

Hebrews 2:14 – 3:6

In our previous lessons we have studied the position of Christ, the power of Christ, the person of Christ, and the work of Christ. Today we are going to continue to study Christ's role as Messiah.

It is important to realize that what Jesus did for us is unique. There are many other religions in the world, but none of their leaders are anything like Christ. Buddah did not come to die for the sins of man. Mohammed did not come to die for the sins of man. Joseph Smith did not found Mormonism and then die for the sins of man. There is only one religion that is centered around the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of its founder, and that is Christianity. All of the other leaders of other world religions did *not* come to offer themselves as a sacrifice (nor did any of them prove their deity by rising from the dead).

Jesus is different. He came to Earth, became a man, and sacrificed His life for our sins. In order to be saved, we must partake of His sacrifice:

Hebrews 2:14a: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; ...”

There are a lot of important truths in this verse. The first thing I'd like to point out is the incredibly important fact that *Jesus became a man*. Throughout all the ages of eternity, Jesus has always existed as part of the Trinity – the uncreated God. There was never a time when Jesus did not exist. Jesus is the one who is, and who was, and who is to come. He is eternal.

In fact, Jesus existed throughout the Old Testament, and even occasionally appeared to people. Theologians refer to these pre-incarnate appearances of Christ as theophanies. Although we don't have time to do an in-depth look at all of the theophanies of Christ, there are a few that I want to mention.

Throughout the Old Testament there is a being who appears who is called the Angel of the Lord. Most of these appearances aren't actually an angel at all, but are Jesus Christ. There are a couple ways that we can tell that this isn't a mere angel. First of all, the Angel of the Lord accepts people's worship and sacrifices – even though real angels refuse worship and tell people to worship God only. Second, there are times when the Bible actually calls the angel God. Those are clues that what we are dealing with is not an Angel at all, but is something much greater.

This Angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua outside Jericho. When Joshua fell down and worshiped, the angel did not stop him:

Joshua 5:13: “And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”

14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?

15 And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.”

Yet we know that real angels do not receive worship:

Revelation 19:10: “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

The apostle John did the exact same thing that Joshua did – but in Revelation the angel rebuked him for it. That tells us that the Angel of the Lord is not an angelic being, but is God Himself.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that the word “angel” means *messenger*. Jesus spent a great deal of time relaying God's messages. In fact, He said this:

John 12:49: “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”

Jesus did not speak for Himself; instead He relayed the messages that His Father had given him. If the phrase “Angel of the Lord” bothers you, think of it as “Messenger of the Lord”. Jesus was certainly a messenger of the Lord. In fact, as we learned in our first lesson in this series, God now speaks to us *solely* through the person of Jesus Christ.

The Angel of the Lord makes quite a few appearances in the Old Testament. He was there when Hagar fled from Sarah:

Genesis 16:7: “And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

9 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

10 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

11 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.

12 And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

Notice that the Angel of the Lord says that *he* will “multiply thy seed exceedingly”. He doesn't say that God will do it; he says that *he* will do it *himself*! That's rather startling, isn't it? But if the Angel of the Lord is actually Jesus then it makes perfect sense.

The Angel of the Lord later reminded Hagar of this promise:

Genesis 21:17: “And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.”

The Angel of God didn't say that God would make Ishmael "a great nation"; he said that *he* would do it. That is a detail that we should not miss. It's more evidence that the Angel of the Lord is not simply an angel.

The Angel of the Lord also appears when Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac. In fact, the Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son:

Genesis 22:11: "And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

Take a close look at verse 12. The Angel of the Lord said that Abraham had not withheld his son *from him*. It doesn't say "from God", which is what the angel should have said if it was just an angel! The Angel of the Lord is acting like he is God.

The Angel of the Lord also rebuked Israel in the days of the judges. Pay close attention to the pronouns that are used:

Judges 2:1: "And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept."

Verse 1 does say "an angel", but verse 4 clarifies that the words were said by *the* Angel of the Lord. Notice, also, what the angel actually said. The Angel said that *he* made them go out of Egypt and *he* made the covenant with their fathers. The Angel is talking as if he was God.

There are many more appearances of Christ in the Old Testament, but that's not the focus of our lesson today. The point I want to make is that Christ is not some new person who suddenly came into existence when He was born in Bethlehem. Jesus is the uncreated God who has always existed and who will always exist.

What is so amazing about Bethlehem is that Jesus, even though He was God, took on the form of a man. Jesus did not stop being God (although He did lay aside His glory, which is *not* the same thing as laying aside His deity), but He did take on human form. He became the God-Man – something theologians refer to as the hypostatic union.

This was truly something special. When angels sinned, Jesus did not take on the form of an angel and die for the sins of angels. However, when mankind sinned Jesus took on the form of a man and died for the sins of men. He *became a man*. It would be something like if one of us took on the form of a snail and died for the sins of snails. It would be unthinkable – snails are so far below us that the idea of a man dying for a snail is utterly ridiculous. It would be a foolish thing to do. Snails just aren't worth it.

Yet, when Jesus became a man and died for the sins of man, that was an infinitely greater act.

God is infinite, holy, eternal, and perfect; He is so far above us that there is simply no comparison. Why did He do it? Because He loved us:

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Now, some people get the wrong idea about this. They say that the reason God did this is because we were worth dying for. They say “Look how much God values you! He thinks you're so valuable that He was willing to die to save you. Aren't you something special!” Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the life of the eternal Son of God is worth *vastly* more than your life. In fact, His life is worth more than all the lives of everyone who has ever lived! The idea that people are more precious than *God Himself* is utterly blasphemous.

God did *not* die for you because you were worth “that much”; He died for you *because He loved you*. He died for you even though your life was *not* worth dying for. What Jesus did was an act of pure love, not some kind of calculated financial deal. His death is not a testament to your worth; it is a testament to His surpassing love.

Christ's death had a powerful impact: it conquered death. Thanks to His sacrifice, we are freed from a terrible fate:

Hebrews 2:14b: “...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;
15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

It is an amazing thing, if you stop to think about it, that Christ conquered death through death. Yet that is exactly what happened. The reason people die is because of sin. People think that death is a result of disease, or old age, or accidents, or something like that, but that's not actually the case. Before Adam and Eve sinned there was no death at all. Death wasn't a part of the world. There was no sickness or disease. However, when they sinned they brought death into the world. That is when mankind became subject to aging, sickness, and death.

If it were not for sin, no one would ever get sick. If it were not for sin, no one would ever get old. If it were not for sin, no one would ever die. Now, I am not saying that your illnesses were given to you by God as punishment for your sins; that's a separate issue. What I am saying is that there would never have been such a thing as illness at all if sin had not entered the world. The reason we live in a world full of suffering is because of that sin back in the Garden of Eden. That one act broke everything.

There was only one possible way to remedy the problem. Since death is the punishment for sin, the only way we could ever be set free is if someone else suffered and died on our behalf. In order for us to escape death, someone had to die in our place:

Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: . . .

18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience

of one shall many be made righteous.”

This is important! Since sin entered the world through the act of one man, it was possible for the righteousness of one man to give the world forgiveness and mercy. Since death came into the world by the act of one man, life could come into the world by the act of another man. Christ could undo what Adam had done – but the price was high. In order to save mankind, Christ would have to become a man and die. There was no other way.

Now, it is true that death is still in the world. However, its days are numbered:

1 Corinthians 15:26: “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

As Christians we know that if the Lord should tarry and we should die before He returns, we will not stay dead forever. Our spirits will go to the Lord in Heaven, and there we will wait until His return. When Christ returns, He will raise us from the dead and give us perfect, immortal, glorified bodies.

But that's not all. After the thousand-year reign of Christ, and after Satan has launched his final rebellion and been defeated, there will be a final judgment. At the Great White Throne judgment God will put an end to death forever:

Revelation 20:14: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”

After this judgment God will create a new Heavens and a new Earth. In that fantastic place there will be no death, or sorrow, or dying, or pain, or disease. All of those things will be gone forever. Instead God will live with His people in this new creation, and we will live with God. We will have a glorious eternity of unending joy and peace. The power of death will be broken forever – all thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

As we said earlier, this is something Jesus did not do for the angels:

Hebrews 2:16: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”

Christ has shown us a level of mercy and compassion that He did not show to the angels. It is important to realize that Christ was *not* required to save us. He did not have to have compassion on us; after all, He owed us nothing. Yet, Christ chose to love us and chose to save us, even though we were His enemies:

Romans 5:7: “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

There are very few people who would be willing to sacrifice their life to save their friends. Yet, Jesus did something far greater than that: He sacrificed His life to save *His enemies*.

The fact that Jesus became a man enables Him to help us in yet another way:

Hebrews 2:17: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

This is something that we touched on last week. Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted. He knows what it's like to suffer, and be in pain, and live in a world that is full of hatred and malice. He was tempted in all things, and yet He never sinned.

In other words, Jesus knows what we're going through. He understands what it's like to have problems and trials and to suffer, because Jesus had problems and trials and He suffered. This gives Him the ability to help us in a very personal and direct way. He knows exactly what we need.

The final point the author makes is that Christ is greater than Moses:

Hebrews 3:1: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

3 For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.

4 For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

5 And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;

6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

Earlier in the book we saw that Jesus was much greater than the angels. Here we see that Jesus is much greater than Moses as well. That may be obvious to us, but to a Jewish audience that is a staggering thing to say. Moses, after all, was the person who led Israel out of captivity in Egypt. Moses was the one who stood before God and was given the Ten Commandments. Moses was an exceedingly great man – one that God spoke with face to face. He was a towering figure in Jewish history; there was no one else like him.

Yet Moses is small potatoes compared to Christ. Moses may have served God faithfully, but Christ was the God who Moses was serving. Moses spoke of the Messiah, but Christ actually *was* the Messiah. Moses was a great man, but Christ is infinitely more than that.