

LESSON FIVE: THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the center of God's scheme of redemption. The entire Old Testament looked forward to his coming, and the New Testament is a revelation of his life, death, and resurrection, and of his will for mankind. This lesson will discuss the most significant aspects of Jesus life and ministry.

JESUS AS THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

As we saw in Lesson Four, during the Patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations God prepared man through types and prophecies for the coming of his Son. Some of these prophecies are especially and wonderfully detailed and compelling in light of their fulfillment in New Testament passages. For example:

- Christ was to be of the seed of the woman (cf. Genesis 3:15 and Galatians 4:4).
- He was to be of the seed of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:3 and Matthew 1:1).
- He was to sit on the throne of David (cf. Isaiah 9:7 and Luke 1:32). He was to be born in Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:4-7).
- He was to be miraculously born of a virgin (cf. Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-31).
- He would be called the Son of God (cf. Psalms 27 and Matthew 3:17).
- He would proclaim good tidings to all men (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:18-19).
- He would be abused and crucified (cf. Isaiah 53:7 and Mark 15:4-5; Isaiah 50:6 and Matthew 26:67; Isaiah 53:12 and Mark 15:27-28; Psalms 22:7-8 and Luke 23:35; Psalms 69:21 and Matthew 27:34; Psalms 22:17-18 and Matthew 27:35-36; Psalms 34:20 and John 19:32-36).
- His death would be for the sins of mankind (cf. Isaiah 53:5 and Romans 5:6-8).
- He would be buried with the rich (cf. Isaiah 53:9 and Matthew 27:57-60).
- He would be raised from the dead (cf. Psalms 16:10 and Mark 16:6).
- And finally he would ascend into heaven (cf. Psalms 68:18 and Mark 16:19; Ephesians 4:8).

Thus the life and death of Christ exactly fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning him.

THE BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS AND HIS LIFE AT NAZARETH

(Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2)

The virgin birth of Jesus is the most wonderful and beautiful event in history. The angel Gabriel appeared to a Jewish maiden named Mary and told her that by the power of the Holy Spirit she, a virgin, would give birth to a son. He also explained this to Joseph, Mary's betrothed. Joseph then married Mary, but had no physical relationship with her until after she gave birth in Bethlehem to the child foretold by Gabriel. In accordance with the angel's instructions, Joseph named the baby Jesus, meaning Savior, for he was to save all of mankind from their sins. Angels in heaven announced his birth to shepherds in the field, and wise men from the east came to worship him. After a brief sojourn in Egypt to avoid those who would kill the child, Joseph and Mary settled in Nazareth, where Jesus grew to manhood (Luke 2:51-52).

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY

(Matthew 3:13-4:17; Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-4:15)

When he was about thirty years old, Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized by him. All others who came for baptism did so in order that through it their sins might be remitted, but since Jesus never sinned, his baptism primarily served as a humble act of obedience and as the beginning of his ministry on earth. As he came up out of the water the Holy Spirit descended on him, giving him complete divine power, and from heaven God announced, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

After his baptism Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the nearby wilderness to be tempted by Satan. This encounter was necessary for several reasons. First, Jesus came to earth to defeat Satan and overcome the great damage he had caused in Eden (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Consequently Christ had to face and resist the same kinds of temptation—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16)--to which man had previously succumbed. Second, Jesus was to be the sinless sacrifice, the Lamb without blemish offered for the sins of mankind (Isaiah 53:6-10; John 1:29; Ephesians 2:14-18), and hence his sinlessness had to be established. Finally, Jesus was to be a mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). As such he had to be both a sinless man and also divine. God had just pronounced him divine at his baptism, and now by resisting Satan while in human form he would show himself the only man worthy to be a mediator (Hebrews 4:15). In a marvelous display of faith and holiness Jesus vanquished the devil, disdainfully rejecting all of the temptations, which had caused man to fall, and as the victorious Christ began his ministry to the world.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Throughout all the history of the Old Testament period, prophets and ministers had shown that they came from God by performing miracles—acts which set aside the laws of nature and thus proved that the one performing the miracles had the power of God in him (cf. Ex. 7-17; 1 Kings 17-18). As the Son of God:

- Jesus demonstrated his divinity with the most marvelous of miracles (John 2:11; 20:30-31).
- He healed the sick and afflicted (Matthew 8:1-4, 14-17; 12:10-13; Mark 1:23-26; 5:25-34; John 4:46-54; 5:1-9).
- He demonstrated control over the elements of nature (Matthew 8:23-27; 14:25-33; 17:24-27; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 5:1-11).
- And, in anticipation of his own final victory over death, he raised the dead to life (Matthew 9:23; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44).

With these undeniable proofs, Jesus demonstrated to all those who walked with him that he was the Christ. And still today the miracles of Jesus demand our faith that truly this was the Son of God come to earth.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Christ is often called the Master Teacher—the one who far surpassed all others who have ever attempted to instruct man in how to live. When the Word of God became flesh (John 1:14), he brought the wisdom of heaven down to men, and for all who would hear him he unlocked the secrets of success and happiness in life and in eternity.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the most sublime and celebrated discourse in history. In quiet and simple measures Jesus taught us what makes life blessed and our duty as disciples (Matthew 5:1-16). He warned us of the dire consequences of sin (Matthew 5:21-48) and taught us

prayer and service (Matthew 6:1-18). He urged us to strive after the eternal treasures of heaven rather than the fleeting riches of earth, bidding us trust in God for the supply of our needs (Matthew 6:19-34). And to heal a world of bitterness and hate he gave us that golden standard of behavior toward one another:

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12).

Of all the stories ever told or written, the parables of Jesus Christ rank highest in the hearts of men. For their drama and creativity they are narrative masterpieces. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) has been called the greatest short story in all literature. But more important than their narrative excellence are the great lessons which these simple but most profound stories teach. In such parables as those of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46), the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27), the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), Jesus illustrated in unmistakable and unforgettable fashion the great truths which man so much needed. The most important regard for man concerning the teachings of Jesus is that our obedience to them will determine our eternal salvation. Christ was not just a great teacher with suggestions about how to live a happy and successful life. He was the Son of God commanding obedience to the commands of himself and his Father; and any man who would be saved must obey all of those commands:

He that rejects me, and receives not my words, hath one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

The apostle John wrote of Christ:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

It is not enough to admire Jesus as a teacher, or even to claim to be his disciple: we must really obey his teachings in our lives. In the Sermon on the Mount he said:

Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

JESUS AND THE CHURCH

(Matthew 16:13-20)

At one point during his ministry, Jesus called on his apostles to tell him who they believed he was. When Peter declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said that on the truth of that statement he would build his church. The church of Christ was the kingdom of heaven, which he and John the Baptist had announced as being close at hand (cf. Daniel 2:44; Matthew 3:1; 4:17; Colossians 1:13). As we shall see in Lesson Six, some fifty days after his death Jesus established his church on the day of Pentecost, and all men from that time on are commanded to become members of that church and to serve God in it (Acts 2).

THE DEATH OF JESUS

(Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 18-19)

With every animal sacrifice offered during the thousands of years of the Old Testament period, man was taught anew that the shedding of innocent blood would someday be required to atone for his sin (Hebrews 10:22). The prophet Isaiah foretold of the Suffering Servant of God, upon whom the sins of all mankind would be laid:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisements of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

At last the day came for Jesus, the Lamb of God, to be offered for the sins of the world. Betrayed by one of his own apostles, and deserted by all, he was arrested, put through a series of false and illegal trials, mocked, spat upon, and beaten. Finally, at a place outside of Jerusalem called Calvary, he was nailed to a wooden cross and crucified. For six hours, lifted up on the cross between heaven and earth, he suffered in the place of sinful humanity. Yet even then his merciful spirit was manifested, as he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." At the last he cried: "It is finished!" and commending his spirit to his Father, Jesus died.

At the instant of Christ's death, two miraculous events took place, which demonstrated both the horror and the greatness of that moment. An earthquake occurred of such violence that it tore apart rocks and opened tombs, as if nature itself were revolting against this most terrible of crimes. Yet in the temple in Jerusalem, the veil concealing the most holy place was torn in two, signifying that by Christ's sacrificial death the way to heaven was now open for man. At the foot of the cross even the Roman centurion in charge of crucifying Jesus said, "Truly this was the Son of God."

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS

(Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21)

The day that Christ died was the most terrible in history; the most wonderful occurred only three days later. On the morning of the first day of the week, as a group of devout women arrived at his tomb to embalm his body, they found the stone door rolled away, and an angel of the Lord revealed to them that Jesus was raised from the dead (Matthew 28:1-7). Over the next forty days this message was confirmed by Jesus himself as he appeared at different times in his resurrected body to his apostles and disciples, on one occasion appearing to over five hundred people at once (cf. Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

Christ's resurrection had been prophesied by David (Psalms 16:8-11) and by Jesus (Matthew 26:32; Mark 9:9-10; John 2:19-22), and it has a most profound significance for mankind. First, it is the consummate proof that Jesus was the Son of God (Romans 1:4). All of those mentioned above whom Jesus raised from the dead would of course soon die again, but Christ's complete and final victory over death demonstrated his deity. Hence to believe that Jesus was the Son of God is to believe that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9). The resurrection later formed the basis of the preaching of his apostles (Acts 2:24-32; 3:12; 17:31). Further, since Satan had brought death into the world (John 8:44; Romans 5:12), by defeating the grave Jesus in part overcame the works of the devil (cf. Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Finally, Jesus' resurrection gives hope to all who will believe on and obey him that they too will one day be raised to live with him forever (1 Corinthians 15). Hence the most joyous message ever uttered was the angel's proclamation "He is risen."

During the forty days of his appearances, Jesus gave his disciples a final commission:

And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things

whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you
always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

Then from Mount Olivet near Jerusalem he ascended into heaven, where crowned with glory, honor, and power he sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 8:1; 10:12). Here he rules over the church, the kingdom of God, and will continue his reign until he returns to earth at the end of time to punish the disobedient and take the faithful home with him to heaven (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 3:13-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the central events of human history. Every man who lives must eventually face them, as well as their consequences for his eternal destiny. For those who believe on Jesus and hear his commandments, he offers salvation from sin and everlasting life.

Please feel free to read and study this lesson as many times as you wish to do so. After you are comfortable with the knowledge you have gained you may want to test yourself to learn how well you remember. Questions for review and study on this lesson may be found by going to <http://64.177.52.39/8LESSONS/5Q.htm> .

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