

# The Foundation of Christ



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## Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to download and open this eBook. In order to help you and the Lord make the most of this experience, there just needs to be a little bit of information given which sets the table. What we have here are the first three articles written from a series of 50. The 50 articles are based off of topical Scripture outlines from the book, *The First Principles*, by John Stevens. This is a book the Lord led me to some twenty years ago. These topics and Scripture outlines are so impactful in developing a solid foundation in us of what it means to be a Christian. This question itself, *what it means to be a Christian*, has many, many answers, depending on who is asked. For us, what it means is to have the indwelling of Christ, and to participate with the Lord in the process of discipleship and transformation, being transformed to his nature, following his leading step by step.

As for the theological perspective in these articles, we have been a part of Pentecostal churches, Baptist churches, liberal churches and the Catholic Church. In every arena there are genuine believers. The writings here are meant to help create a foundation of Christ in us to serve the Lord wherever he places us in his Body. There is no ideological or theological bent intended, and some things will likely reflect your own background. That said, there will also likely be times where the Lord asks us to look beyond any walls that may have developed in us to see the fullness of what he is revealing. A walk with the Lord is a state of spiritual motion, and we follow the Lamb wherever he leads. Having convictions about spiritual things is good. Having convictions to seek the Lord for what he is revealing is better.

Ultimately, the depth of our spiritual life is predicated on our own willingness be led by the Lord and do the things that he asks. While we need the Lord, and others in the Body, the responsibility is our own to participate with the Lord in what He calls us to be, as no other person can make our choices for us. May these lessons be a blessing to you.

*The First Principles* is a series of topics with corresponding Scriptural outlines which was offered to help pastors and study groups. We have no affiliation with the publisher, and we offer our articles at no cost. If you would like a copy of the book for yourself, the eBook is available here:

<https://livingwordpublications.org/product/the-first-principles/>

All Scripture passages quoted are presented in italics and are from the Lexham English Bible, a transparent study translation of the Bible.

## Creation, the Fall and the Need for Salvation

Genesis 2 and 3

John 3

Just as every river has a beginning, so too does the wellspring of the believer. For believers, this beginning is the indwelling of Christ within us. Salvation isn't the end point of the journey but rather the initiation point. It is the moment where the journey with God begins, and so this is where we begin this series as well. We're going to look through what the Scriptures say about salvation, why there is a need for it, and then how our will is involved in the process.

To open, we need to read the story of creation and the first days of humanity found in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. This story captures the basic understanding of what took place, and how this impacted the way the human history subsequently played out. We'll see why it was necessary, and specifically, necessary for us.

While I'll always recommend that you read the suggested texts yourself (listed under the article title), we're just going to look at some of the key points from Genesis. To set the context, in the story of creation when the Lord creates human kind as we know them, they are created to be in a pure and flawless communion with God. The Lord would walk and talk with them (Genesis 3:8-9). During this initial period of humanity, Adam and Eve were also experientially unaware of that which we would describe as evil. There was no flaw or separation in their communion with God, but then evil was introduced.

In the story, this knowledge of evil is described in terms of eating of the fruit of a tree - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this narrative evil was already present in the world, but the Lord warned the two people against participating in it. In Genesis 2:16-17 we read, *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."* The Lord issued this commandment to protect them from entering into evil by curiosity or ignorance. By explicitly telling them this beforehand, participation in evil became a direct choice of the two.

After some undisclosed measure of time, we then read about how the serpent approaches Eve, and it begins to introduce evil to them. As you read, you'll notice that evil is presented to them as something different than what it actually is. Deceit plays a significant role in what transpires. In Genesis 3:1-7, we have the account. *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal, which the*

*Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman, "Did God indeed say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God said, 'You shall not eat from it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not surely die. For God knows that on the day you both eat from it, then your eyes will be opened and you both shall be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise, then she took from its fruit and she ate. And she gave it also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves and they made for themselves coverings.*

In this account evil is presented as a wise choice; a chance to be more like God, knowing good and evil, as opposed to what the Lord had said, a choice that would result in their death. As a result of this deception, Eve and Adam took the fruit and participated in evil, and the results were catastrophic for them. This was when sin entered into humanity, and the life of the Lord departed from them. They were left in a state of full separation.

After this happened, the first couple tried to hide themselves from God – to stay away from his presence due to fear and shame. They tried to hide what they had done and the state they were in. While it may seem silly or childish to read about this kind of behavior, we have Christ indicate this is a normal response for those who have participated in evil. In John 3:20 we read, *"For everyone who practices evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest their deeds be exposed."* So, let's consider their response to be a valid one, even if at first take it may be a little eye rolling.

But despite their efforts to hide themselves, the Lord reached out to them and they did come out to speak with the Lord. During this conversation, the Lord addresses the serpent first, due to it being the instigator of the transgression against what God said. The Lord levels his judgement against the serpent. After this, he then addresses the woman and the man and indicates to them the consequential results of separating themselves from him through their participation in sin. There are several things listed in the passage, which reference difficulty and futility in their lives. They are then cast out of the Garden of Eden, where they have dwelt since their creation. I do want to note here, that despite their situation, the Lord did not completely sever ties with them. He aids them in making clothes, and still interacts with them, though it does seem like it's in a much more distant way.

Looking back at the narrative we are posed with the question about death. The Lord had told Adam and Eve they would die when they ate of the tree. From the narrative, after they ate they didn't die physically, but the life of God departed from them. And in the absence of God, the vacuum left in a person is the state of spiritual death. This is what the Lord was trying to indicate to them. Evil is not a part of God, and it exists only apart from God. God is only life, while sin is only death. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, *For the compensation due sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23). Sin is that which separates us from God. This complete separation is the state of spiritual death, or put differently, a lack of the life of God within us is the state of spiritual death. And that lack of God within us bears fruit in the incompleteness, futility and difficulty of our existence. It is through Christ that this separation is restored.

That narrative took place at the dawn of humanity, but its impact was permanent. Paul wrote that because of this initial transgression, all of humanity was bound over to this state of initial separation. In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote, *For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive* (1 Corinthians 15:22). All of subsequent humanity was bound over to this state of separation due to sin. In a different epistle, he said to the Romans, *For God confined them all in disobedience, in order that he could have mercy on them all* (Romans 11:32). All of humanity was bound to this state.

It seems like such a hard reality for humanity. A common thought that we can have in response to this idea that we were born into sin because of someone else is, 'well that isn't fair, why is this state visited onto me when it wasn't me that did anything?' It is a difficult question, but I think the answer to this question is something like this: If any of us were created first, created into this state of perfect unity with God, all of us would have done the same thing.

Beyond the two examples we just saw, there are several more texts in the Scriptures that support this. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). And, *All of us have wandered about like sheep; we each have turned to their own way; and the Lord let fall on him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:6). And, *Just as it is written, 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside together; they have become worthless; There is no one who practices kindness; there is not even one'* (Romans 3:10-12).

To return to the question about why humanity was bound this way, I personally feel that the Lord didn't want other people to experience the cataclysm

that Adam and Eve went through. After Adam and Eve fell, the Lord reversed the process of humanity's relationship with him. Instead of creating people in the flawless state, all people were going to begin their life in the complete separation of sin, and God was going to raise them back toward the state of perfect grace. In this way we all learn about both good and evil, we choose what is good and we grow in God. This idea really gives some context to what Paul said in Romans 11:32. Everyone was confined to sin as both an act of mercy and to offer a foundation on which God would build his relationship with humanity. This is ultimately what the salvation process represents. A restoration of relationship and path back to original perfection.

God offers this path of salvation, which hinges on the sacrifice of Jesus. It was his life, death, and resurrection that makes salvation possible for you, and I and everyone else. Christ was the fulfillment of the Jewish Law, and according to the Jewish Law it is the blood upon the altar which makes atonement for sin. In Leviticus 17:11 we read *Indeed the flesh's life is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives, because it is the blood with the life that makes atonement.*

This was still the understanding of the New Testament writers as well. Hebrews 9:22 reads *Indeed, nearly everything is purified with blood according to the law, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* And again, in Romans, Paul writes *But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Therefore, by much more, because we have been declared righteous now by his blood, we will be saved through him from the wrath* (Romans 5:8-9).

The offer of salvation is a gift of love to us. A love which understands the predicament of humanity and reveals God's desire to know and commune with us. A chance given to us to walk with God, and for God to walk with us. It is God's desire to make sure that futility and death aren't all we experience in our creation. Salvation isn't a get out of hell card, but an invitation to participate with God into the fullness of our creation.

The offer is there, but there must be an initiative on our part to participate. We just have to respond to this love and initiate the rebirth into the life with God. We're going to look at that now. This is not meant to be an academic checklist to follow, but Scripture references to help us open up and participate in a genuine way.

The first step is to acknowledge to yourself and to the Lord the separation that exists due to sin. A genuine desire to see this resolved is the basis for participating in salvation. Luke 13:3-5 reads, *"No, I tell you, but unless you repent*

*you will all perish as well! Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them – do you think that they were sinners worse than all the people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all perish as well!”* This acknowledgement and turning to the Lord, rather than a continuing to turn away and hide from the Lord, charts the course for us.

The second step is to believe with your heart. Believe in your heart for the Lord to be a part of your life. *For with the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation* (Romans 10:10). The human heart has the capacity to believe while the human mind only has the capacity to agree. It is the heart that matters for us as it is the part of our creation designed to relate to God.

The third step (as seen above) is to confess a desire for forgiveness and restoration to the Lord. I John 1:9 reads *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, so that he will forgive our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* While it is common to confess sins to priests, or pastors or to another believer it is ok to just confess it out loud to yourself and to the Lord. We believe with our heart, and confess with our mouth.

Next, we accept Christ as he is, the source of our salvation. *But as many as received him – to those who believe in his name – he gave them authority to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a husband, but of God* (John 1:12-13). This is more than the acceptance that Jesus existed 2000 years ago, but accepting the reality of Jesus now as a part of your life.

Finally, just come to the Lord. Open yourself to share your life with him. Be ready for the newness of life that comes with his presence dwelling within your heart. *Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and the one who comes to me, I will never throw out* (John 6:37).

That's it. It is something so simple, but it takes courage to come out from hiding and ask the Lord. It is a big step to recognize that something is not right, hold the desire for remedy and have the courage to take the step. Confess this to yourself, the Lord, and perhaps someone else if you'd like. Believe in your heart and receive Jesus as your source of salvation. Finally, just come and be a part of the family. It is so simple. Like little children we can come unto him. But as we saw in the story of Adam and Eve, fear of what might happen can drive us to hide – to withdraw and remain separate. But it is always safe to turn to the Lord. It is the turning away from the Lord that is not.

*Lord, I ask for courage for these who would join your family. Courage to set aside fear and doubt and with a fullness of heart receive you to be their salvation. I ask that your presence bring them peace and hope and joy. And that you raise them up in the newness of your life, now, and forever. Amen*

## Jesus Christ, Our Savior

Isaiah 53

John 6

In the last article we explored the topic of salvation. We looked at why it was necessary, the events that took place in order for God to offer it, and the steps of our will, taken by faith, to participate in it. We saw how it was Jesus Christ, who was the sacrificial lamb whose blood and body were offered upon the altar of the cross, in accordance with the will of the Father, that opened the door to the hope and healing of salvation. But unlike every other sacrifice upon the altar, Christ was raised again, taking his place at the right hand of the Father. He lives again and is infinitely more than a static offering of the past.

The next two lessons are going to focus on who he is now, the roles he fulfilled at the sacrifice and some of the roles he fulfills since that sacrifice took place. We're not going to look at the humanity of Christ, but the spiritual relationships that exist between him and humanity. These spiritual relationships are the basis for our understanding of who he is now, and the basis for how we are to relate to him now. When we appropriately relate to him, the door opens to the depth of knowledge that he reveals to us of himself. The New Testament constantly points to the centrality of Christ in the life of a believer, so it is important for us have a good foundation of how to relate to him in our heart. The two main readings are Isaiah chapter 53, which is a chapter of prophecy for Jesus, as well as John chapter 6, where Jesus talks about himself.

I think it is important for us to understand that Christ is the perfect expression of the will of the Father. He is the perfect servant of God, whose life and roles assigned to him by the Father He willingly accepted. Christ embraced the roles given to him fully, seeking only to be the expression of the will of God. We can see several references where Christ tells others that the motive of his heart was to express the will of the Father. *Jesus said to them, "My food is that I do the will of the one who sent me and complete his work"* (John 4:34). Again, in John 5:19. *So, Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing*



*from himself except what he sees the Father doing. For whatever that one does, these things also the Son does likewise.”* And, in a third example, we see a prayer that Jesus prayed. *“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, deliver me from this hour?’ But for this reason I have come to this hour! Father, glorify your name!”* Then a voice came from heaven, *“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again”* (John 12:27-28). During his life on Earth, Jesus’s desire was to set aside anything he could have done at his own ambition to seek and to express the will of God. It is important to consider this as we move forward because his motives are trustworthy and dependable.

Now we’re going to look at some of the different roles that Jesus plays according to the will of the Father. First, we’ll look at some of the Scriptural references of his role during his life on Earth, and in a bit, we’ll look at some of what his current roles are. There will be more of these in the next article.

As indicated already, Jesus came down from heaven to Earth to be our Savior. As the hinge point of the Father’s salvation gift, Christ willingly left heaven to be born of a virgin, live a life as a Jewish man in Palestine, and to give his life as the sacrificial lamb for humanity. From the moment of his birth, this was his path. It was part of his announcement by angels. *And there were shepherds in the same region, living out of doors and keeping watch, guarding over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring good news to you of great joy which will be for all the people: that today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born for you in the city of David”* (Luke 2:8-11). From the moment of his birth, Christ was part of the plan of God. He was sent to fulfill the will of the Father and become the Savior of the world.

During his ministry Jesus also indicated he knew this was his role. *“For God did not send his Son into the world in order that he should judge the world, but in order that the world should be saved through him”* (John 3:17). Jesus was well aware of who he was in the plan of God, and he was an invested participant in the plan.

The role of Christ as Savior was an accepted part of early church thought as well. In the first letter to Timothy we read, *This saying is trustworthy and worthy of all acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost* (1 Tim 1:15). In the letter to the Hebrews, in reference to Christ we are told that Christ can completely save those that come unto him. *Therefore, also he is able to save completely those who draw near to God through him* (Hebrews 7:25a).

Jesus is the responsible party to save us, if we believe in him to do so. Salvation is not a doctrine or the result of any religious ritual. Salvation is accomplished through our belief for salvation in a person - the only Son of the Most High God. We believe in him to save us through the gift of his life indwelling us.

Another main role Christ fulfilled in the plan of salvation was as the sin-bearing substitute for all people. This references the act of sacrifice he went through, offering himself as the sacrificial lamb according to the Jewish Law. Throughout the Old Testament, sacrifices were made upon altars of God in order to atone for the sins of the people. We saw last time how it is the blood upon the altar that allows forgiveness of sins. This practice of ritually sacrificing animals for the atonement for sin was still going on during Jesus's ministry. The story of Jesus cleansing the temple in John 2:14-17 tells of him driving out the oxen, sheep and doves, which were being sold as sacrificial animals.

In a very real way, Jesus was sacrificed on our behalf. We have a couple of references to this in 1 Peter. *Who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we may die to sins and live to righteousness, by whose wounds you were healed* (1 Peter 2:24). And again in 1 Peter 3:18; *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, in order that he could bring you to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.* Another good example in Hebrews 9:28. *Thus also Christ, having been offered once in order to bear the sins of many, will appear for the second time without reference to sin to those who eagerly await him for salvation.*

We can see this role of sacrificial substitute was prophesied for Christ in Isaiah 53:5-6. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his wounds we were healed. All of us have wandered about like sheep; we each have turned to our own way; and the Lord God let fall on him the iniquity of us all.* From these passages we can see the gift. Christ as a willing sacrifice, who was our sin bearing substitute and Savior. This groundwork for salvation was laid in accordance to Judaic Law.

After his resurrection and ascension more roles were given to Jesus to aid us in the salvation process. It is important for us to understand that salvation is both the initial moment where we believe in Jesus and his life indwells us, and the process by which all aspects of our creation are healed and restored. Everything about us is restored. Our spirit, soul and body are all a part of the restorative salvation process. We read in Matthew 5:48, *Therefore you be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.* This ultimate goal of salvation is why we can read in Hebrews that *He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through*

*him, because he always lives in order to intercede on their behalf.* Complete salvation is a process that we go through with God. We also see Paul telling the Philippians this. *Therefore my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For the one at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure is God* (Philippians 2:12). Salvation is the initial indwelling, but it is also a process we go through with God.

Christ plays a major role in this process in our life in various ways, and we'll look at a few of those ways now. First, we saw in Hebrews 7:25 that Christ is able to save us completely because he always lives to intercede on our behalf. Christ intercedes to the Father on our behalf at all times. He wants us to find restoration. He wants us to have abundant life within us. His heart is set to help us on the path, and the Father always hears the prayers of the Son. *"Father, I give thanks to you that you hear me. And I know that you always hear me, but for the sake of the crowd standing around I said it, so that they may believe that you sent me"* (John 11:41-42).

A second way that Christ aids in our process is that he has the capacity to bear our burdens. Paul wrote to the Romans, *but we who are strong ought to carry the weakness of the weak, and not to please ourselves* (Romans 15:1). This teaching emulates what Christ himself does. Jesus said, *"Come to me, all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to carry and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

We all carry burdens within us. Sometimes we notice them, and sometimes we've become so acclimated to carrying them we don't even recognize that we are weighed down by them. Christ not only shares in the bearing of them, but also works in us awareness of how to set them aside or be healed from them. Jesus gives himself fully to aid in the salvation process for each of us.

A third role that Jesus fulfills in our lives is that of our foundation. His presence in us becomes our stability and foundation in a life that is full of spiritually erosive forces. *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise person who built their house on the rock. And the rain came down and the rivers came and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it did not collapse, because its foundation was laid on the rock"* (Matthew 7:24-25). Paul referenced how he participated with God to lay this foundation in the Corinthian church. *For no one is able to lay another foundation than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:11). Christ's presence in us grows in us as we

participate with him to move from our spiritual birth into spiritual maturity. Teachings which are alive by the Spirit are those which minister the life of Christ to others, helping to lay that same foundation within them.

A fourth role of Jesus is as the sustenance for our spirit. Our spirit has the capacity to absorb more of the life of Christ into us, and he is the only source of healthy spiritual food for us. Jesus said *“I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty again”* (John 6:35). Peter references this need for believers to feed themselves on spiritually pure food – the word of Christ which is unadulterated, meaning pure or uncontaminated. *Like newborn infants, long for the unadulterated spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up to salvation* (1 Peter 2:2). Milk, bread, mana and meat are referenced in the New Testament as metaphors for the life-giving teachings that were presented to believers; milk being the types of teachings which are suited for new, or spiritually immature believers.

One of the challenges that all believers face is the needed change of their spiritual diet. We sometimes have to learn to like that which is actually good for us. If we’ve come to like our spiritual food being fried and sugar-coated, the healthy food of the Lord probably sits a bit differently. But what we feed ourselves on is our choice. Peter indicates that learning to long for this pure and life-giving food is necessary for our salvation process to progress. We want to feed on that which is healthy.

A final role that we’ll look at in this article is that Christ is our only source of truth. Jesus said *I am the way, the truth, and the life*. This will come up again later in much greater detail when we talk about discernment, but he is our compass, navigating us through a world where spiritual realities can be quite different from appearances. We saw an example of this in the interactions of Jesus with the Pharisees of his day, as depicted in the Gospel of Matthew.

While these religious leaders’ appearance and presentation would lead one to believe they were the holy, Godly and pious people, worthy of honor and emulation, Christ referred to them as vipers, sons of hell and whitewashed tombs. He warned others to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, as a contagion that could lead people astray. This misrepresenting of good and evil is rooted in deceit. Just as evil was portrayed by the serpent as something good during the narrative of the fall, so also can people misrepresent themselves and God for their own ends. Spiritual realities exist all around us, but when we identify with Christ as the source of truth in our life, our insight and choices reflect truth rather than presentation.

That is going to conclude the examination of Jesus as Savior. He fills multiple roles and ways of impacting our salvation process. Savior; sin-bearing substitute; intercessor; burden-bearer; foundation; sustenance for our spirit; and truth. All of these roles are so necessary for us. And this list will be expanded on next time. But these roles are key for how we relate to Christ. They are the basis for relating to him. Jesus will honor our initiative to relate to him in these ways, fulfilling his promise to be what we need in the salvation process.

Paul wrote *So then, from now on we know no one from a human point of view, if indeed we have known Christ from a human point of view, but now we know him this way no longer* (2 Corinthians 5:16). There is a reason why we don't know much about the humanity of Jesus from the Bible, and it is because relating to him in this way isn't the way the Father wants us to relate to him. Relating to him in the defined spiritual ways is the will of the Father, and we'll find that it is a much more productive and healthy relationship.

*Father, we desire to abide by your will in the ways we relate to your Son. Grant us the understanding and the faith to set this foundation right in our hearts so that we can participate fully with your Son in the gift of salvation.*

## Jesus Christ, Our Risen Lord

John 20 and 21

1 Corinthians 15

Hello again, my friends. There is more to discuss related to Jesus Christ and his role in our lives, expanding on what we've looked at thus far. This is the third lesson to lay that foundation of who Jesus is, and while we've spent time looking at his role as Savior, this time we're going to look at his role of Lord - Lord of all.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Peter told the masses at Pentecost that Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God, and throughout the New Testament, Jesus is most commonly referred to as 'Lord'. The word is used around 700 times, compared to under 30 uses of 'savior.' We're going to look at what this ascension means, why it happened, and what it means for us. Two good passages in the New Testament for longer readings on this are John chapters 20 and 21, as well as 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Each of the gospels has an account of Jesus's resurrection, but we're looking at John's account here. 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 is an explanation of what this resurrection means for believers.

We talked about some of the roles that Jesus fulfills for humanity at large and for believers. He is the only one given these roles in all of creation, and he is the only one who is able to fulfill them. We may think we want his job, but, eh, we don't. He is much, much better at it than we'd ever be, and this article is about his highest role. We'll see that Jesus as Lord of heaven and earth is the fulfillment of the authority of God resting upon him. The resurrection of Christ was a witness to this ascension to the right hand of God. It is his identity, and the most important identity we can accept as we learn to relate to him. The kingdom of God is his kingdom, and if we want to be a part of that kingdom we need to learn to identify with him according to his role in the kingdom.

As we mentioned before, Jesus was aware of his path before his public ministry and the Passion events transpired in his life. He was a willing and dedicated participant in those events, living out the example of what it means to be dedicated to manifesting the will of God, despite what it would mean for his life. There are some examples of Jesus speaking of this awareness during his ministry. The first one we'll look at is in Mark chapter 8. *And he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and after three days to rise* (Mark 8:31).

Here is a second example from Mark. In speaking to the twelve, he told them *"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise"* (Mark 10:33-34).

A third example, though more veiled at the time it was spoken, was in the account of the cleansing of the temple in John chapter 2. After Jesus makes a mess of the money changers and ran the animals out, people demanded a sign from him to indicate his right to do it. Jesus answered them, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up!"* Then the Jews said, *"This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?"* But he was speaking about the temple of his body. So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the saying that Jesus had spoken (John 2:18-22).

The Lord had made clear, particularly to the disciples, that this sequence of events was coming. And yet, it was hard for even the disciples to believe and understand what was happening. At one point, Peter rebukes Jesus for saying he would be executed, and Jesus corrected him for encouraging him to withdraw from

the will of God (Matthew 16:23). Peter was looking at the situation from a human perspective. After all, death is pretty permanent for most people and it was hard for him to believe that God had this in mind for Jesus. But the Father wanted them to believe in Jesus, and so he gave a lot of supporting evidence after the resurrection occurred that confirmed for them that Jesus had fulfilled the plan of God. Let's look at some of these.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, when the tomb of Christ is approached, they are greeted by an empty tomb and by angels who confirm to them what had taken place. Taking Matthew 28:5-7 as an example, we read *But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, just as he said. Come, see the place where he was lying. And go quickly, tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and behold, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there.'"* Mark and Luke have very similar accounts. In the same way that his birth was announced, so also his resurrection was announced by angels. God was confirming to the early followers of Christ that Jesus had been obedient throughout all the events of his life, and now God was going to set him at his right hand as Lord over all things.

After the testimony of the angels, the Lord began to appear to his disciples to give them hope and set them on the courses the Father had for them. We'll see an example from John 20, but there are accounts in all of the gospels. *Now when it was evening on that day – the first day of the week – and the doors had been shut where the disciples were because of fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace to you." And when he had said this, he showed his hands and his side to them. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord...* (John 20:19-20).

It was a life changing moment for them. However, Thomas was not with the group for some reason, and the gospel account has Thomas refusing to believe that Jesus was raised unless he puts his hand into the injuries of Jesus's body. While this account paints Thomas as being more unbelieving than the others, Jesus honors the request, appearing again to the disciples when Thomas was with them, eight days later. *Then he said to Thomas, "Place your finger here and see my hands, and place your hand and put it into my side. And do not be unbelieving, but believing!" Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"* (John 20:27-29).

It is lovely to see this. Thomas had integrity to him. He was not about to confess something he didn't genuinely believe, and his story is not unlike the one in Mark 9. This recounts the story of a father of a child possessed by the mute and deaf spirit who wants to believe that Jesus can heal his child. The father also recognizes unbelief present within himself and asks the Lord to help his unbelief. Thomas struggled, but the Lord helped his unbelief and he was able to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and he went on to fulfill the apostleship he was called to.

As another example attesting to the Lordship of Jesus, Peter, when speaking at the house of Cornelius, tells those present that he and the others were chosen to be witnesses of what God had done for Jesus. *And we are witnesses of all the things that he did both in the land of the Judeans and in Jerusalem, whom they also executed by hanging him on a tree. God raised this one up on the third day and granted that he should become visible, not to all the people, but to us, who had been chosen before God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify solemnly that this one is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To this one all the prophets testify, that through his name everyone who believe in him receives forgiveness of sins* (Acts 10:39-43). Peter and others were commissioned to proclaim that Jesus was exalted by the Father.

As final example, Paul tells the Corinthian church about his own commission to testify. *And that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, the majority of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as it were to one born at the wrong time, he appeared also to me* (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

All of these believers testified to the resurrection of Jesus and what the resurrection meant. In a fun little discourse in Acts 25, Festus, the Roman procurator, was trying to sum up the case to King Agrippa which was being made against Paul by the Jews. He put it so simply. He said, *When they stood up, his accusers bringing no charge concerning him of the evil deeds I was suspecting, but they had some issues with him concerning their own religion, and concerning a certain Jesus, who was dead, who Paul claimed to be alive* (Acts 25:18-19). The believers were commissioned to proclaim that Jesus was not dead, but alive and set as Lord. God had raised him up, and just as the parable of the minas in Luke 19 speaks of the faithful servants commissioned to rule after their faithfulness was proven, so also was Christ. Let's look at some additional passages that testify of the resurrected Lord.



We have very clear testimony of this from Paul, in Philippians 2:9-11. *Therefore also God exalted him and graciously granted him the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on the earth and of those under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* There is no one set in a higher position than Jesus.

Another example is from the letter to the Ephesians, where Paul, again, lays out the importance of this identity. *And what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty strength which he has worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly places, above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name named, not only in this age but also in the coming one, and he subjected all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church* (Ephesians 1:19-22).

Paul knew the Lordship of Jesus. He recognized it, and he also recognized his own identity in relationship to Jesus. Jesus's position was established, and it was beyond questioning. The only question left for Paul was how would he relate to Christ. We see the answer to this in his letters, usually in the greeting. Paul identified himself as a bond-servant, or slave, to his Lord. The letter to the Philippians reads as such: *Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:1-2). Paul identifies himself as being at the command of Jesus. He chose to identify himself with Jesus on the terms that the Father established, and as a result was one of the most impactful people in history for the Lord's kingdom.

So, what have we learned? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was an indicator that Jesus had ascended to being Lord at the right hand of God – to be Lord over the kingdom of God, the church and of all creation. This realization was fundamental in the thinking of the early Christians, as Christ himself commissioned them to be witnesses of this.

These early believers identified themselves as servants/slaves of their Lord, a concept foreign to most people in this era of individualism and self-determination. Because of this culture and predominating thought, it is common to think of Jesus only as Savior, or as gatekeeper of our access to heaven. And while this is true, to relate to him in the will of God, the relationship with him should move into identifying him as Lord, and ourselves as servants at his command.

So often people tend to want to exploit God for what God can do for them, as there are Scriptures that indicate the blessings of God, particularly in the Old Testament. But the relationships in the New Testament much more align to Lord and servant relationships. It is the obedience of heart to the will of God that opens the door to walking with God and to the restoration of our being. It's why Jesus asked, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?*" (Luke 6:46).

People in this day and age have an acclimated resistance to having a genuine Lord in their life. So often we have an independent mindset and struggle with the idea of authority. It is what our society encourages, and it's what we've adopted as good practice. But as believers, a genuine surrender to the Lordship of Christ is the basis for a healthy relationship with him. It is the will of the Father that the Son is the Lord. It was the relationship of all the authors in the New Testament who knew him both before and after the Passion. It was something that was taught as others joined the growing movement. Here is something that Peter told the early believers: *But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense to anyone who asks you for an accounting concerning the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15). The Christian faith was never meant to be practiced on our terms, but on God's terms.

Like Thomas, many of us struggle with internal resistances. But if we are sincere, the Lord will reveal who he is to us, and help us overcome any fear, any unbelief or any resistance that may well up within us. Our hearts can willingly bend a knee to the Lord, like so many before us. I hold faith for us, that we each can take this step. I encourage you to make this a part of your prayers because this is how we come to participate in the family of God in the way that is authentic and sustainable in our lives. It makes all the difference in the world when we come to identify the shepherd as being our shepherd.

Alright, so that brings to a close the initial three lessons on who Jesus is and the roles he fulfills. Some of it may have been familiar to you, while some of it may have been things you've not heard about or thought about. One thing about the Scriptures is that the truths in them are pretty inexhaustible. Being a believer is to know and walk in the centrality of Christ. The Scriptures themselves were given, at least in part, to bring about the revelation and identity of Christ to people. Choosing to relate to him in appropriate ways moves us from the outskirts of the camp into the tabernacle within. We are able to be led out of confusion and into truth. *You search the Scriptures because you think that you have eternal life in them, and it is these that testify about me* (John 5:39).

As we become living epistles we are read and known of all people (2 Corinthians 3:2). We too reveal Christ to others in our spirit, our nature, our word and our deed. The revelation of Christ is written on the tablets of our hearts and this light shines in the world.

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