

301: Systematic Theology

Week 6 - Christology

TEACHER NOTES

To tie this all together today we're talking on Christology. The study of who Jesus is.

- Week 1 - the Bible is our authority. Luke 24:27 Jesus says the whole Bible is about Him.
- Week 2 - God reveals Himself indirectly and directly through His Spirit and Word. John 1 tells us Jesus is God made flesh who revealed Himself most fully in creation
- Week 3 - Man is made in the image of God but fell from grace and we are born into sin. The New Testament affirms Jesus became man to die for sin and raise to life so that we are know being redeemed into the "image of Christ."
- Week 4 - Spiritual powers and principalities are at war out there and in here. And Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.
- Week 5 - God is sovereign and we are free beings. And God will accomplish His purposes through the redeeming work of Jesus and His church to ultimately bring all things together.

In a nutshell, without Jesus, we don't have a Christian systematic theology. He holds all of this together. He is theology embodied. So you can say all you want about your problems with Christians and Christianity, is Jesus who He says He is though? Because Christianity says it starts there. Ok, once we locked that in then we can go from there.

Now before we get into what He did and accomplished we need to do some background work and play some defense as we have with previous weeks.

It's ironic, most people are ok with a lot of the teachings of Jesus. Non-Christians, atheists, Hindus, Muslims. No one seems to bat an eye, at least in our culture, when it comes to "love your enemies" or "turn the other cheek" most who don't follow Jesus would say, "Yeeeeah, that's awesome."

And yet, Jesus is THE most divisive person in human history. And while most would blame Christians for messing that all up, (and it's true Christians have done terrible things in the name of Christianity), when you look at Scripture we see that Jesus is the divisive one. Over and over again He draws lines in the sand.

John 14:6

"I am the way the truth and the life NO ONE comes to Father except through me."

Matthew 10:34-36

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

Also...Jesus talks about Hell more than anyone else!

So what I first want to do is present some of the arguments out there against Jesus, provide some biblical defense, and then actually look into what the Scriptures say about His person and work.

So what are the arguments against the person and work of Jesus? They also all start with L, so you know it's right.

1 - Jesus is a Lama.

This is the most dominant view. We talked about this in week 1 of our class. Jesus was just a good rabbi. He had radical teachings about peace and love. But never did He once believe He was actually God.

Constantine

The idea of Jesus being God according to this view is that His divinity was fabricated by the early church in the 300s in order to unite the Empire. Constantine needed a religion to bring people together, so the whole thing is made up.

If you're familiar with the Dan Brown book, *The DaVinci Code*, this was the idea. Jesus was a rabbi who got married and eventually died and the church needed to create a myth as a powerplay.

Historical Jesus (Jesus Seminar) movement

This is also the dominant theory in what's known as the historical Jesus movement. This was a big field of study a decade or so ago but the idea was that this school of thought wanted to uncover Jesus the man, not Jesus the God. So the presupposition is as you read the Bible you reject all the supernatural claims and miracles because if Jesus was just a man, none of this actually happened. So who is the historical Jesus apart from what the early church "fabricated"?

A famous precursor to this movement was Thomas Jefferson, who held to deism - the idea that a God does exist but He doesn't personally associate with His creation.

And like we mentioned before, the reality is there's no truth to these claims. The early church believed in Jesus as both God and man prior to Constantine coming into power according to our earliest manuscripts.

There's also an underlying presupposition that the supernatural does not exist so it cannot exist. So the notion isn't even considered because of the bias against the supernatural.

So we reject the theory that Jesus was just a lama or teacher.

2 - Jesus is a legend

Another theory that has come up recently but is a minority in terms of conventional wisdom and scholarship, is that Jesus is a legend.

So this is the Constantine theory taken to the extreme. It's not that Jesus's divinity was fabricated, it's that His entire existence is fabricated.

Now again this is an academic minority. But I cite this because if you're a new Christian and you've never heard this before, it can really freak you out. Some scholars and skeptics hold to this view and its the notion that all of it - whether its the disciples or the early church - that wanted to unite people together or unite the empire so all the textual evidence we have has all been fabricated and forged.

Which once again, we have no evidence supporting this view at all. You can go back to week 1 to dive more into this.

Not only do you have non-biblical sources talking about the historical events of Jesus and the early church, but you also have the Bible appealing to skeptics who doubt the existence and personhood of Jesus.

One of my favorite passages on this is 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15:3-9

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, **5** and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **7** Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. **9** For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

a - according to the Scriptures (vv.3-4)

He's referring to the Old Testament scriptures predicting that Jesus would come. There are **over 300 predictions** and prophecies in the Old Testament dating as far back as 15th c BC and ending around 450 BC. The odds of Jesus fulfilling 8 of the 300 is 1 out of 100 quadrillion.¹ The odds of fulfilling 48 of them is 1 in 10 to the 157 power. The odds of all 300, I don't know, I think your calculator explodes.

¹"To help us understand the significance of Jesus's fulfillment of these prophecies, Peter Stoner in his book *Science Speaks* offers this well-known example. Stoner hypothetically figures what the chances are of Jesus fulfilling only eight prophecies. Even if Jesus fulfilled only eight prophecies, Stoner claims that the odds of this happening are 1 in 10¹⁷ power. That would be 1 chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (17 zeros after 1), a number so mindboggling it's impossible to grasp apart from an illustration. Stoner provides one by having us envision 10¹⁷ silver dollars spread out over the entire state of Texas. The silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Now mark one of the silver dollars and stir them all up. Then blindfold a man and tell him he can go wherever he wishes, but he's allowed to pick only one silver dollar out of the mass of silver dollars covering the state. What are the chances of him picking up the marked silver dollar? The same chance that the prophets had of writing out just eight prophecies that would be fulfilled in Jesus." <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/4363-one-minute-apologist-who-is-jesus/day/4>

Counter - "Well, maybe the New Testament was written way after the fact, and the Church a few hundred years later made all that Jesus stuff up and they wrote in how he fit all those Old Testament prophecies. Maybe it's all myth."

To which Paul would say -

b - he showed up to the apostles (v.5)

He's referring to the disciples that saw him once he resurrected. Back then, there were lots of Jewish leaders and teachers and political revolutionaries with mass followings. And here's how it always went down - when there leader died, that ended the movement. Jesus dies. Everyone leaves. A few days later, the disciples are suddenly bold, talking about Jesus is alive, and all of them are willing to die as martyrs for the rest of their lives. How do you explain the move from wimp to being willing to die for Jesus?

Counter - "Well, maybe they hallucinated. Maybe they all decided to just make it up together."

In which Paul would say....

c - he showed up to 500 people, some died but most are alive (v.6)

It's not as if the apostles, all 11 of them, just mistook some other guy for Jesus or drank some special Kool-Aid - a packed-out auditorium of people can all verify it. He's essentially saying, "If you still don't believe me, go talk to any of those 500 people separately, they're all going to say the same thing."

d - he showed up to James (v.7)

James leader of the church in Jerusalem and Jesus' little brother. We've all heard of sibling rivalry, that's a common thing. You know what isn't a common thing? Sibling worship. He's saying if you don't believe the disciples, if you don't believe the 500, go talk to someone in his own family.

e - Paul says, then I saw him and my life changed (vv.8-10)

From a religious-zealot of Judaism who hunted and murdered Christians to passionate about Jesus. He says, "This is my story now. This is who I was before I met Jesus, he's how Jesus got my attention, and here's what Jesus is teaching me now." The greatest apologetic Paul can offer at the end that the Gospel is true his own life change.

So the logic goes, why would one person die for something they knew full and well to be a lie? On top of that why would the disciples die for something they knew to be made up?²

Chuck Colson

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured

² "If a messiah was killed by the pagans, especially if he had not rebuilt the Temple or liberated Israel, that was the surest sign that he was another in the long line of *false* messiahs...It is surely clear what follows. If the messiah you had been following was killed by the pagans, you were faced with a choice between two courses of action. You could give up on the whole idea of revolution and abandon the dream of liberation. Some went that route, notably, of course, the rabbinic movement as a whole after 135 AD. Or you could find yourself a new messiah, if possible from the same family as the late lamented one." N.T. Wright
<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/christian-origins-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-resurrection-of-jesus-as-a-historical-problem/>

that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

- Not only that, do you remember in which city the early church began in Acts 2? Jerusalem.
- Do you remember in which city Jesus was publicly tortured and crucified? Jerusalem.
- Do you remember outside which city Jesus was buried? You get it.
- Do you know how much time was in between those two events? About 40 days.

So let's just connect the dots here. Let's say you're wandering through Jerusalem and you hear this guy named Peter preaching the gospel. And he starts talking about in v. ___ “This Jesus who you crucified is alive.” (The implication is that the people he is preaching to had publicly witnessed Jesus' death.) People raising from the dead was not a normal thing at that time anymore than it is now. People weren't gullible and believed anything you told them. So if I wanted to disprove Peter's claim about Jesus, what would I do? I'd just go walk right outside of town where Jesus was buried and go see for myself.

So how could, according to Acts 2, thousands of people come to faith in Jesus if it could have been easily disproved? The soundest reasoning would say its because Jesus actually, historically rose from the dead.

And skeptics will reject that and say, “Well Jesus's disciples stole the body.” Well, his tomb was guarded by trained soliders so as to avoid an insurrection. And then you still run into the problem of how/why disciples would make up and die for a lie.

Other skeptics would say Jesus didn't really die on the Cross. He just passed out or faked being dead. Which once again, trained soldiers who publicly execute people for a living would know.

All that to say, when you look at Scripture and at extra-biblical resources the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus existed and rose from the dead.

In fact even the way the gospels are written were unique at that time

- **Ancient Mediterranean stories.** There's some recent scholarship coming out about the way the Gospels were written, they were biographies circulating about political leaders that were written like propagandic folk tales. The Gospel writers intentionally insert geographical places and historical people within the narrative to show that these things were grounded in reality.
- **The leaders always got it wrong.** We mentioned this in week 1, but if you were going to make this up, you wouldn't cite the leaders of the faith as the ones who got it wrong the most. You wouldn't have disciples doubting Jesus' resurrection to end a Gospel (Matthew 28:17).
- **The first witnesses to the resurrection were women.** At that time, a woman's testimony was not accepted in the court of law. And the first people to witness the resurrection of Jesus were women. Again, if you're making this up you don't lead with that. That's counter-intuitive.
- **Talk of other theories circulating around.** If you notice in Matthew post-resurrection, there's a breaking of the fourth wall. If you're making it up you wouldn't include that in there. It's like if

I'm with friends and I'm trying to win them over to my opinion, I don't mention the counter arguments. Why would you do it? If you're telling the truth then it doesn't effect your case

So Jesus is not a lama or a liar, C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* talks about the trilemma of Jesus that the only options you really have (assuming he was a historical person and the Bible is reliable) is that He's a lunatic a liar or He's Lord.

3. Jesus as Lunatic

Ok, you say you like the things Jesus taught. Have you read any of His teachings? The Gospel of John is full of divine claims like, "No one can come to the Father except through me." "I and the Father are one." The dude literally claimed He was God. I had some great teachers growing up that I loved. But if any of those teachers were at any point to say, "I'm God, worship me," I'd say, "Ok I'm out." This guy's weird if he really thinks he's god.³

4. Jesus as Liar

Maybe he didn't really think he was God but led everyone to believe that He was. In which case, He was a fraud and a liar. He's like the Wild, Wild Country guy. He was conning people. And Jesus' teachings were an extension of who He was. Because He was God He was able to say the things He said.

5. Jesus as Lord

so then the only real option you have is that Jesus is in fact Lord. He's the God of the Universe. You've got to decide in light of who He really is, what does that mean for me? Will I keep making up excuses, will I keep being a skeptic or will I actually worship Him?

When we say Jesus is Lord we're acknowledging some things about His personhood and some things about His work - who He is and what He did.

Personhood

Fully Man - He is able to be the perfect mediator for man. He is able to be the perfect sacrifice for man.

Example?

Fully God - He is able to fully forgive sin. He has the authority and the power to save humanity.

We won't get into because the arguments are similar to week 2 and the Trinity but the early church had to deal with a lot of false teaching regarding this.⁴ How is Jesus able to be 100% God and 100% man at the same time? That adds up to 200%. Wouldn't it make more sense logically if He were 50% God 50% man? Nope, can't do that. Ok, well what if He was 100% God but just looked like a human? No.

³ To which a skeptic would reply that Jesus does not assume His divinity in the earlier written Synoptic Gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel of John was the last to be written and that Gospel has the most explicit divinity claims, therefore, according to the skeptic, the church was evolving the person of Jesus within that first century to eventually make Him into divine status. N.T. Wright, "some of Jesus' key symbolic actions, notably his action in the Temple, and some of his key riddles and parables, as both implicitly and explicitly messianic."

⁴ The big three 1) Jesus only appeared to be human (Docetism). 2) Jesus was subordinate to his Father in power and glory (Arianism). 3) Jesus' humanity and divinity existed separately from each other (Nestorianism).

That needs to be locked in when it comes to understanding our faith. Jesus is fully man, fully God. That is a close-handed issue. Line in the sand. You cannot be a Christian and disbelieve that. It's not an arrogant claim to make, that's what Jesus said. It's either you believe in Him and who He is and what He's done, or else you're not a Christian. You can't really follow Jesus' moral teachings if you reject Jesus' own presuppositions and teachings of Him being divine. You can't pick and choose which parts of Him to follow and which parts you don't.⁵

Right now it's very trendy to follow Jesus as a teacher and call yourself "Christian" or "Jesus leaning" but that's like saying I love my wife but I also love flirting with other women. I'm devoted but I'm in an open relationship. That's not how relationships work. Jesus doesn't give us that sort of option.

So that's a quick summary of Jesus's personhood, let's talk about Jesus's work. In light of who He is, what did He do?

Work

A quick fly-by of what He did:

He was born of a virgin

- Origin as both supernatural and natural
- Had a sinless nature
- God taking the initiative

He lived the perfect life we never could

- Empowered and led by the Spirit, showing his humanity⁶
- Submits to the will of the Father, showing his submission
- Sinless, showing his divinity

He died the death we deserve

- His death as perfect sacrifice for sin
- His death imputes righteousness to us
- His death destroys the grip Satan has on us

He rose again from the dead

- Verifies that He's God
- Sin and death have no power over Him
- Gives us new life through Him

He ascended into Heaven

- Able to give us His Spirit, empowering us to continue and multiply what He began
- Intercedes on our behalf
- Sitting at the right hand of the Father

He's coming back

- Restore all things

⁵ For an interesting read on where the rubber meets the road with the exclusivity of Jesus in the post-Christian West, read, "Am I Christian Pastor Timothy Keller?" in *The New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/23/opinion/sunday/pastor-am-i-a-christian.html>

⁶ To dive further into this idea, read "Could Jesus Have Sinned?" from *Desiring God* on the peccability vs impeccability of Christ. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/could-jesus-have-sinned>

- Rid sin and Satan powerless once and for all

Now I know that's a lot but the line in the sand that all Christians would agree on is He was born, He died, He rose again, He's coming back.⁷

And so you're aware, one of the major areas of contention regarding the work of Jesus is the nature of the Cross - specifically, what happened when Jesus died? Why did He have to die exactly? Most everyone would say Jesus atoned for us. He died to make atonement.

Atonement - Jesus dies for us to bring us to Him.

Atonement, "At one," to make us one with God. To reconcile us to Himself. But how?

This is where we get into atonement theory. Theologians for the last 2,000 years have debated this.⁸

- **Penal substitution** - Jesus dies for our sin. On the Cross, Jesus becomes the embodiment of sin and takes on the penalty we deserve. In this view, there is an objective spiritual reality. From guilty to innocent. Most conservative denominations hold to this.
 - 2 Cor 5:21 - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- **Example** - Jesus dies as an example. On the Cross, Jesus embodies what it means to live a life wholly to God, to give your life away for the sake of others. In this view, there is a symbolic power. From selfish to selfless. More liberal denominations hold to this.
 - Phil 2:4-7 - Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant
- **Victory (Christus victor)** - Jesus dies to defeat Satan. On the Cross, Jesus' death was actually His victory. Where Satan thought he won, Jesus proves the grave has no power. In this view, there is a subjective spiritual reality. From enslaved to set free. More charismatic denominations hold to this.
 - 1 Cor 15:55 - "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting?"

Now which one is true? Yes.

We would hold to, because the Bible talks about it, that all of them are true.

⁷ This is found in the earliest Christian creed, the Apostles Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the holy Ghost, Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the holy ghost, The holy Catholick Church, The Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, The resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. Amen."

⁸ While there are more out there (expiation, imputation, ransom), for the sake of brevity, I'm boiling the theories down to three most dominant ones in contemporary Christendom.

Author and theologian Scott McKnight talks about atonement theories like different clubs in your golf bag. Depending on the situation, you use a different club. He says the same goes for atonement theories. If someone is a Christian and acting selfish, talk about example theory. If someone is a Christian and they are feeling guilt over their sin, penal substitution. If someone feels absolutely powerless, Christus Victor.⁹

At the same time, I think when you look at the whole canon of Scripture the dominant motif we see is the problem of sin.

Furthermore, when we place our faith in Jesus its because we've come to an acknowledgement of our sin and we need Jesus to be our Savior. This is Paul's logic in Romans. All have sinned. Not all have been bad examples, though certainly that's a big part of it. Not all have been under Satan's bondage. Though that is absolutely true. All have sinned. Also worth noting in Ephesians 2:1 in noting the three enemies of spiritual warfare, "sin" is the first one listed. So in atonement theories we make a big deal about penal substitution because the Bible appears to give that one the most airplay.

While at the same time, we don't want to truncate, downplay, or ignore the other atonement theories because those are in the Bible too. When you dive into this stuff, often the argument goes "pick one!" And it's like, no all of them. Penal substitution is your driver. That's the biggie. At the same time, I'll say example theory isn't enough. It's very easy if you hold onto that to boil it down to moralism and/or works righteousness. Maybe it's your putter in this analogy?

So with that a few application points as we close down.

For one, we have confidence before God.

In this life and the next. Jesus conquered death. It historically happened. And if that really happened then it changes everything. Everything. So while we may not know the mysteries of the Trinity in its entirety, or we may not know the right creation theory, or to get really practical...you may not know why you or someone close to you is in the moment experiencing suffering, but what we do know is Jesus conquered death. So even if we don't have all the answers that's ok. We're not called to know everything, we're just called to know Him. Not arrogant. It's a humble confidence.

Two, we have a story to live by.

Jesus, God and man. He comes down to tell us what life is really about, what's really worth living for, and how that's going to happen. Jesus provides us a picture of new humanity. He's the truest human filled perfectly with Word and Spirit.

Jesus is theology embodied. And He invites us in on it. When we believe in what Jesus has done and do the things Jesus does, we become like Jesus.

When we study and equip ourselves with The Story, we become theology embodied too.

⁹ Scott McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*

He is shaping us to be a people who look like Him. Not immediately. Not overnight Christianity. But in the long-haul, Jesus gives us the narrative and the resources to live in accordance with reality, to live in a kingdom of love, now and forever.

Third, we have a story worth sharing.

God's Kingdom is happening. Jesus's resurrection shows us that nothing can stop His Kingdom. His church is the picture of that. God's people doing life together is evidence that the atonement has won. So let's go. Let's get after it.

Conclusion

So now that we've wrapped up this class, it's on you now. What are you going to do with what you've learned? We've given you so much information over the last six weeks, will you use it to renew your mind? Will you allow Jesus to transform you? The Bible says you are held accountable by what you know.¹⁰ So.....

Galatians 5:13-14

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. **14** For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Paul elsewhere says:

1 Timothy 1:5

5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith

Let's be people who are marked not by how much we know, let's be marked by how much we love. Not love as purely based on emotion or feeling. But love that is grounded in the authority of who God is and the story He's called us to.

¹⁰ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/we-are-accountable-for-what-we-know>