walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), to "walk in love," after the pattern Christ gave us (Eph. 5:2; cf. 1 Peter 3:8, 9). In a classic case in point, when addressing slaves and exhorting them to be submissive to their masters, even when suffering unjustly, Peter explains, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

2. To Heal the Weak and Sick

a. What was Jesus' objective when he ministered to the sick? Matt 10:8 _____

b. How effective was Jesus? Luke 4:40 _____

Jesus came to heal. Far from manifesting contempt toward the weak and the sick, He showed that His mission and work were closely bound up with the frail and feeble of body and spirit. He healed many (Matt. 4:23). “Wherever he came, in villages, cities, and country, they laid the sick in the market places” (Mark 6:56; cf. Luke 4:40). “Great multitudes gathered to hear [Jesus] and to be healed of their infirmities” (Luke 5:15), “and the power of the Lord was with him to heal” (verse 17). This clearly was part of His mission. The twelve whom Jesus sent out were charged to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and to “heal, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Matt. 10:5–8; cf. Luke 10:8, 9).

Jesus viewed the presence of illness as a result of the Fall. Since His mission was to destroy the works of the devil, He made every effort to heal the sick and diseased. Yet His miracles of healing were more than spectacular wonders. Commenting on His healing activities in Capernaum, Matthew specifies that Jesus’ healing ministry was the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Isaiah concerning the mission and work of the divinely appointed Servant: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4). Though Matthew makes no reference to an atoning element, he sees a clear connection between the Servant’s work and human sickness in Jesus’ healing ministry. His healing activities were part of the plan of God and of the work of Christ. They showed that the One who was to come in due time was now among them. They established the supernatural basis of the unique divine self-revelation that accompanied them.

3. To Make Sin Exceedingly Sinful

a. Which was harder for Jesus to deal with the disease or the sin? Luke 5:16 – 26 _____

Included in Christ’s gracious task was a revelation of the true moral condition of humanity. To produce in human beings a consciousness of guilt, repentance, faith, hope, and love was indispensable to His work. His conduct and His teaching made sin exceedingly sinful. His presence and ministry actually produced a sense of sin (Luke 5:8; 7:36–50). He was the very embodiment of the gospel. While it condemned sin, it invited the sinner to receive forgiveness and enter into union with the victorious One who from the first had overcome the world (Matt. 4:1–11; John 16:33). Corrupted sinners eventually rejected and killed Him, thereby further disclosing the depth of human guilt and need.

4. To Be a Faithful High Priest

a. What is the beauty about the High Priest of Jesus? Heb 4:15 _____

b. Who stands before the Father in our behalf? 1 Tim 2:5 _____

Christ came to be qualified to act as a faithful high priest. He became flesh to enter into every human experience, apart from sin, that He might be fit as high priest (Heb. 2:17, 18). Christ's work reappropriated the threefold ministry of the high priest of OT times: to present annually the atoning sacrifice for the sanctuary and the whole congregation, to intercede for the faithful, and to bless the people (Lev. 4:16–21; 16:1–28).

5. To Save Sinners Through His Death

a. What the mission of Christ in 1 John 3:8? _____

b. What does Paul say about Christ's mission to earth? 1 Tim. 1:15 _____

The mission of Christ involved His death. He came “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8) and “to take away sins” (verse 5), thus delivering all those who were living as slaves of the devil (Heb. 2:14, 15). As Paul wrote to Timothy, “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). This, however, could be accomplished only “through death,” as the Hebrews statement stipulates (1 Tim. 2:14). He might have come to judge the world, but the joyful cry is that He came specifically to save sinners. The necessity of the Incarnation and the purpose of Christ's mission are God's response to sin. A self-giving death as a sacrifice for sin was a chief part of His work.