

CWV-101 Topic 4 Overview

Jesus Christ

Introduction

This week approaches the high mark of your studies: the person of Jesus Christ. You will be reading the textbook and numerous Bible passages in the Gospels and other apostolic letters that tell about who Jesus is. You can see God's wisdom and mercy throughout the Old Testament in the way he deals with his people and reaches out to them in love (read Psalm 103 as an example), but this all culminates in the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. You can see great wisdom in his plan to restore people through Christ, and you can see his abundant mercy in how he openly invites people to come to him (Matt. 11:28-30 ESV).

All through the history of ancient Israel, the people of God longed for the promised Messiah as foretold by their prophets. Micah spoke of his birthplace to be Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2-5), and Isaiah spoke of his being a ruler in the line of David who will bring peace, justice, and righteousness forever (Isa. 9:2-7). When he finally came, born in a most lowly and obscure manner, few were prepared for such a Messiah.

How Do You Know Jesus? The Four Gospels

The genealogy of Jesus, along with the story of his birth, the announcement to the shepherds, the visit of the wise men, the flight to Egypt, and the return of Joseph and Mary with Jesus to their home town of Nazareth, are all told in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. The former was a diligent tax collector who became an apostle (Matt. 9:9), and the latter was a physician who traveled with Paul and did extensive research in preparation for writing the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4). He also wrote the book of Acts, the account of the early church.

The other two gospel accounts are the books of Mark and John. Mark was written by a young disciple of Jesus (who later traveled with Peter and Paul), and John (who was the apostle who was closest to Jesus who lived the longest). John also wrote three short letters bearing his name, and the book of Revelation—the apocalyptic book that tells of the last days to come and the new heavens and new earth. The first three gospels are known as the Synoptic Gospels because they share similar accounts. The Gospel of John was written some years later and includes little overlap with the others, and a more personal account that highlights the last week of the life of Jesus (John 12-21) and the divinity of Christ.

Is Jesus God? The Trinity

John opens his gospel like the book of Genesis:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made through him...In him was life...And the Word became

flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 3, 4, 14)

You can find clear references to Christ's divinity throughout John (John 5:19-26; 8:56-69; 17:5; 20:28-29). But you can find the same consistent theme throughout Scripture, from the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 9:6), to the opening Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1:23), and Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col. 1:16-17; 2:9).

All four Gospels testify of Christ's miraculous works of healing and calming the sea and feeding the 5,000. And after he was crucified, Jesus arose from the dead, a point covered extensively by all four Gospels, and the most powerful evidence of his divinity. Furthermore, Jesus was certainly not an angel or archangel; Hebrews chapter 1 is devoted to pointing out how much greater he is than the angels. Jesus also spoke of the Holy Spirit as a person who dwells together with him and the Father (John 14:15-17; 15:26).

The only conclusion one may come to then is what is called the doctrine of the Trinity, which refers to the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully man), and God the Holy Spirit—three persons, same substance, one God. One of the most powerful implications of God existing in three persons is that he is therefore relational. The Godhead always had a relationship among themselves (Gen. 1:26), so it follows that in God's creation, relationships with his creatures would be paramount.

Why Did God Become Man? Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection

Jesus was the Son of God before he was born into our world. The event of God taking on flesh and dwelling among us—the incarnation—is amazing, and is celebrated all over the world at Christmas. The incarnation is proclaimed clearly throughout the New Testament (Luke 1:35; John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-7).

So why did God become man? The most famous verse in the Bible clearly tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And Jesus knew what this would require of him. He stated in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

God is both holy and just, so although he created humanity to be immortal, he could not accept them into his holy kingdom in their sinful state. So from the beginning God enacted and unfolded his plan for humanity, to redeem a people for himself (Titus 2:11-14), requiring that justice be upheld and sin punished. Therefore a sacrificial lamb was needed—one that could atone for the sins of the world. Only the perfect and sinless Lamb of God would be sufficient. Yes, God himself would have to be the sacrifice somehow.

So the incarnation led inexorably to the cross, the torturous experience that had been prophesied nearly a thousand years earlier by David in Psalm 22. All four Gospels give

vivid accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, the most unjust execution ever to be carried out, as testified by the centurion there who said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" (Luke 23:47). But as unjust as the crucifixion was, Jesus willingly accepted it, for as the Son of God he could easily have been rescued (Matt. 26:53). Instead, Jesus bore the sins of the world on the cross. This is called the atonement—the reconciliation of humanity with God through the sufferings and sacrificial death of Christ.

It is interesting that the clearest account of the atonement is found in the prophecy of Isaiah 53 where the atonement is specifically stated seven times:

He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...⁶and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...⁸stricken for the transgression of my people...¹⁰when his soul makes an offering for sin...¹¹and he shall bear their iniquities...¹²yet he bore the sin of many.

God went out of his way to make the extent he would go to bring about reconciliation clear.

Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is by far the climax of his life. All four Gospels provide vivid accounts of this amazing miracle that conquered death. There have been many who looked at the history of the times, read the many accounts of what happened both in the Bible and in other sources, and came to the inevitable conclusion that there is no other explanation for what happened except that Jesus surely rose from the dead. After the crucifixion, the disciples gave up and went back to fishing—the three years of exhilarating ministry were over. But then the resurrection changed everything. It was not long before the disciples were accused of turning "the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).