

We Believe in Jesus

Lesson 2

The Christ

Forum



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Lesson Two: The Christ

Forum

With

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Question 1:

How can we be certain that Jesus was a real, historical person?

The central claim of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, the Son of David that inherited the throne of Israel, and that will reign forever and ever. But in order for this claim to be taken seriously, it's critical for Jesus to be a real person. Is he? How do we know the biblical writers didn't just invent him? How can we be certain that Jesus was a real, historical person?

Dr. Steve Cowan

The question sometimes gets asked whether Jesus was a real historical person. And yet, there are very, very few scholars who would doubt that Jesus was a real historical person. The vast majority of Bible scholars, even the most liberal of scholars, will grant that there really was a person named Jesus of Nazareth who lived and taught in and around Galilee and Jerusalem in the first century A.D. and who was crucified by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. And the reason why the vast majority of scholars are convinced of this is that the evidence for it is very, very strong. First of all, we have the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of which tell the story of Jesus, and which are at least semi-independent of each other. The Synoptics are interesting in that they have important relationship to each other—Matthew and Luke probably borrowed from Mark some of their material—but the Synoptic Gospels tell the story about Jesus. Luke himself begins his gospel by telling us that he wants to describe the history of what really happened about Jesus and what happened to him and through him. Then we have John's gospel, which everyone admits is independent. Paul talks about Jesus as a historical figure. So we have all of these divergent voices in the New Testament itself telling us about Jesus as a historical person.

But beyond that, we even have extra-biblical sources that mention Jesus as a historical person. We have, for example, the Roman historian Tacitus who speaks of Jesus as a person who lived in Galilee and was crucified by Pontius Pilate and who had a large following that believed he was raised from the dead. Tacitus doesn't believe that, but he definitely believes Jesus was a real person who had a following that believed that. We have Josephus the Jewish historian who lived in the 1st century and would have been a late contemporary of Jesus and his apostles, maybe a young man during that time, anyway. And Josephus talks about this person called Jesus of Nazareth who preached that he was the Messiah who had a following that believed he was the Messiah, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and who his disciples believed had risen from the dead. So we have all of these divergent voices testifying to the fact that Jesus was a real historical person. And even beyond that, we can say that it's impossible to explain the origin of Christianity as a movement if there really never was any such person as Jesus.

Dr. Mark Struass

Occasionally someone will come along and say, "Jesus was just a myth; he never existed." To me, the claim is historically ludicrous based on the evidence. It's something like saying, "We don't think Abraham Lincoln was a real person or George Washington was a real person." It seems to me the evidence for the reality of Jesus, as a person, is just absolutely overwhelming. I mean we have primary source, first-hand references to Jesus. The apostle Paul, for example, Paul refers to the brothers of Jesus whom he knows, and the direct associates of Jesus whom he knows. So the idea that Jesus could have been a myth created, when we've got, actually, primary source, first-hand documentation of who he is, that's just stretching the bounds of the imagination.

Question 2:

How do we know the biblical portrait of Jesus is accurate?

Evangelical believers accept that Scripture is the inspired, truthful Word of God. And we embrace its teaching that Jesus is the Christ. But there are plenty of skeptics in the world that challenge these beliefs, and their perspectives sometimes cause Christians to doubt. So, it's important for us to be able to answer questions, like how do we know the biblical portrait of Jesus is accurate?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Well, if you're asking the question about the biblical portrait of Jesus, one of the things actually, surprisingly enough, that really gives us reason enough to believe that it's accurate is there are a lot of things predicated to Jesus, or said about Jesus, or even said by Jesus that a later pious group of Christians is unlikely to make up. It's unlikely, for example that the gospel writers would have made up the idea of a virginal conception because it immediately suggests that Jesus was illegitimate to

those who are skeptical. It's unlikely that the gospel writers would make up the idea that the first to see Jesus on Easter morning were women and that they were the first witnesses of the risen Jesus. It is unlikely that they would make up a testimony that when a young man approaches Jesus and says, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Jesus' response is, "Why do you call me good? There is nobody good, but God alone." Now, this is suggesting, possibly would suggest to the skeptical, that Jesus is neither good nor God? It's this offensive odd stuff that later pious Christians were very unlikely to have made up. So this gives us a reasonable degree of certainty that we're dealing with an honest and authentic portrait of Jesus.

Question 3:

Why did the Messiah have to be a descendant of King David?

One of the claims the New Testament makes about Jesus is that he descended from David, Israel's second king, who lived about a thousand years before Jesus was born. This ancestry is important because only a descendant of David could be the promised Messiah. But why? Why did the Messiah have to be a descendant of King David?

Dr. Frank Barker

Well, the Messiah had to be a descendant of David because Old Testament prophets indicated that. For instance, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, it says that "when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name." David had wanted to build a house for God's name, and he said, "No, your descendant will do that." Well, actually that was talking initially about Solomon who would build the temple, but ultimately was talking about the Lord Jesus Christ who would build the true temple, which is made of living stones, true believers. And Jesus dwells by his Spirit in those true believers. And so the temple symbolized the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which would be indwelt by his Spirit. And it goes on to say here, it says, "Your throne should be established forever." So it wasn't just talking about Solomon and the house he would build, but about Jesus Christ who would be a descendant of David's and would build the real temple in that way.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah have to be a descendant of David? The answer to that is rooted in God's plan in terms of what he has promised. Ultimately, he has to be human — the last Adam. The New Testament picks that up. But in the plan of God, humanity comes through a specific family, a specific nation, a specific tribe. Particularly what I'm thinking of there is Abraham's family, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, and particularly David's line. That is where we have in terms of the Davidic covenant. 2 Samuel 7 makes promises to David as the representative of

Israel, that it's through his offspring, through his lineage, that God's rule will come to this world. The Davidic king is presented as the one who will fulfill ultimately the Adamic role of ruling over the nations, carrying out the creation mandate that was given to each one of us. So, the Messiah, in order to fulfill God's plan, has to be a descendant of David, has to fulfill God's promises through the Davidic covenant to the nation of Israel, ultimately, in terms of God's promise, all the way back to Genesis 3:15.

Dr. John McKinley

The Messiah had to be an heir in David's line, somebody in his lineage, because that's how God set it up. All the promises throughout the Old Testament about salvation to come were promised to David and according to what your son David is going to do. Somebody, a distant descendant, and this is repeated and developed all the way through. So, because God set it up that way, the only way it could be fulfilled was to have somebody who is in David's line — whether lineage, being born that way, or being adopted into it and designated as the heir. If God had promised to do it another way then there would be no need for the Davidic line, but because he had articulated it already, it's David's line, someone like David, a man after God's own heart, then that's the way he's going to play it out.

Dr. Willie Wells

In order for the Jews to be able to accept Jesus as the king, he had to line up with the parameters of the Old Testament. And the Old Testament, Jesus satisfied every bit of it. That people then were under the Law, and the Law had parameters set that, you know, he had to be a Jew for this. And Jesus satisfied all of that. He came so that the Law would be fulfilled. People said that “the heathen” was not the Son of God, but he came, he fulfilled every bit of the Law. There was nothing that the Law had already actuated out that he did not fulfill. And so, he is the only one that can put the seal, he's the only one that can break the seal because of his position coming down through the lineage of David. Now this is very interesting. Why did God choose such a line as that? It wasn't a perfect line, but it was the line that God chose. And when we think about the sovereignty of God, you know, God can use anybody, and he chose to use the frailness of mankind to bring himself down through. And so, when we think about the Davidic position, not only did he satisfy the Jewish principles of being a Jew, but he also takes on the title of the kingship. And so, one day we're going to see him not only just the earthly king, but we're going to see him as the heavenly king that he is. In Jesus, we'll see that he has satisfied every part, every portion, every particular whim that was given out. Everything that God had set out and placed into action, Jesus satisfied.

Question 4:

In reference to the hypostatic union, what do the terms “person” and “nature” mean?

Jesus isn't just the human descendant of David. He's also God. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate by Mary, so that Jesus was and still is both fully God and fully human. Theologians refer to the union of God and humanity in Jesus as the "hypostatic union." The technical definition of the hypostatic union is that Jesus is one person — the second person of the Trinity — and that he has two distinct natures — a divine nature and a human nature. But this definition itself requires some explanation. For example, in reference to the hypostatic union, what do the terms "person" and "nature" mean?

Dr. James D. Smith III

The nature is really the stuff which comprises something. We call it, in terms of human life, human nature; it's the DNA of what we're about as humanity. So, to use an analogy, all of which fall short at some spot, but to use analogy, my wife and I have three children. They have the same DNA—that's their nature as human beings — but then they are quite diversified as persons. There is an individuation, there are accents, there are particular nuances that are part of that quality. And that's an element, not with a scientific terminology, but that's some of what the early church saw in the personhood of God.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

The term hypostatic union itself often sounds confusing, and then when you hear it explained that we're talking about divine nature of the second person of the Trinity united with a full and complete human nature, sinless human nature, but full and complete: body, soul, mind, the whole works in one person. That concept in itself, as well as the term, is amazing. Especially in the light of the fact that Scripture so often emphasizes in the Old Testament that we should not confuse God and man. Yes, man is made in God's image and God's likeness, but we shouldn't confuse the Creator and the creature. And here in the New Testament we find this very clear announcement that in Jesus Christ we meet one who is obviously fully human, exhausted to the point of sleep in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and at the same time fully God, so that when roused from that sleep, as the Creator of the universe, he ushers a word, "silence," and the whole storm stops in obedience to its Creator. So there's a text right there that puts the hypostatic union right before us and demands that we, if we hear the Word of God, that we accept it. And of course we could add many texts that talk about the humanity of Jesus, the deity of Jesus, the oneness of his person.

What I think is so intriguing is the way the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes how crucial it is that the mediator between God and man, the great High Priest, be fully God and fully man. That he, as Hebrews 1 says, is the Creator who is the same while all of creation may change. And that theme that the writer starts with from Psalm 102 — that the Creator is the same, the Son is the same through all eternity — he picks up at the end through Hebrews 13: "He's the same yesterday, today, and forever." He's eternally God, the Creator who sustains all things by the word of his power. He's fully God. And then Hebrews says, for our sake because we need a high priest who is fully human, he takes to himself flesh and blood just as we have. He is our brother.

He can intercede for us from the standpoint of one who shares our human nature, who has endured every trial and temptation with absolute obedience, and who knows what it's like to undergo human testing. So we need a human high priest, a brother. We also need a divine High Priest who lives forever to intercede for us. And we have that in the one person of Jesus Christ. So Scripture reveals that he is God and man in one person, and particularly I would say in the book of Hebrews, Scripture tells us precisely why we need this mediator that God has provided. The eternal Son who has become our brother to intercede for us, to give his life for us as the atonement for our sins. And that, to me, is really the substance of what we need to understand about the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one person of Christ and why it is so important for our faith.

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

When we think about the subject of the person within the hypostatic union of Christ, we really are referring to who Christ is in his essence. Nature, Christ having a human and divine nature, deals with the composition, if we can use that term, of who Christ is. But the person deals with his ontology, it deals with his being, it deals with him as being one. And so when Christ acted, he acted both in his human and his divine nature. And so his work is a work of one who is 100% human and 100% divine because he is one person. The question of what is the nature or the natures of Christ in the hypostatic union is one of the more difficult questions in theology, and the reason for this is we're seeking to understand a mystery. The nature has to do with Christ's humanity and his deity, and he had both a human nature and a divine nature. And what is interesting in the way the Scripture presents that is that these are not blends; he is fully human, and he is fully divine, and they do not come together in a confused manner, but Christ at the same time was both human and divine.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We've spoken about the hypostatic union in terms of the necessity of two natures coming together. One of the questions that the early church had to deal with, though, in trying to figure out the mystery of how these two natures came together, was the relative importance of these natures and whether one dominated the other, or whether both could remain intact, as it were. And some gave an answer that said, well, the deity comes into the mind and just the rational principle of man is where deity came and replaced the human mind. But as the church thought about that they said, well, if the human doesn't have a mind, that's the most important of what it means to be human, and so we can't say that the deity somehow replaces the rational principle. Then there are others who said, the deity is so powerful that it absorbs the human nature, and it's just like a drop of water being put into the ocean. The human nature loses its identity because of its identification with the deity. So after the incarnation, there's only one nature. But then there are others who said, no, you have to have both natures there. And so, what you have is the deity coming alongside and the human person being in perfect conformity of the will of the divine person, but you actually have a human person and a divine person. This is called Nestorianism. It's a kind of adoptionism. The problem with all of these was, on the one hand, it did not have both natures, but it destroyed the integrity of the person. Nestorianism destroyed the

singularity of the person. If you don't have a single person who is our Redeemer, then we cannot have redemption because this single person has to do all things that are necessary both toward God and toward man. And the wisdom of God — this is the mystery of the incarnation — that there are these two natures in which you have a human will, a divine will, human affections, divine affections, human knowledge, and human ignorance along with divine omniscience all dwelling in this single person. And there are many things about Scripture that we come to understand when we realize that there are times in which Jesus is speaking, peculiarly out of his role as the Christ, in his humanity, in obedience to, and submissive to, the Father. There are some times he is acting singularly in his deity. "I tell you, I forgive your sins" — who can forgive sins, but God alone? But both of these are done by this one person, this one face. And so, again, for redemption there has to be the unity of the person, the singularity of this person in which we have both God and man.

Question 5:

Why was it important for Christ to be sinless?

Because God can't sin, and because Jesus is God incarnate, Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life before dying on the cross. And theologians have often pointed out that Jesus' sinlessness was critical to his work as Christ. Why was it important for Christ to be sinless?

Dr. John McKinley

It was important for Jesus to be sinless because he functions as a substitute sacrifice in our place. If he had any sin, he wouldn't be acceptable as a sacrifice to be punished in our place, to take away our sin. This follows the Old Testament pattern that sacrifices in the form of animals had to be in some sense, acceptable because they were pure; they were innocent. So being all white was a sign that they were unstained and unblemished. So, had Jesus ever sinned, he wouldn't be able to stand in. He would've needed somebody else to stand in for him. But because he never sinned, he's able then to be bearing our sin as a substitute and then punished for it and completely remove it from us. Everything has been put on to him, and that's the only way he can bear our sin.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

Suppose Jesus had sinned just one sin. Well, that's okay, just one sin? Anybody can overcome one sin, but would that have made him a perfect sacrifice? No. So, if you bring a lamb that is sort of the runt of the flock or maybe is not one that you want to shear because there's something about the wool that you don't like, and so you'll give this one as a sacrifice, is that honoring to the type that God is setting forth of what he is requiring of his own Son? He is requiring perfect obedience. He is requiring obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. He cannot even waffle right toward the end and back out and say, okay I've gone far enough, but this I can't take. He

can't do that. He's got to go all the way. And that's what he did.

Rev. Jim Maples

It was necessary for Jesus to be sinless because Christ worked to carry out his messianic task as Messiah, as Savior, as the last Adam. And to effect the salvation of those he came to save directly depended upon his personal obedience to God's law. We speak of Christ's active obedience, that is, all the things that Christ did to observe the Law of God and to keep it perfectly. If Christ had not been sinless, his human nature would have been damaged just as ours is. He would have been unable to make atonement for his own self much less anyone else. Playing off that, if Christ had only suffered the penalty for our sin, we would have been in the same state that we were as Adam before the Fall. We still would not have had any holiness, righteousness, obedience to the law. So Christ's perfect obedience which, this double imputation that took place at the cross, our sins were imputed to Christ, but his righteousness, his obedience, his holiness, was credited to our account. So it was very important that Christ be sinless, and his perfect obedience actually merits for his elect their adoption as the sons of God and eternal life.

Question 6:

How could Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have been tempted to sin?

Jesus was fully God, and God can't be tempted to sin. But the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus experienced true temptation. For example, prior to beginning his public ministry, he spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil. Jesus didn't give in to these temptations. He didn't even respond with a sinful thought or desire. But he was still genuinely tempted. How could that have happened? How could Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have been tempted to sin?

Dr. John McKinley

Jesus can be tempted even though he is God — even though God can't be tempted because God can't be deceived by anything — because he also truly a man. So there are certain things he can experience and do as God that he can't as man, and certain things he can do and experience as a man that he can't do as God. So, as a man, he has real needs, he has a finite mind, he has vulnerability to pain, he can be threatened and he can have needs for food or the desire to escape suffering. So he's living two lives simultaneously and he's playing by the rules of both lives in their game, so to speak. So as God, yeah, he's totally exempt, he cannot be touched by temptation, and it has no pull on him whatsoever. But in his human life, when he's on earth, he is living truly in our kind of existence. And in that existence he feels hungry when Satan says, "turn these stones into bread," he actually has something, part of his human nature that is pulling at him with a desire to want to do that. When he's in Gethsemane and he is faced with the prospect of going to drink the cup of God's wrath, as a creature he is feeling desires, needs, fear that he has as a man, but he

doesn't have as God. And so in that framework, yeah, he wants to flee the cross. He's got a human will of wanting to run away, but he's able to surmount temptation as a man because he is relying on God's help, he is resting on God's word, and he is being a man led, empowered, strengthened, by God, the same way all of us are able to. And so it's a somewhat paradoxical experience, but it's kind of the same situation of God can't die, but as a man he can die. God can't be born, but as a man he can be born. So it's part of that framework in what's possible for him as a man.

Question 7:

Why is it helpful for Christians to know that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin?

Because Jesus was not just God but was also a human being, he could be tempted. And although he never gave in to sin, he felt his temptation just as intensely as we do. And the fact that Jesus was tempted is good news for believers. Why is it helpful for Christians to know that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin?

Dr. Robert Lister

Jesus is two things for us, and sometimes we separate those unhelpfully. He is certainly our Redeemer, the one who atones for our sin and lives victoriously, perfectly over our sin in a way that we couldn't do for ourselves. And we certainly don't want to diminish or undermine that at all. Jesus is also, however, our example, and so a passage like 1 Peter 2 even says that Jesus is an example to us in not sinning. And, you ask the question, how am I to emulate Jesus as my example in not sinning? And this is where the humanity of Jesus becomes very important for us — fully God, fully man — but the purpose of the incarnation is so that he will live in our place perfectly, overcoming sin and temptation in his humanity, trusting the Father and the power and the resources that are common to us as humans. So he achieves victory on our behalf, which we entirely depend on him to do. But we also can take comfort and follow an example of Jesus in overcoming temptation and sin. We can actually emulate the things that he does because he's relying on resources that are common to us. We can enter into prayer. We can spend time studying the Scriptures. We can rely on the resources of the Holy Spirit. We can surround ourselves with Christian community, involvement in our local churches and have brothers and sisters supporting us, and so be engaged in the battle for victory over temptation in the way that Jesus was during the time of his incarnation.

Dr. John McKinley

It's important for Christians to know that Jesus was truly tempted to sin, faced it, succeeded through it, and never sinning as a result, for a whole bunch of reasons, in how we think about him and how we think about ourselves. One reason why it is important is that Jesus proves that temptation to sin is not a sin. The fact that he was sinless and went through temptation can assure us that even though we feel like

there's something wrong, actually the battle is now something that we're engaged in, and we need to turn away from sin — not the fact that we're sinful just because we're being tempted. Adam and Eve were also tempted even though they hadn't sinned before then. So Jesus kind of demonstrated that temptation is in itself not a bad thing. It can actually be a positive thing that God's using as a test for us to show obedience in the face of some kind of resistance. Temptation for Jesus is also important because it's the way he was able to earn righteousness — the obedience that we were supposed to manifest, that we're supposed to in our lives, but we fail at. He faces the test, is tempted significantly throughout his life and each time surmounts it. So, as far as Jesus living in our place and doing the life that we ought to, loving God and loving his fellow man as himself, temptation in his life proves that he really struggled and was victorious.

Also, in Jesus being tempted, he shows us how to face temptation. He gives us in the ways he dealt with it — at least the ones we're told about — a pattern for some strategies for how to resist temptation. In the wilderness, at the beginning of his ministry, he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, following the Spirit's lead into the wilderness. And Luke tells us, when he comes out of the wilderness, he is still being led by the Spirit. So it is the basic Christian thing of walking with the Spirit, being open to God leading us, strengthening us. That is one of the ways that Jesus beat temptation, and then we can also. And then we're told specifically, probably having come from Jesus himself, that when he resists Satan, he's doing it by recourse to God's Word. Temptation is something that afflicts us because we're tempted to believe a lie, that something that is actually bad is good. Now, Jesus is not ultimately deceived by this. God is never deceived, so God can't be tempted, but we are susceptible to being tempted because it might seem that suffering is always bad and getting something by cheating or stealing or lying is actually a good. But Jesus shows us in the wilderness that God's Word is what we really need as the antidote to all the lies that might come up in our lives as part of temptations. And so, by our trust in what God has told us to believe, we can overcome temptation the way Jesus did.

Jesus' temptation is also important for us because by it we are assured that he really understands what we are going through. Hebrews 2:17-18 and Hebrews 4:15-16 assure us that he is not distant from us, that the fact that he never sinned doesn't mean that he didn't ever struggle, that he really understands what we're going through, and so we shouldn't shrink back from him because we're struggling with some kind of pull to a sin. But instead, we should come to him, even just to start out praying, "Jesus, help me" is going to diminish the temptation somewhat. And it's the encouragement from his experience in temptation that is supposed to drive us in Hebrews 4:16 to seek the throne of grace, to find mercy and receive grace to help in our time of need, and specifically at the time of temptation. So Jesus received help by relying on the Holy Spirit, relying on God's Word, and then also by prayer. In Gethsemane, we find that he is praying desperately, intensely, and he's commending his disciples to pray that they don't enter into temptation, and that is something that we should be doing as well as Jesus patterned for us. How do we beat temptation? Well, we're not supposed to beat it on our own. We're supposed to do it exactly the

way Jesus did, by having recourse to God, and in that God will strengthen us, and God will lead us through it. And it will have been a test that we passed instead of simply a temptation that overcame us.

Finally, Jesus' temptation, the reality of it is something that proves the reasonableness of him as an example for us for how we're supposed to live. Jesus is a true human being and part of a true human experience is that he was assaulted, he was vulnerable all through his life, probably from very early childhood and to the day he dies with the pull to do the wrong thing, and yet Jesus is held up in Scripture for us as someone's supposed to walk in his steps, even taking suffering. Well, that only makes sense if Jesus truly lived a life that was in the muck and grime and the pain of what we experience. So he understands, and he sets himself out as a leader for us and we can receive help from him as somebody who knows what we're going through.

Question 8:

What was the central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed?

During Jesus' public ministry, he taught extensively on many different topics. But all his various teachings were united and consistent because they all flowed from and tied into his role as Christ. What was the central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed?

Dr. Peter Walker

As we look back at Jesus' message, it's worth looking at his central proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand. That's the first thing that Jesus said. And so, when we're asking, "What was Jesus really on about?" we must look there. It seems to me that that phrase, "the kingdom of God is at hand" gives us a great clue. Jesus is claiming that with his arrival, God is now the coming King. So the first thing he's saying is that God is ruler, you need to bow to him, and you need to recognize his rule in your life, and you need to recognize his rule, through me, Jesus. But more than that, when we recognize that the kingdom of God was something which in Old Testament hope they were longing for God to bring in, we realize that Jesus is also saying, I am the fulfillment of the Old Testament story. So, a very important part of Jesus' teaching is, "I am the fulfillment. I am the expected answer to the problems that were there before." And when we look back to find out what was that Old Testament story all about, well, some of their hopes were, yes, that God would bring a king. But they were also expecting God to redeem his people. So, Jesus is saying, "I'm the one who's now going to redeem God's people." When you think that in ancient Egypt the Israelites were rescued from Egypt and redeemed, what Jesus is offering us is redemption. Not from slavery in Egypt, but from what? Well, slavery to sin. When you look back into the Old Testament you discover also a longing that God will fulfill his covenant, and this covenant is God's plan to bless the entire world through Abraham's descendants. And so when Jesus comes and says, "I am the

fulfillment of that,” then we’re getting the message that God is going to do, through Jesus, that which is going to overcome evil and is also going to bring all people everywhere into his kingdom. So that’s the central thing that Jesus is claiming. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Dr. Johnathan Pennington

The idea that Jesus preached primarily, or focused on in his preaching, on the kingdom of God may at first strike us as a little odd, until we recognize that the major story of the Bible starting way back in creation itself is, too, a message about the kingdom of God. Even though the language “kingdom of God” rarely, if ever, occurs in the Old Testament, per se, the hope and the expectation and the vision that God is a ruling king, a good ruling king, from creation on, is clearly a major theme, and in fact, in the prophets becomes the major hope for a day coming when God will restore his reign through a Davidic messiah, a Christ, an anointed one. So when we get to the Gospels we really shouldn’t be surprised that what Jesus is announcing and proclaiming is the kingdom of God. It’s there. It’s because it’s a part of the whole message of the Bible, and it’s, in fact — when you look beyond the Gospels into the Epistles — it’s, in fact, what they are building upon and presupposing and teaching as well. And, I was going all the way to the book of Revelation, the hope is for the restoration of God’s reign. So we can see at the center point of history itself, in the center of the Bible, the Gospels — which witness to Jesus’ life and death and resurrection — we are not surprised to see that his message is the same message of the whole Bible, God’s reign, God’s kingdom is coming from heaven to earth, from creation to new creation.

Dr. R. Leslie Holmes

The central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed was really quite simple. It had two significant points to it. The first one was the call to repent. Now that really was the same message as the Old Testament prophets had brought calling the people to repent, which means to turn around. That’s the message of John the Baptist. In Matthew 3 we read that John came preaching repentance, and Jesus preached repentance, meaning that we are to turn around. And that repentance has a mental component — it changes our mind; it has an emotional component — it changes our hearts; and it has an “actional” component, I like to say, which is to say it changes our actions. So when our minds are changed, we see we’ve been wrong, we start to think differently, our emotions are involved in that, and then volitionally we give our wills to doing the right thing, the new thing. That’s the first part of the message of Jesus. The second part of the message of Jesus is the kingdom of heaven is come, and the kingdom of heaven was in fact the central theme that he kept returning to again and again and again. When you read, for example, his Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5 and 6, you see that he comes back five different times to talk about the kingdom, and he’s talking about the kingdom that comes when Christ dwells in our hearts.

Question 9: **What does repentance from sin look like?**

When Jesus Christ proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, he often urged his audiences to repent. Without repentance, we can't experience the forgiveness of sins we so desperately need, and we can't share in the joy of Christ's kingdom. But, what does repentance from sin look like?

Dr. James D. Smith III

Repentance from sin in the Christian life can look like a number of things. Let's just site three growing out of the Scriptures. Sometimes, as in 1 John 1:9 where it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness," it's a very personal kind of thing. And repentance from sin can simply be a change of heart. It can be a change of how we think about things, changing customary response patterns, for example, or seeing things in a new way, God's way. And that's one-on-one. It can also be a situation in which we know that, either because we've wronged someone else, or in fact, we've done something where we need the help of someone else to pray for us, to strengthen and encourage us, stand with us. James 5:16-17 is a passage like that where we confess our faults to one another and pray for each other so there's a healing that takes place. So it can be an individual thing with God, it can be with one another, and then sometimes there are occasions where a wrong that we've done requires a public act. David experienced that in Psalm 51 where he talked about having ultimately sinned against God, and yet he goes public with the fact of his sin and the fact of his repentance: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew a right spirit within me." So sometimes, when it's of that magnitude or the effects of our sin are devastating to peoples around us, those peoples need to know that God's worked in our lives and we've decided to follow Jesus.

Dr. William Ury

The Bible shows repentance in some very visual ways. I love Hebrew. I've always loved the language because it's so pictorial. The word for repentance, the basic word, is "*shub*," which means to turn. And that's what it looks like basically; it's the choice to turn from sin. Now, of course, that turning is enabled by the gracious work of God. There's no way that anyone could turn from any sin without God enabling that turning. In Greek the word for repentance is "*metanoia*," which is a change of mind. And of course, the mind is not just the mental mind. It's a change of the whole orientation of one's life. 2 Corinthians speaks about having a godly sorrow. And I'm sure we have pictures of what that means with tears and beating one's breast because we're in agony, and that may be sufficient at some points for repentance, but I think the much more deep conception than just my emotional repenting is a foundational turning of my being, to say, "Lord, I have run my life one way and it's gotten me nothing but hell, hell in my life, and hell maybe in the future. So I am turning toward you. I am turning all of my self-trust to trust you. I'm laying all of my goals, my dreams that I used to have for myself, I'm turning all of those and pointing them all

toward you for you to clarify, for you to remove, for you to change in whatever way you'd like.”

When I think of Paul's repentance, if you will, on the road to Damascus, I think what happened there was he confronted Jesus, and he realized that his life — religious, moral, good — was totally demonic at base. It was self-centered. And so, when he met Jesus, he turned, his entire life turned, it pivoted, and he began to realize the lordship of Jesus was the only way that real life could flow into his life. Sometimes I think in the Western church we have specific places where we say for ourselves, that's where you go to repent. You go to an altar or you look a certain way on your knees. I'm not going to diminish that. That's important to have. But I think there's an ongoing repentance in the believer's life where through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, believers realize, I've got all kinds of idols in my life I didn't realize. And so, not out of fear but out of love, I say, Lord, I repent of that. I no longer am going to go that way or treat another person that way. So it looks like typical response in daily life to a person you love. I want my life to please that person's heart or mind. And so I willingly repent, lovingly repent day by day because I love that One more than I love myself. So, there can be godly sorrow in a graphic way, there can be turning of one's entire existence fundamentally to become a Christian, but there's also a daily repentance, which is the expression of love that I think we see throughout Scripture and I know throughout church history. I think that's why repentance is so important and sort of what it looks like in real life.

Question 10:

What does the Transfiguration teach us about Jesus' role as Christ?

Jesus' role as Christ or Messiah was often misunderstood during his earthly ministry. But at certain times and with certain audiences, God revealed his purposes with greater clarity. One of these instances was Jesus' transfiguration, when he appeared speaking with Moses and Elijah, and his glory was revealed in brilliant light. What does the Transfiguration teach us about Jesus' role as Christ?

Dr. Simon Vibert

The Transfiguration is clearly significant for the synoptic gospel writers because at this point Jesus starts looking forward to his death on the cross. And before we go into that “final days” of Jesus's life, Jesus is transfigured. Moses and Elijah are present, presumably as representatives of the Old Testament Law and the prophets, all finding fulfillment in Christ. But of course, also, we have the voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him,” and the attestation from the Father, not only over Jesus's sonship, but actually the fact that all believers ought to listen to Jesus's words because they have the endorsement of the Father.

Dr. Frank Thielman

Jesus appears on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and with Moses. Elijah is the great prophet who worked many miracles, just like Jesus also was a great prophet who worked many miracles. And Moses was the great teacher of Israel, the great Law-giver of Israel, and Jesus is presented in the New Testament also as a great teacher. And if you look at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also gives a kind of law. He gives a reinterpretation of the Mosaic law there — his own teaching. And so we can see how Jesus is tied back into the Old Testament, and has to be interpreted by means of the Old Testament. But at the same time the narrative makes very clear that Jesus is greater than either Elijah or Moses, that Jesus can't be explained simply in terms of Elijah and Moses because God himself appears on the scene and says, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." So the Transfiguration is one of those places in the New Testament where we can see both the continuity, the really critical and important continuity between Old and New Testament, and some of the discontinuity, some of the surprises that Jesus brings to us as someone who comes on the scene fulfilling all that the Old Testament has to say.

Dr. Peter Walker

That moment in the Gospels when Jesus is transfigured and his glory is seen by Peter, James, and John, is again one of those most powerful parts of the gospel narrative. It's telling us some very important things about who Jesus is. Firstly, it's telling us that Jesus is eternal, and has an eternal glory. And if you'd read the rest of the Synoptic Gospels up to that point, you might not have noticed that. You might have thought that this was just a human being who happened to be a great teacher. Now it's nailed. Now it's actually revealed quite clearly — albeit just to three people, Peter, James, and John — that actually, behind the scenes, Jesus has an eternal glory. So that's really very important. But then you remember that Jesus is there with Elijah and Moses, and in that we see clear teaching that Jesus is greater than these two great figures from the Old Testament — one, Moses, summarizing the Law; one, Elijah, the head of the prophets, if you like, the Law and the prophets, and Jesus in the midst. He is greater than those two. So it's an incredible revelation of who Jesus is, greater than the Law and the prophets. And one final part of the Transfiguration narrative which is also key; in Luke's gospel it says that they are discussing Elijah and Moses with Jesus, his exodus that he's about to accomplish in Jerusalem, exodus, picking up the whole story of the redemption from Egypt. And so we see clearly that the Transfiguration is teaching us that Jesus Christ is going to be the one who's going to do a new redemptive act in Jerusalem, like the old exodus, which is going to set people free.

Question 11: **What does the Lord's Supper signify?**

Jesus delivered many public teachings and miracles that indicated the nature of his messiahship. But one of his clearest teachings came in a more private setting, during

the “Last Supper” — the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before he was crucified. During this meal, Jesus instituted the sacrament we call the Lord’s Supper. How did this ceremony point to his role as Christ? What does the Lord’s Supper signify?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

God gives us many things in order for us to know what he has done for us. To remind us as Christians as to how he has been active for our redemption, and to remind us of the great grace that is involved in this and the great privilege we have to be God’s people. One of the ways he has done this is in baptism, which signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. But then the ongoing reminder of that, and that God is continually involved in redeeming us through the removing of corruption, that there is a continued work that God does for us, that Christ is presently interceding for us and his blood is still operating for us, and the Holy Spirit is still working within us to make sure that our union with Christ is having all the proper effects — and the reminder of that, God has graciously given us, is something we call the Lord’s Supper. Jesus himself instituted this when he had the last Passover meal with his disciples, and he gave them wine, he gave them bread, and he said, “This cup is the blood of the new covenant... and this bread is my body which is broken for you.” And so he was reminding them that it was in his humanity that he is actually taking our sin, that he was made sin for us. As Peter says, “in his own body on the tree” he did this. So, when the church comes together to be reminded of the nature of this sacrifice — that it was actually given by God, that it involved a death, that it involved the shedding of blood, and that it is presently operating for us — we partake of the Lord’s Supper and we remember this death until he comes again. We call forth and we seek to properly discern the Lord’s body, as Paul told us, meaning that we recognize that we are without any righteousness before God, that we are still condemned unless he had taken in his own body our sin. So we celebrate the ongoing effect of the death of Christ for sinners and the resurrection of Christ for sinners, since we do it until he comes again — it’s a recognition that he is coming again — when we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in the Gospels is to see how Jesus in the upper room when he breaks bread with his disciples, is doing it not that far away from another place in Jerusalem which Jesus has visited a few days before, which is the temple. And the temple is the place into which Jesus had gone and had done this cleansing of the temple, signifying that everything the temple stood for was now about to come to an end. And people wondered, how on earth is he doing that and why? And now, if you like, Jesus with his disciples on his own gives the answer: instead of the temple being the place where sacrifices are going to be made, Jesus is going to open up an alternative new way. And that’s what’s going in the Last Supper, Jesus opening up an alternative to the temple, an alternative sacrifice. And as he breaks bread and then he says, “This is my body,” their eyes are opened to the reality that Jesus is about to die, and is about to give his life as a sacrifice. He’s opening up a new way into God’s presence. In contrast to the temple, now this is the way. And he’s placing himself

right at the center. One of the fascinating things about the story is that we're uncertain whether or not there would have been a Passover lamb on the table. I personally believe that there wasn't, and that Jesus is celebrating this just a fraction ahead of schedule because he's going to be dead the next day. Therefore, there wasn't a Passover lamb on the table. But when Jesus says, "This is my body broken for you," effectively he's saying, "I am that Passover Lamb. That which you need to eat at this meal is me." So he's making an incredible claim that he is the one who is going to be like the Passover lamb, redeeming people. And when you remember also that in a Jewish context, drinking blood and cannibalism are absolutely horrific things, the symbolism and the horror of Jesus saying, "This is my body, this is my blood," they would have recoiled. But Jesus is saying, "You need to realize that I'm the one who's going to die for you, and the only way you're going to get the benefits from what I do for you is if you take this bread and drink this wine." It's very powerful stuff.

Dr. Willie Wells

The significance of the Lord's Supper really brings about signifying of the union between fallen man and the saving grace of God. When we look at the communion, the specifics of it, it brings us into great contact, or communication, or union with Christ himself. And when we look at the opportunity that we have with becoming covenantally connected with him, we think about Jesus' body, how it was given, so that the lostness of mankind could be redeemed, and we think about the blood of Jesus, how it brings in and restores us, or brings us back into rightful fellowship with him. And 1 Peter says here in 3:18, the NIV rendition of it says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." And so when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we think about the communion. It goes beyond just a celebration or a ceremony. It really signifies the position of mankind, how we were apart from God, but as a result of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection, we have been united with him, and, therefore, fellowship with the Lord has been reestablished.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

What does the Lord's Supper signify? It represents our Lord's instituting of this sacramental rite where bread is broken and wine is poured out, and thanksgiving to the Father for the Son's atoning sacrifice. And in addition to that, it also points to a future time when the Lord shall return himself, for he said he would not drink this food of the vine any longer until he drinks it anew with us in his kingdom. And so as believers, we get to share in the Lord's table and to share in this tremendous grace, which gives us tremendous hope and tremendous encouragement that while we await his return, we can enjoy communion and fellowship with him even now.

Question 12: **Was it unjust for God to impute our sins to Jesus?**

As the Christ, Jesus died to atone for our sins. To accomplish this atonement, he agreed to have the guilt of our sins “imputed” to him or “reckoned to his account.” But how was this just? Why should anyone have to take the punishment for crimes that other people committed? Was it unjust for God to impute our sins to Jesus?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, it might seem unfair to impute our sins to Jesus on the cross because we believe that Jesus was innocent and did nothing that was worthy of death, but the Bible writers consistently say that it was just, because, actually, he stepped in to pay the price for the sin of human beings. And the legal language is used quite often by Paul, particularly in Romans, to describe the fact that Christ, through his sacrificial sin-bearing death, enabled us to be justified in the sight of God because he paid for the price of our redemption. So, in that respect, to say that it is unjust would be to misunderstand, actually, the nature of the atonement that Christ made on our behalf on the cross.

Dr. Derek Thomas

Was it unfair or unjust for God to impute our sin to Jesus on the cross? This is a very important question. It is one that has been asked from the very beginning. Certainly, the church fathers addressed this issue of the justice of so-called imputation. But it has also been raised in recent years among otherwise Bible-believing evangelical Christians. One notorious statement within recent years has been that this view of imputing sin to somebody who is without sin, or to put it more generically, for someone to bear the consequences of another’s crime or fault, is inherently unjust, and in the case of Jesus, is a kind of, and I quote now, “cosmic child abuse.” And so the ethics of imputation is the question at hand, and it is a question that is not just about the imputation of sin to Jesus, but it is also the same generic question as the imputation of Adam’s fall and transgression to us. So, that statement of Paul, for example, “As in Adam all die ... so in Christ shall all be made alive,” what applies to the one, applies to the other. And I think that one has to consider that at the point at which Jesus was condemned, at the point at which God’s righteous retribution came upon Jesus, at that point, he is a sinner in the legal sense. He has been reckoned to be sin. So it’s not unjust. It’s not as though God is punishing somebody who is sinless at that point. At that point legally, he is reckoned to be a sinner.

Dr. Derek Thomas

Now, you can take the question further back and ask, is it just for God to reckon him to be sin? The punishment, I would argue, is not unjust, because at that point he is legally, constitutionally reckoned a sinner. But is the reckoning itself unjust? And I think that if you were to examine, for example, similar cases — they’re not exact but similar — one thinks of the famous incident in the book, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, about Japanese imprisonment of soldiers during the Second World War building a railway through, was it Burma, and into China, somewhere there, and at the end of the day, the prisoners are lining up and they count the shovels and one is missing. The Japanese guard says that unless the person who has hidden this shovel owns up, everyone is going to die. And after a tense moment — and this is a true story — one

of the prisoners steps forward and the prison guard shoots him dead. Now they recount the shovels, and there were none missing. So he gave his life for others. Is substitution inherently unjust? We would look at that incident and say, no, that was an act of heroism. Now there's more in Jesus' death than heroism, but we wouldn't say that was inherently unjust for him to do that. Jesus volitionally, of his own accord, entered into a covenant. Theologians speak of a covenant of redemption, a pre-temporal covenant, an agreement with the Father to redeem lost sinners. And that, I would argue, is not unjust, it is an act of love and unimaginable grace.

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Dr. Glen Scorgie

You know many people think about the human analogy to the dynamic of the cross whereby Christ assumed responsibility for the sins that human beings committed. And people wonder about the fairness or the justice of such a transfer of guilt. I think the answer to that is that there's something about grace that shatters our whole understanding of the dynamics of retribution and compensation. Grace upsets the apple cart. Grace says karma is not the final answer to how the dynamics of the universe work. I think Jesus was getting at that himself when he told the parable of the people who came on board to work for a certain employer at different parts of the day, different times of the day, and ended up all getting paid the same. I think it was Jesus' way of saying, there's something about grace that's outrageous. But thank God there's something in the world as outrageous as this.

Question 13:
What kinds of blessings do believers receive as a result of Christ's resurrection?

Jesus' atoning death purchased salvation for believers. But his death wasn't the end of his ministry as the Christ. In fact, Scripture talks about many blessings that believers receive as a result of the things Jesus did after he died, including his resurrection from the dead. What kinds of blessings do believers receive as a result of Christ's resurrection?

Dr. Frank Thielman

We're often familiar with the benefit, great benefits we receive from Jesus's death. When he died on the cross, he atoned for our sins, and so we're forgiven and at peace with God. But I think people are sometimes, well, they're confused about the benefits that we receive from Jesus's resurrection. Was the resurrection just a confirmation that, yes, God has indeed forgiven us by Christ's death on the cross? And that's certainly true; that's part of it. But the resurrection of Jesus is a very rich concept in the New Testament. There are multiple benefits that we have as believers from it. The first and most important of which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15, and it's also described in other places. And that is, Jesus' victory over death in the resurrection means that we too have victory over death and that our bodies will one day be raised. We'll be physically raised. Our bodies will be similar to the bodies we have now. There'll be continuity between our physical bodies now and our physical bodies then. They'll be different. Those bodies will be immortal, Paul says, and they will be able to live an immortal existence. So they won't be subject to death and corruption. That's the way Jesus's body was when he rose from the dead in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus's resurrection. And the way his body functioned and appeared tell us a bit about what our life will be like one day when we too are raised physically from the dead.

Another benefit of the resurrection that sometimes people don't think about is that when we're raised together with Christ, we are seated together with Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 2:6, in heavenly places. Paul says we are made together alive with him, we are raised together with him, and we are seated together with Christ. Paul also says in Romans 6 and in Colossians 3, that our resurrection together with Christ has huge implications for the way we live our lives. We're no longer under slavery to sin, but we are instead, according to Romans 6, enslaved to righteousness. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we have been buried with him through, with his death, in baptism. When we become Christians, we are buried with him and we are raised now, just as he was raised to newness of life. And so, Paul says in Romans 6 that that means the way we used to live, before we became Christians, our old way of life that did not honor and please God, has now started to be, set aside, and we are beginning to live a new resurrection life just as Jesus was raised from the dead. Colossians 3 also makes that point. Paul's very careful though, here, to say that we have not yet been raised from the dead in that final eschatological sense. There is a sense in which

we have been raised with Christ, but there is more yet to come. We will never be completely sinless until that final day when we are finally raised from the dead and occupy our resurrection bodies.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We focus much on the death of Christ because it is true that it is in his own body on the tree that he bore our sin, and that God is pouring out his wrath. And it's true that at the end of that time of suffering, which was exquisite, Jesus said, "It is finished." But then we know that the story doesn't stop there. God still has work to do to show us that it was finished, that the atonement has been made, that it has been complete, that he is perfectly satisfied with it. And so, after our Redeemer does experience the grave — he experiences the deadness of death in his body — he was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, by the glory of the Father. He was raised from the dead according to the Spirit of Holiness. He was raised from the dead by his own power resident within him. He says, "I have power to give my life; I have power to take it again." So the resurrection is a demonstration that the triune God is happy with the atonement that Christ has made, is fully satisfied with this. So one of the blessings that we have is the assurance that, indeed, when we go to God that Christ's death has been sufficient. It also lets us know that Christ is, even now, at the right hand of God, interceding for us, this continued blessing, that if any man sinned we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

It also shows us that death, indeed, has been conquered. He has released from this fear those who all their lives were fearful of death, and he has destroyed him that has the power of death, and he's shown this by the resurrection. If the atoning work had not been satisfactory, then he would not have been raised from the dead, but since he has been raised from the dead, we know that it's satisfactory. The Scripture also tells us that when he was raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he gave gifts to men. All of the gifts that we have come as a result of this work being completed, and he, as it were, the psalm says, he enters into glory: "Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." And so he has won this victory, and he gives gifts to men. So all the gifts that we have in the church, the gifts of teaching, the gifts of preaching, the gift of the Spirit to sanctify us, all of these have been given by Christ in his resurrection, so we are utterly dependent upon this. Paul says, "If Christ be not raised, then we're of all men most miserable." God lays it all out there and says all of this is true because of the resurrection, and Jesus said, "You'll know that I'm the one I claim to be when I'm raised from the dead." So our entire confidence and all the gifts that we have are at least indicated to us, and then given to us, by the resurrection of Christ.

Question 14:
Why does Jesus still need to intercede for us?

When Christ's earthly work was finished, he ascended to heaven. The New Testament makes it clear that one of the things he's doing there is interceding for us. And part of his intercessory work is protecting us from the Father's displeasure. But why do we need him to do that? Weren't all of our sins forgiven at the cross? Why does Jesus still need to intercede for us?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

The Scriptures assure us that Jesus is eternally interceding for us as believers. And in the minds of some people this might raise the question of why this is necessary, and whether the cross as a historic and decisive achievement was sufficient. Well, I think the answer is that the cross is indeed a comprehensive, fulsome, and sufficient payment for the sins of the entire world, past, present, and future. This is core to our belief. The cross is the crux of history, the definitive and final achievement. And yet, you know, in the Christian life there is the historic and positional status we enjoy, and then there's also the existential reality of our ongoing living-in-the-present-moment relationship with Christ. And so, when we sin, there is not a removal of the sufficiency of the cross, but there is an element of damage to the intimacy and the relationship where we're fully appropriating all that the cross has achieved for us in our existential, living-Christian life experience. And so, built into the gospel is a continual existential reiteration, reactivation, reinforcement of the truth that is there all the time, the provision that is there all the time so that we are continually cycling through the wondrous reality that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. That, I think, is the assuring significance of the intercession of Jesus Christ for us now and forevermore.

Rev. Jim Maples

Jesus still needs to intercede for us, and that does not influence or reduce in any way the effectiveness of the cross. In his mediatorial work as priest, he continues to intercede for his people. As priest, he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is constantly interceding on behalf of his people. He continually offers up his sacrifice, his completed sacrifice, to the Father as the sufficient basis for the bestowal of God's pardoning grace. He is constantly applying the work he did on the cross and making it effective for the justification and the sanctification of sinners. He always lives to intercede for those that are his, pleading for their acceptance before God on the basis of his completed work.

Question 15:

How should the fact that Jesus is enthroned in heaven affect the way we live and worship?

After God raised Jesus from the dead, he seated him at his right hand and placed everything under his feet. As Christians, we can take great comfort in the fact that the one who is seated at God's right hand is the same Lord and Savior who loves us

and died for us. But beyond that, how should the fact that Jesus is enthroned in heaven affect the way we live and worship?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

When the Scriptures tell us that Jesus is exalted at the right hand of the Father and that the Father has given to him a name that is above every name, we need to remember that that is not simply a statement that affirms how glorious Jesus is, but it is a statement that reminds us of all that he has done in his life of perfect obedience, of self-sacrifice, to redeem God's creation. So, for instance, his resurrection from the dead is God's testimony to us that his creation will not be abandoned. Even in all of its fallenness and sinfulness, God cannot abandon his creation to the power of death and destruction. Jesus is resurrected from the dead. He ascends back into heaven, the victorious one who has overcome the power of death and the power of sin. So his enthronement in heaven reminds us of what he has done in God's great plan to reclaim all of creation. But not only that, his overcoming of sin and death is the undoing of Adam's fallenness. As Paul says in Romans 5, just as sin and death came into the world through one man, such a more glorious gift has come into the world through Jesus — that life has come into the world. And Jesus, undoing the power of Adam's fallenness, has in essence created in his glorious, resurrected ascendancy, back to the Father's throne, he has created for us a whole new way of life. It's not that Jesus rises from the dead and then asks us to try really hard to be good people. No, he has paved a way that we can live if we live in him. And that way of life will take us all the way to the right hand of the Father, for even now we are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

Thirdly, the ascendance of Jesus and his enthronement means that the Holy Spirit has been poured out, for he goes back to the Father, not to rest in his own glory, but so that the Spirit could be sent upon those who believe, in that our lives can be transformed by the presence of God — lost in the Fall but reclaimed for us by Christ. Given to us in Christ. Therefore, how should we live and respond and worship? We live by saying to God, "Make me like Jesus. I know there's not a bunch of rules I should follow. I know there's not a bunch of legalisms I should keep, but make me like Christ. Fill me with his character. Let me live in his victory over sin and death, over fear, over anything that would hold me back from being what you want me to be, Father. Let me live in the victory of Jesus." That's the way it should affect our lives. How should it affect our worship? We should be filled with an absolute awe-filled love for this God, this God who would break the power of sin, this God who would carry our humanity in Christ back to his own throne to let us live in Christ there at the right hand of the Father, spiritually speaking. All over the great love of God for us should drive all of our worship. And a joy unspeakable and full of glory should not only mark our worship but every day that we live if we understand what it means that Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

Well, that Jesus is enthroned in heaven has everything to do with how we live and worship today. But you know, I think one of the weak parts of what we do is worship.

I find out that when I teach my people to pray in the church where I pastor, we always talk about the four parts of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Beautiful stuff, but I've found in the evangelical tradition, the "A" part of that, the adoration is really the weakest part. And I think we've got to find a way not only to worship with our songs, with our lips, but also with our lives. I'm thinking right now of Revelation. One of the things that's going to be done quite a little bit in heaven is worship. All over Revelation you see these songs that come — "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever, Amen." Beautiful stuff. That's the stuff that ought to be on our lips all day long, not just on Sundays, but all over our life all day long. What do the songs of heaven have to do with us and how we live the day? How we handle our finances today, whether we go to see that movie or don't go to see that movie, or whatever else it might be, our lives ought to be lives of worship, our lips ought to be lips of worship. It's what we'll be doing in heaven that ought to have impact on what we're doing today.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised Son of David that was foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament. He is both God and man in one person. And through his life and work, he has saved us, is saving us, and will continue to save us from sin and death. As Christians, we are abundantly blessed, and we should live every day in grateful worship of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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