

# Jesus Christ

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IF I want to understand the Christian Gospel I need to know about Jesus Christ. There is much in matters of faith that is out of this world. God, heaven, eternity are all things that we cannot see with our eyes or handle with our hands. But Jesus of Nazareth lived in this world. It is true He was more than man, but for our sakes He became a man and lived among men. What He did, He did for men to see; what He said, He said for men to hear; and what happened to Him was what men did to Him. We need to know these things if we want to understand the truth of the Gospel.

He came into this world to show us the way to God, the truth about God, and the life that is in God. This was done so that "whosoever will may come." God wants all men to know what He is able and willing to do for anybody that will come to Him. In order that you and I might know enough so that we could come to God for help if we wanted to do so, Jesus Christ was born of a woman, lived and died in this world.

## THE SON OF GOD

The basic element in the word *Christian* is *Christ*, which comes from the Greek word *Christos* meaning "to christen" or "to anoint." Anointing was a ceremony in which oil was poured on a person, indicating that that person was set aside for some specific purpose. Therefore, the title Christ was given to a person who had been anointed for a certain work which He was to do.

We use the word *Christ* as a title. It means much the same as the word *king* or *emperor*. The Hebrew word for Christ was Messiah. The word Messiah in the Old Testament means the same as the word Christ in the New Testament.

Where the word *Messiah* is used in the Hebrew language and *Christ* is used in the Greek, *Caesar* is used in Latin, *Kaiser* in German, *Czar* in Russian, and *Shah* in Persian. These titles are all closely related to each other. They each refer to someone who has been selected for and installed in a certain office.

The Old Testament pointed forward to a time when God would send One Special Person to bring salvation to His people. Israel expected God would send His Anointed One to rule and to govern His people, and to set up His Kingdom on the earth. They called this expected Ruler the *Messiah*. The New Testament claims Jesus of Nazareth is the *Christ*, whom the Old Testament predicted would come. This means that Jesus is the One who is appointed of God to do His great work on earth.

When Christ Jesus is spoken of as "Son of God," reference is being made to His origin. He was "the Son of God" in a sense that He was not "the son of Adam." The title "the son of man" is given to Christ to show He had a human body. This does *not* imply that He was a sinner like all men. He was the "God-Man" but He was not a child of Adam. He was the Son of God. Because He is the Son of God, He is *God*.

The Bible speaks of Christians as being "the children of God." Does this mean when we become Christians we become "sons of God" in the same sense that Christ is "the Son of God"? The answer is a most emphatic "No!" Christ Jesus alone can be referred to as *the* Son of God, because He is the only one

who was "begotten of God." There is *only one* Son of God who is both God and man. The Godhead is made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The second person in the Godhead is the Son of God, who became Jesus of Nazareth. Christians become "sons of God" when they are *adopted* into the family of God. They are adopted by God when they receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Whenever the word *son* is used, we naturally have in mind the word *father*. This is because they belong together. The Son of God belongs to the Father, and these two are alike. Jesus Himself said, "I and my Father are one."

When Jesus of Nazareth was baptized by John in the river Jordan, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In another place we read that a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." The Lord Jesus Himself talked about how things were between His Heavenly Father and Himself. We read that at one time He said, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands." On one of His last days on earth before His crucifixion, He prayed, "O, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." In such Bible passages we get the idea that the Son of God is God and was always with God. He is eternally the Son of God. When He became flesh, He became flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, but He always was the Son of God. God did not reach out, take just any man, and make that man good enough and strong enough to bring His will to pass upon earth. He sent His own Son into the world to do that. He sent forth into this world His only begotten Son as Jesus of Nazareth, whom we call Christ, the Son of the living God. When we believe in Christ as the Son of God we are actually believing in God.

When Jesus of Nazareth was here on earth, He showed that God was willing to come down in human form to live among men in order that men could come to God. The Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son, but through Him believers have been adopted into the family of God with Him. As God came down into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, so He wants men to come up to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth was the human form in which the Son of God dwelt among men. He was the "Anointed One" of God who in this world was made in the form of man, but never ceased to be the Son of God. He was the "only begotten" Son of God throughout His earthly ministry. He is the second person of the Godhead – God the Father in heaven, God the Son, for a short while here on earth as Jesus of Nazareth, and God the Holy Spirit, who afterwards came that He might be in the hearts of men.

Some people use the expression "The Christ." The word *Christ* may be used that way. "The Christ" is God's "Anointed One" and is the title given to the Lord Jesus. Worded in that way it carries with it the idea that this is the One whom God chose and placed in this world to do His will.

## THE INCARNATION

*Jesus* is a boy's name, just as children are named Tom or Henry or William. In Christian talk when-ever the name *Jesus* is used it refers to the human being called Jesus who grew up at a particular time in a little village called Nazareth. In other words, whenever the name *Jesus* is used in the New Testament to refer to our Lord the human form of the Son of God is brought to mind.

The name *Jesus* is a Greek word. The same name in the Hebrew is *Joshua*. The name *Jesus* appears in the New Testament and the name *Joshua* in the Old Testament. The Hebrew name *Joshua* is really a phrase. It means "God is my Saviour" or "Jehovah is my salvation." The word *Jesus* freely translated means "God is my salvation."

What we mean by the *incarnation* is very nearly the same meaning as in *Jesus*, that God became flesh and took upon Himself the form of man. When the Bible says "the Word was made flesh" it means that God Himself took on a human form. This is what is called the *incarnation*.

When Paul tells what actually took place when the Son of God took a human form he brings out the idea that the Son of God was originally with God the Father. He then goes on to say that Christ Jesus

"thought it not robbery to be equal with God." This means "He did not think it a thing to be grasped to remain equal with God." The word *robbery* pictures someone grasping or snatching something. And so Paul is saying that the Son of God who was God with God the Father did not think that it was something to be snatched at, something to be grasped, or something to be clutched to Himself to remain equal with God. He did not try to maintain His position, "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Through this entire passage it is made clear that this Person existed before He was born in Bethlehem. He was with God the Father. Because He had in mind to do the Father's will, He left His heavenly place with the Father and came into this world. The old hymn sums it up:

Out of the ivory palaces,  
Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love  
Made my Saviour go.

No human being ever came into the world the way Jesus came. No human being is ever thought of as having lived before and himself deciding to come into the world. Yet this is what the Son of God is reported as doing. The important idea here is that *Jesus was the Son of God before He ever became Jesus of Nazareth*. He existed from all eternity.

It was Jesus who in Gethsemane prayed to His Father and accepted His Father's will that He should be shut away from the presence of His Father in order to atone for man's sins. It was Jesus who went through human death and experienced separation from His Father. It was Jesus whom they took from Calvary's cross and laid His body in the grave. But all the time Jesus was the Son of God.

It was the very fact that the Lord Jesus Christ lived before He came into this world that made it so that He could not be born in the ordinary way, and He was not. The Bible teaches that He was "born of a virgin." The birth of Jesus of Nazareth is mentioned only twice in the New Testament. It is recorded in the first chapter of Matthew and in the first chapter of Luke, and each time it plainly says that He was born of a virgin. John simply says He was "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We cannot fully understand how Almighty God could become a Babe in Bethlehem, but our difficulty in understanding this action of God does not change it in any way.

The only thing that was missing in the Lord Jesus Christ while He was on earth as Jesus of Nazareth was His glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration His glory was revealed for a few moments. Peter, James, and John were with Him, and they saw that "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Moses and Elijah were there talking with Him while these three Apostles were given a glimpse of the true glory of the Son of God which was veiled from their eyes while He was here on earth. What makes the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ so tremendous? Is it not that He was the Son of God? What makes His yielding to wicked men so amazing? Is it not that He was the Son of God?

When Peter told Jesus that He should not go to the cross, Jesus answered Peter by saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Jesus had plainly told his disciples that He was going to die. When the time actually came for Him to be taken by the soldiers and arrested, however, Peter drew his sword and was willing to attack the whole Roman company to defend his Lord. Jesus told him to put up his sword, and added, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Certainly this plainly shows He was actually the Son of God. It is difficult to understand the humility of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth. We must remember that Jesus of Nazareth was always with God and that He was God. In the human form of Jesus He yielded Himself and became obedient even to death. And this He was willing to do for us that He might show us the love of God and win us to put our trust in Him that we might be saved.

## **HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY**

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth is commonly referred to as the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. This is a very general way of speaking. So far as is known, Jesus the Babe in Bethlehem was just like any other normal baby. He sat on His mother's knee. After returning to Galilee from Egypt with His parents, Joseph and Mary, He grew up in the town of Nazareth. Nothing is written to suggest anything extraordinary. The Bible does not describe the life of Jesus as a boy, but gives only a glimpse of what hap-pened by telling about one brief incident which occurred when He was twelve years of age.

At that time He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem. Since He had reached the required age to be received as one of the men in the Jewish community, they put him through a sort of ceremony. This was when He was sitting with the doctors and asking them questions. Actually, the religious leaders were there to ask Jesus questions much the same as any of our young people would be examined for church member-ship after having completed a course of study in a Communicants' Class. In this case, it turned out that even though He was only a boy, He was asking the questions of the leaders and was astonishing them.

This story goes on to tell how Jesus became engrossed in talking with the doctors. When it was time to leave for Nazareth, Joseph and Mary did not look for Him, for they supposed He was with some of the relatives traveling in the caravan. After having traveled "a day's journey" they looked for Jesus and did not find Him in the family group. They had to go all the way back to Jerusalem, and there they found Him sitting in the Temple listening to the doctors and asking them questions. Mary took Him aside and said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Jesus said to Mary, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" However, we read further that Jesus went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them in all things.

This incident is the only glimpse the Bible gives of the Lord Jesus from the time He was a little child brought back by Joseph from Egypt at the age of four or five or even less, until He was thirty years of age. The Bible does not mention anything about His youth. That is not important. The Lord Jesus was not living His life in this world the way human beings live their lives. He was the Son of God, and He was brought into this world for a purpose, to give His life a ransom for many. He came into this world to seek and to save the lost. To do that he would have to die in His human form.

At the age of thirty, Jesus began His public ministry. We may be sure that in those thirty years He was human in every way as we are, fashioned like us, made like us, and was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." When the Bible says "yet without sin," it is saying a tremendous thing. Certainly no human being can ever imagine what thoughts guided the mind of Jesus of Nazareth. Since the Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, there is no need for me to try to figure out what He thought.

I personally think that Jesus of Nazareth suffered in the course of His entire life. What would happen to a boy who would always tell the truth? What would happen to a boy among other boys, who would never do anything wrong? What would happen to a boy who would not fight to defend himself? Would such a one not lead a lonely life? The description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 very likely not only pictures the last three years of Jesus' life in His public ministry, but probably characterizes attitudes and receptions He encountered all the way through His earthly life.

At about thirty years of age, He began to preach; and when He preached, He preached like John the Baptist. He preached like a prophet of the Old Testament. He preached that God, who made a covenant with Abraham and with David, and who gave the law to Moses, was the living and true God and that all men should be genuinely, sincerely obedient to Him at all times. His preaching in itself attracted attention, but what really startled people and caused them to notice Him were His works, the miracles which He performed. The Gospels clearly show that in the days of His public ministry He exercised power and control over nature and over the lives of men. The element of the supernatural in the ministry of the Lord Jesus

Christ cannot be denied.

In the first thirty years, Jesus probably lived very much like other people and did the things that other people would have done, but the Bible does not tell about them. When the Bible begins to tell about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, every single work recorded is a work that could be done only by supernatural power.

One could say, "Well, I suppose He fed the poor." If anyone thinks Jesus fed the poor by taking some of His own food and giving it to them, that will be his own imagination. The Bible does not say that. What it relates is that Jesus took the lunch of a little boy, blessed it and fed five thousand people (Matt. 14:15-21). No human being could do that.

If it is thought that He helped people who were sick, certainly He did. But, if by helping people who were sick it is thought that He did a work such as the Good Samaritan did (Luke 10:30-37), that He stayed with them, took care of them, eased their suffering by pouring in oil and wine, this too would be left to one's imagination. The Bible nowhere states that He ever applied any such treatment to anyone in trouble. When the leper came and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Jesus touched him and said, "I will; be thou clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. No mere human being could do that.

Jesus showed an amazing power over nature and the things of this world. Even the people who were with Him were astonished. He commanded the storm at sea, "Peace, be still" and it stopped. Those who were around Him said, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

A woman who had been sick for twelve years with an issue of blood and had spent all of her living on the doctors but was not helped saw Jesus passing and said in her heart, "If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole." She went to Him and touched the hem of His garment. Jesus turned around and said, "Who touched my clothes?" His disciples said, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" (Mark 5:30-31). Ah! but there had been one who had touched Him in a different way, and the woman knowing she had been healed came forward and fell trembling at His feet. She had merely said, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I would be well," and He told her to rise up and go her way, that her sins would be forgiven because of her faith.

Consider also His control over demons. Over and over He showed authority over demons and power to deliver human beings from their control. Men are skeptical today about such things but there is no question that this is what the Bible says.

No doubt the most awe-inspiring acts of Jesus were instances when He raised the dead to life. He warned all people that His acts of complete control over natural and spiritual elements showed He was God and was serving His Father in heaven. The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ shows evidence that God was with Him and He was doing the will of His Father.

## **HIS DEATH**

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth was marked by a strange outlook. He came into the world to die.

Of course death comes to all people, but most persons put it off as long as possible. But the Lord Jesus came for the simple reason that He would die to save souls.

Shortly after Jesus had begun His public ministry, His disciples took Him to show Him the temple that was being built by Herod. Everyone in Jerusalem seemed interested in it; but Jesus made a comment which to His disciples sounded very strange. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." His hearers did not then understand what he meant, but after the crucifixion and His resurrection they understood that He was speaking of the temple of His body. So we see that from the very beginning of His public ministry He knew He would die and that He would rise from the dead. The greatest thing the Lord Jesus Christ did was to lay down His life "a ransom for many." Death was something that Jesus knew was



coming. He knew it was in the will of His Father that He should die in order to save those who would believe in Him.

The meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ can be partly felt as we read of the Garden of Gethsemane. His agony there was not because He was afraid of death. Death of the body would not have mattered to Him, but in His death there was to be a separation from His Father. The eternal Son of God who loved the Father, and the Father who loved the Son, were to be separated, while the Lord Jesus took man's place and suffered for him the consequences of his sins. Sin alienates man from God. When the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin on man's behalf, the sin that was placed on Him took Him away from the presence of God the Father.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" No doubt the idea of the Father's apparent forsaking of His Son raises a question: how could this be? We need to remember that in ways that go beyond human understanding, the Lord Jesus was made sin on our behalf. We know that God is unable to behold evil. So at the time the Lord Jesus Christ died for sinners, He was evidently in the presence of God bearing man's sins in Himself. The Father would have nothing to do with Him because of the sins. The Father apparently turned away and let Him die. In that separation the Lord Jesus Christ experienced the terrible agony and suffering which was so hard for Him to bear as He thought about it in Gethsemane.

The Bible tells us that while praying in Gethsemane Jesus asked the Father to spare Him if that were possible. Jesus was praying that if there was any other way to save sinners, any way other than by His separation from the Father, let it be done that way. But regardless of His own wishes, if it was necessary for Him to die in order to save sinners, He asked God's will to be done. There is a great lesson for Christians to learn from this prayer of the Lord Jesus. The Bible tells us "Let your requests be made known unto God." The request of the Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane was "Father, if it be possible, take away this cup from me." That was His request, but that was not His prayer. His prayer was, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt." The Lord Jesus came out of the Garden with peace which He could share with others. When once He openly yielded to the will of His Father, He was able to face death without any concern.

The question is often asked: If the Lord Jesus knew what the Father promised Him, why was He distressed? The answer involves an understanding of love. Jesus was distressed apparently because He was to be separated from the One He loved, and to think of such separation would be agony.

The death of Jesus was a *vicarious* sacrifice. The word *vicarious* means "He took my place." I should have been judged for sin; Jesus should have gone free, but He moved over in my place, took my sin on Him, and was judged for my sin so that I could go free. I who deserved to die was allowed to go free, and Jesus who deserved to live came and died in my place. This is the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Good News, the Gospel, which we preach over the whole world. It is just as true for everyone and for anyone as it is for me. "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

## **HIS RESURRECTION**

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps the greatest event in all history. Perhaps I am no different from any other person who is earnest, sincere and honest with himself when I wish that I were better than I am. I would like to be free from the things that hinder, bother, and lead me into trouble. Now I am thrilled to realize it is possible for me to be free. Freedom from everything that hinders or that hurts is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

What actually happened in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was that a body which died was raised from the dead different from what it was in life. A body that had died was raised into a better life than it had before. The resurrection is not so much that man gets a second start. It is that man gets

another start on a different basis, better than anything he ever had before. This is to be seen in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The story of the resurrection is familiar to us all: Jesus was put to death on the cross in the way we call crucifixion. This was not an uncommon event. It was the way all criminals were put to death in those days when Jesus lived. To us it is a cruel, rough way of doing, but the point is that His body was killed and the soldiers checked to make sure He was dead. They pierced His side with a spear to be positively certain He was dead. Then they certified His body as actually dead. After that He was laid in the tomb. This is the whole story of what happened as far as the action of the soldiers went.

Today the bodies of the dead are buried in graves usually underground. We need to remember that when Jesus was buried, He was put in a tomb which is similar to a vault. It was a cave in the side of a hill, large enough for a man to walk into.

The body of Jesus was wrapped in linen cloth, so His friends could wait until after the Sabbath Day to embalm Him with perfume after the custom of that time. The dead body of Jesus lay in the grave for three days, and when they came to embalm Him it was gone. The grave clothes were lying folded on one side. They did not know what had happened. They thought maybe someone had stolen the body away.

When the Lord Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene later that morning, she thought He was the gardener. Jesus called her by name, and suddenly she knew who it was. Mary hurried to the disciples and said she had seen the Lord, but they did not believe her. None of them were ready to believe such a story.

That same night, however, while they were all together in a room with the door shut, Jesus appeared in their midst. They were terrified. They thought they saw a ghost, an apparition of some sort. Jesus spoke to reassure them, "Peace be unto you . . . Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." When He saw that some of them still wondered and apparently could not believe, He said, "Have ye here any meat?" The Bible says they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and a honeycomb. He took the food and ate it before them. We would call this a scientific demonstration that they could trust their eyesight. They were not being fooled. A man might imagine seeing a ghost, but a ghost would not eat a piece of fish. There must have been a body there to eat that food. After this demonstration Jesus disappeared from their midst.

Thomas had not been with them the night Jesus appeared, and when he was told what happened, he would not believe it. He said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Eight days later they were all together again. Thomas was present this time. The Lord Jesus appeared, went immediately to Thomas, and said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing." Thomas was completely convinced, and fell at His feet saying, "My Lord and my God."

The Bible does not leave room for any idea other than that the body of Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. While it was the same body with nail prints and spear wound, it was now made of different stuff. Before His resurrection, Jesus did not appear and disappear at will. He did not pass through closed doors. However, after His resurrection He could do these things. This is important because in our resurrection we will be like Him.

Consider also the ascension of the Lord Jesus. His body was taken up away from this earth beyond the clouds into heaven. This brings up questions. I used to wonder: Where would Jesus get oxygen to breathe? What I needed to realize was that Jesus did not have the kind of body that needed oxygen. He did not have the kind of body that needed food. He could eat food, but He did not need it. He had a body that Paul describes as a "heavenly" body in 1 Corinthians 15. After His resurrection Jesus had the kind of body believers are going to have when they are raised from the dead, because the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was the first-fruits of the resurrection from the dead which all believers will experience. All shall be changed as He was changed in the nature of His body.

It is important to realize that all shall be changed, for someone might think that when people are raised from the dead they will be as they were when last seen in this world. At that time they may have been suffering from illness, weak, emaciated by disease. Their bodies may have been very frail. Their resurrected bodies will not be frail. No disease and weakness can come to them. If somebody by some misfortune lost a leg in this world, he will not have just one leg in the resurrection. If somebody by some mishap was blinded, he will not be raised from the dead with eyes that cannot see. Those raised from the dead, having had faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, will have bodies like His body which is called a glorified body. The body that belonged to this earth was ashes and dust, but the body that was raised from the dead was a body of spiritual reality and heavenly substance. This spiritual body could appear and disappear at will and ascend into heaven in apparent defiance of the laws of gravitation.

Another life, better than this one, is available to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such persons will be raised from the dead. The resurrection brings out the truth that there is life after death. Death is not the final end for anybody. The body will be raised from the dead when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

There is also such a thing as death of the spirit. Death can occur in the whole personality, body, soul and spirit. The spirit can be raised from the dead, and it is so raised when one is born again. The Bible speaks of believers being "quickenened" who once were dead in trespasses and sins.

Resurrection, living again after death, will occur to all men, both the just and the unjust. In the case of the believer, the resurrection will be to newness of life. "We shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). How can a person live again? This was very hard for me to grasp when I first seriously considered the Gospel. It helped me to believe this when I reflected on the first birth. The God that made me out of nothing the first time should be able to make me again in the resurrection if He wanted to do so. The God that raises men from the dead is the God who made men out of nothing. He is Almighty God.

## **HIS ASCENSION**

The *ascension* of the Lord Jesus Christ is seldom understood for what it really means. This word refers to the occasion when the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was taken from this world up into heaven. That was truly an amazing event.

In our study of the resurrection we noted that it was the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus which ascended into heaven. In this world His body was composed of the elements of the earth; now it is made of heavenly, spiritual elements. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross, He went through the experience of human death with an earthly body. When He was raised from the dead, He was raised in a body that does not die. He has a spiritual body which is alive now.

The truth of eternal life is difficult for the human mind to understand; for the mind is, for the most part, limited by the senses. Into this mind is thrust the idea that Jesus of Nazareth, who died and was raised from the dead nearly two thousand years ago, is alive today. The Bible is very simple and clear when it states, "He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." At the end of the forty days, while He was speaking to them and blessing them, "He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

The Scriptures tell us of two instances in the Old Testament when a human body was taken directly into heaven. Before the flood, it is related that "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." The New Testament says, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him" (Heb. 11:5). *Translate* is a very good word to use. If a man speaks in Russian and his words are translated into English, those words are not Russian any more. They are changed. It can be assumed that everything that happened to the body of Jesus Christ at the resurrection happened to the body of Enoch. The Bible does not tell us any more about Enoch than



that he was taken into the presence of God. His body was taken from this world and translated from the natural body into a spiritual body.

The narrative describing the departure of Elijah from this world pictures a much more dramatic event. Elijah was with Elisha, who was to be his successor, "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." There is much about each of these events we do not know, but there can be no doubt as to what happened.

The ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is presented in a much clearer, precise way because preparation was made for His ascension by the resurrection from the dead. It has been emphasized that the body after the resurrection was of different stuff. This body was taken up from the earth in full view of people and in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity. It is not known that the law of gravitation was broken, because the kind of stuff of which that body was made is not known. Occasionally some magician claims to be able to make a body float. The technical term for that is *levitation*. That is not involved in the ascension. Jesus' body was actually taken away out of this world. He had appeared and disappeared at will for forty days. He could have been taken into heaven at any of His disappearances, but God did not want it that way. God wanted man to see the transition taking place. He wanted a witness to the act of the body's leaving this world and being taken into the other world. God had this thing done when it could be seen so that men could understand it in their minds.

After His ascension into heaven, the Bible refers to Christ as sitting at the right hand of God. The expression "at the right hand of God" does not refer to a location. It is a term of special privilege with God. It is a position of power. Christ is right next to His Father. There are many things about heaven which man does not understand. From what God has allowed to be revealed, it can be said that the Lord Jesus Christ is with the Father. He is in personal fellowship with the Father as one person would be standing or sitting alongside another person in this world. As far as the location of heaven is concerned, that is something which God has kept secret. Here we do well to remember that "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

The ascension of the Lord Jesus was witnessed and recorded so that man might know that there is a world other than this one and that Jesus Christ is in it. If I could remember day in and day out that there is a world other than this one, this world would not bother me so much. If I would just keep in mind that there is a life other than this one, this life would not trouble me so much when things go badly with me. This life is not going to last. The other life will last forever. Heaven is real, and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is going there. We have that expectation. In that other world there are persons with whom fellowship will be had. God is there. The Lord Jesus Christ is there. The Apostle Paul says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

The promise of God is that all men shall have their bodies raised from the dead. Jesus Christ is now alive at the right hand of God. Man, too, will live again in the presence of God. At the present time at the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus is interceding for us. By His Holy Spirit, He can make me aware of His presence with me now. This means I can become conscious of His presence here in this world. The Lord is really alive and in the presence of God, and His presence is actually with us. In the presence of God, Christ Jesus is waiting to return to this world.

When I keep these things in mind, life in this world can never be the same for me. Just as Jesus Christ was raised from this world and taken into the presence of God, so will all of us who put our faith and trust in Him be raised from this world and taken into the presence of God.

## THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

The Lord Jesus Christ definitely belongs to a certain group of people here on earth. The Bible speaks of Him as being *the Head of the church*. Christ's position as Head of the church must not be thought of as a position to which one is selected. Christ is the Head of the church in the same sense that a human body has a head. This means there is a functional relationship between Christ and His people on earth. The living Lord Jesus Christ in heaven thinks for, guides, and directs the activities of His people here on earth.

Sometimes when meetings are held to decide and vote on some policy regarding something in the church, prayer is made that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church will give guidance to help the church in making the right decision. That is a very proper prayer, but somehow it does not cover all that the Lord Jesus Christ is doing. He not only overrules to bring the right decisions to pass, but He actually guides the thinking of each member.

When I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, accept Him as my Saviour, acknowledge Him as my Lord, and am inwardly minded to be obedient and willing to do His will, He sends His Holy Spirit into my heart. The Holy Spirit works in the Christian that which is well-pleasing in the sight of God. When the Holy Spirit is inwardly moving me to do certain things, this is by the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The common problem of the average Christian is that, although he is a child of God in Christ Jesus in the Holy Spirit, yet as long as he lives in this world he is a child of his parents and a child of Adam in the flesh. Every Christian has some inward conflict between being a child of Adam (a child of the flesh) and being a child of God (a child of the Spirit).

The truth of the matter is that even though I am a Christian, I still have what is known as the old man or the old nature, as well as the new man or the new nature. The old nature in me makes me concerned about what I am going to do as a human being. The psychologists and sociologists would try to help me figure out the answer from a human point of view. They claim that if they know where a man was born, whom he grew up with, whom he has been going around with, and what is happening to him at the present time, they can very nearly tell what he is going to do. The Christian with a real relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ will be a puzzle to any psychologist or sociologist on the face of the earth. The Christian is going to do some things for which there is neither rhyme nor reason so far as this world is concerned.

There is no way in human thinking to explain why a person will take money that he has worked for, earned, and saved, and give it to be shared with people in Africa, in Brazil, in Mexico, in Korea. Others would use that money for themselves, but this person gives it to missions because he feels inwardly moved to do it. Sometimes the Christian is conscious of that inward movement. Perhaps in a church service, the words of the sermon prompt one to action. But many times the Christian is not even conscious of what is happening when he finds himself thinking in his heart, "I am going to have to do this." The Christian is being inwardly moved to do these things by the One who is the Head of the church.

Christ is the Head of the believer the way the physical head is the head of the arm, the hand, or the foot. The actions of the hands are decided by the head. The head wills to do and the hands do as they are willed to do, if the man is healthy and well. If a man gets to the place where he cannot move, he is paralyzed; he is sick. Also, if the hands act when the man does not want them to, he has "a case of nerves"; he is really sick. If, however, the members of the body are under control and are obedient to the head, then they act according to the way man wants them to act.

It is the same way between the Christian and the Lord Jesus Christ. If I belong to Christ in a way which is sound and healthy and true, my actions will be motivated and guided by Him. Christians belong to each other as members of Christ's body, and He is the Head of the body.

The Lord Jesus Christ is alive and in the presence of God. He is seated at the right hand of God, having communion with His Father. It is the will of the Lord Jesus to do His Father's will. When the will

of the Lord Jesus is manifested in me by the Holy Spirit, I have the desire to be well-pleasing in the sight of God. This desire to be well-pleasing in God's sight is the Lord's moving in me to do this thing. When I try to express my thoughts in prayer, my thoughts may be inadequate, they may even be wayward, and I may not be able to express exactly what I have in my heart; but while I am praying to the Father, the will of the Lord Jesus Christ who is in the presence of God will affect my own praying. The Lord Jesus always says "Thy will be done." In that sense, as Head of the church, He inclines me to do the will of God. The will of the living Lord Jesus Christ is the Christian's motivating power. At this very moment and always, Christ wills to do the will of God, and all I need to do is to yield myself to Him. Christ is now in heaven in the very holy place of God, and there He is as a high priest interceding on my behalf. He not only intercedes on behalf of my sins, He is actually interceding for what I am to do. He is interceding on behalf of each Christian's individual problems.

Let me illustrate it in this manner. Let us say that I am to live through tomorrow. In that twenty-four hours there will be many things which I will face, decisions I must make, situations I must live through. The Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of God, knows all about my problem tomorrow. He knows the course I am going to take. It is the infinite Lord, who is never weary nor overcome and who shall not fail or be discouraged, who is praying to His Father and prays me into the will of God. When tomorrow unfolds, the only thing I in my human consciousness can contribute is a humble willingness to be obedient and to follow His will. He guides me. I may not always understand why or how, but I can always yield. I can yield in complete confidence because He has planned what will come to me to do. He has prepared the good works in which I am to serve Him. He sets up the situation, and I am moved to do my little part in obedience to Him. That is my place of service.

Often we feel it would be wonderful if every time a Christian did something it amounted to a notable victory. We think it would be a fine thing if every single play made in a game scored a touchdown. We imagine a wonderful way to live the day through would be for everything to be marvelously successful. But things do not work out that way. While the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth, He was perfect and did the will of His Father at all times; yet He had days of sorrow and grief. If I choose to live along with Him, I too will have sorrows and grief; but I will never be alone. The Christian can rejoice in the Lord because his joy is in Him. Christ is his Saviour and his Lord. Everything is safe in Him, and the Christian belongs to Him. The believer goes through each day walking in the will of God because Christ in the presence of God is interceding on his behalf.

## **HIS COMING AGAIN**

When thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ, it is natural to think of His earthly career. He was born as a babe in Bethlehem; He taught, performed miracles, and did astonishing things; He suffered death. The grave did not hold Christ, however, for the Bible reveals His resurrection, His ascension, and His presence at the right hand of God. And this can seem to be the complete story.

But the Scriptures further promise that the Lord Jesus Christ *will come again*. Christ first came as a servant in humility. He will come again as a king in glory. The prophets foretold that Christ was coming once, and a great many people did not believe it. Christians say He did come; many do not believe it. The Bible says He is coming again, and there are many who do not believe that. All the truths that are in the Gospel – the reality of heaven, God, the soul, eternal life, the resurrection, the ascension, His being at the right hand of God – prepare man to believe that from the presence of God, Christ will come.

Sometimes the second coming of Christ is referred to as the second *advent*. The word *advent* is not a common English word. It means *coming in* or *coming forth*. Some churches recognize one Sunday in the year as Advent Sunday, on which the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is remembered. The second advent is His coming again.

He is coming as a person. He will, as Acts 1:11 states, be "this same Jesus" who was seen going

into heaven who will come. People often have the idea that spreading the influence of the Gospel is the same as the coming of the Lord Jesus. These two ideas are not the same. When speaking about Christ's coming again, the Bible means to say He will come again in person.

The coming of the Lord may be thought sometimes to be the Lord's coming into our personal experience. This could happen when several people have been planning or working on some projects of service. Maybe they started thinking as human beings, worked along for a length of time, and then paused for a period of prayer. They had been trying to figure the matter out for themselves, but now they wait, as it were, for the coming of the Lord. They ask the Lord to take a hand in this thing and to take over the leadership of it in such a way that they no longer feel they are doing it themselves but He is doing it. The Lord's participation could be thought of in that way, but this is not a fulfillment of the promise of His return. The fulfillment of that promise is that the body which left this world in the ascension is the body that is to return.

When the Bible speaks of Christ's coming again in power and glory, it is made plain that this coming will be greatly different from His coming as the Babe of Bethlehem. On that occasion He came in humility. He had emptied Himself of His glory. Christ was seen in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter, James and John were with Him. Glory shone around Him. When He comes again He will come in glory.

Poets sometimes describe the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the coming of a beggar to the door. It is intimated that the way the person treats a beggar would be the way he would treat the Lord if it were the Lord who was there. We may well appreciate what the poet is trying to say. He may even be attempting to convey the thought the Lord Jesus expressed in "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The idea is that if I neglect to help the beggar, I have refused Christ. If, however, I do help the beggar, then I have honored Christ. The Lord Jesus takes man's rejection or acceptance of the beggar personally. This is the general idea that if a person helps the poor, he is helping Christ; if he ignores the poor, he is ignoring Christ; because Christ is concerned with the poor. No matter how true such emphasis may be, this is not the meaning of Christ's coming in power and glory.

When Christ comes in power and in glory, He will be here in person. He will be here in a way which the Bible describes as brighter than the noonday sun. There will be nothing of the beggar about Him when He comes in glorious majesty. Some people have seen Christ since He has ascended into heaven. One of those who saw Him was Saul, the Pharisee. You will remember how Saul was on his way to Jerusalem by way of Damascus when "there shined around about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' And he said, 'Who art thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' " This experience blinded Saul. John, who wrote the Revelation, saw Christ on the Isle of Patmos and he "fell at his feet as dead." Christ now is glorified and will never be seen apart from His glory.

When talking about seeing the Lord Jesus Christ, a Christian may at times in his enthusiasm say he wishes that the Lord would reveal Himself. From the standpoint of working with men and letting the Holy Spirit minister to men's hearts, taking the humble effort of the Christian witness and turning such into something powerful and strong, this could be all well and good. But, before asking the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself, I should be prepared for something terrific. It would be a light that would blind the eyes. No human being has been able to stand in His presence in glory. It is as if one took an ordinary electric appliance and ran power through it that was a hundred times stronger than it was built to use. That appliance would just burn out. This is exactly how Christ's appearance would affect man. We need not dwell longer on that. When the time comes that the Lord will be revealed, we will be changed. To those who believe, it will be a wonderful, glorious thing; but it will be terrible to those who do not believe; because He will be coming to judge all men, both the quick and the dead.

When Christ comes, He will also receive His own to Himself. Paul says that, at the sound of the

trumpet announcing His coming, the dead in Christ shall rise first and then those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them and so shall they ever be with the Lord.

The second coming of Christ is something the believer can carry in his mind and cherish. It is in the plan of God. But long ago my father-in-law warned me not to let my mind settle itself only on the time when Christ would come back to this world. He said it would be far more wholesome for me to think in terms of the time when I will go to see Him. The Lord may not come back for a thousand years, but I am going to see Him long before that, because every Christian person when absent from the body is present with the Lord. The Christian is not far from seeing the Lord at any time.

The world is also going to see Him, because He is coming back to earth to show Himself. Every eye shall see Him. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).