

What We Believe...About Jesus

Revelation 1:4-8

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So far in our series on “What We Believe”, we’ve looked at what we believe about the Bible and what we believe about God. Today we turn our attention to what we believe about Jesus and I’m going to begin not with some Bible verses, although we’ll look at several, but with some sermon titles of a preacher from the 1800’s named Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Gathered together in a book entitled *Christ’s Glorious Achievements* are seven sermons with titles such as: Christ the End of the Law, Christ the Conqueror of Satan, Christ the Overcomer of the World, Christ the Maker of All Things New, Christ the Spoiler of Principalities and Powers, Christ the Destroyer of Death, and Christ the Seeker and Savior of the Lost.

I mention those sermon titles because I hope by them you can see how differently and how majestically Christians viewed Jesus in times past. Today’s preaching and theology tends to emphasize (perhaps over-emphasize) Jesus as the One who forgives us, supports us, helps us with our burdens and so forth. All of those are true but in focusing on what Jesus does for us *personally*, sometimes we miss the grandeur of the role Jesus plays in the great sweep of God’s plan to redeem those lost in sin. Is it any wonder that Rev. 19:13-16 describes Jesus as “[13] ...dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. [14] The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. [15] Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. [16] On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

We rightly celebrate what Jesus has done for us personally but we must never forget, as the Apostle Paul said in Phil. 2:10,11 “that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” He is just that great!

The largest part of what we know of our great Lord and Savior isn’t gained from non-biblical sources, although Jesus *is* mentioned by several ancient writers, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The bulk of the information we have about Him is from Scripture, as you would expect, and of course we find most of the details of His life and ministry in the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – while the rest of the NT tends to flesh out the significance of who Jesus was and what He did.

That doesn’t mean that references to Jesus don’t appear in the OT as well. Jesus said so Himself in John 5:39 “You diligently study the Scriptures [*in His day, the Scriptures were the OT*] because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me”. We see Him in what are called “pre-incarnational appearances”. The incarnation is what we celebrate at Christmas, that is,

Christ coming in the flesh. So pre-incarnational appearances of Jesus to people would be appearances He made before He was born to Mary as described in the NT. For example, a being known as the “Angel of the Lord” appeared to Hagar, the servant of Abraham, and she calls the Angel of the Lord, “God”, indicating that He wasn’t *just* an angel but was actually divine. But of course, the Scriptures teach that no one can actually see God and live (Ex. 33:20) so theologians believe that the many brief appearances of the “Angel of the Lord” in the OT were actually Jesus rather than God the Father.

Then there are the many, many prophecies referring to the coming Messiah scattered throughout the OT, from Genesis 3:15’s prediction that eventually the offspring of Eve will crush Satan’s head, to the promise to King David that a descendant of his would rule forever (II Samuel 7:16), to predictions such as Jesus’ virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14), that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would suffer and die for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:6,9,12), and that one day He will judge the nations (Isaiah 2:3-4). This just scratches the surface of OT references to Jesus but we can say with confidence that He wasn’t the creation of imaginative minds bent on concocting some religious hero they could use to fool people. He was nothing less than the promised Messiah.

That word “Messiah” was the Hebrew word for “anointed one” and referred most often in the OT to the king of Israel but in NT times people associated the term “Messiah” with a coming national deliverer. Because of its political focus, however, Jesus didn’t use the word for Himself, others applied it to Him (e.g. John 1:41). In the Greek, “Messiah” is translated “Christ” and so we get Jesus, who is the Christ, or just, Jesus Christ. But Christ isn’t His last name, it’s a title – Jesus, the anointed One. The One anointed by God to be, not a national deliverer for the Jews, but a spiritual deliverer for the whole world.

Now, why would the world need a spiritual deliverer? Well, it’s because as the Apostle Paul said in Romans 5:12 “...sin entered the world through one man [*i.e. Adam*], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”. Adam broke God’s command in the Garden of Eden and through him the whole human race became “infected” with sin, which is breaking God’s law. Each one of us is a sinner and the consequences of sin is eternal death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But the good news is that God has provided a way out, a Deliverer. Romans 5:17 “For if, by the trespass of the one man [*i.e. Adam*], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

Of course, that “one man” who brought us grace and eternal life had to be very special, in fact, more than special. He had to be fully human and fully divine, two natures in one person. Romans 1:3,4 says “[3] regarding his [*i.e. God’s*] Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, [4] and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus had to be fully human so He could be tempted in every way yet

fully divine so that He could remain perfectly obedient to God and without sin (Hebrews 4:15). His sinlessness was essential because He was sent by God His Father to be a sacrifice in our place, to take the punishment sinful people like us should have taken. Hebrews 9:28 "...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people". That makes Christ, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, our mediator, the one who intervenes between us and God and makes possible peace with God. Hebrews 9:15 "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Stop and think about that for a moment. We are all manifestly incapable of keeping God's laws perfectly as He requires. Try as we might to be good, our tiny efforts only magnify how short we fall every day. We are guilty before a holy God who could justly send us to hell yet instead He sends His only Son, Jesus, to perfectly satisfy the law's demands and die as a sacrifice in our place. And though we were sinners, Christ willingly died for us, out of love. Paul puts it so beautifully in Ephesians 5:2 "...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

What a magnificent Savior we have the privilege of serving! (1 Peter 1:2) Theologians often describe Jesus in terms of the three "offices" or functions – prophet, priest, and king – He fulfilled. As the great prophet, Jesus came to represent and tell us about His heavenly Father (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1,2). As the great priest, Jesus not only speaks to God on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24,25) but was Himself the sacrifice that makes possible our relationship to God (Hebrews 2:17).

Prophet, priest and, finally, I want to close with the thought of Jesus as our great king. When asked, Jesus told Pontius Pilate that He was indeed a king, although of a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36,37). He is King of a spiritual kingdom and today rules in the hearts of His followers. But a day is coming when He will return as that passage from Rev. 19 we read at the beginning described, where Jesus comes at the head of an angelic army from heaven to destroy every foe and establish His eternal reign as "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." And so the Apostle John said in Rev. 1:5,6 "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."

This is the great Jesus that we love, this is the great Jesus that we serve, this is the great Jesus that we long to see. Revelation 22:20 "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."