

Deal Pentecostal Church Training School

Reference Material

Study 3 Jesus

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The Life Of Christ

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The life of Christ

In the introductory chapter we considered the importance of knowing what we believe and why we believe it. Then we saw why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. In the last chapter we examined the nature of God and saw that he has revealed himself as one being in three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We now turn our attention to the birth, life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, who became flesh and lived for a while among us (John 1:14).

His virgin birth

The Bible teaches that the entry of Jesus Christ into this world was quite different from that of any other human being, for in his conception and birth, as well as in his life and death, he is unique among men.

Despite the arguments of those who refuse to believe God's word, those who accept the authority of scripture will find no difficulty in accepting the plain biblical teaching of the virgin birth. The prophet Isaiah declared that a virgin would conceive and would bear a son whose name would be Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). The Holy Spirit tells us in Matthew 1:23 that this prophecy was fulfilled at the birth of Christ, and although some translate the word virgin as young woman, it is quite clear from the passages in Matthew and Luke that the word is to be taken literally.

Mary herself could not understand how she could possibly bear a child, for as she herself declared, I am a virgin (Luke 1:34). To this the angel replied that the Holy Spirit would

come upon her and that therefore her child would be the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Matthew 1:18 clearly states that Mary was with child through the Holy Spirit before Mary and Joseph came together and in verse 25 Joseph had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.

It is interesting to notice, incidentally, that Mary did not remain a virgin, as some teach. This verse makes it quite clear that after the birth of Jesus Mary and Joseph lived a normal married life and that Mary had other children. Mark 6:3 confirms that Jesus had brothers and sisters and names James, Joses, Juda and Simon. These other children were conceived in the normal way, having Mary as their mother and Joseph as their father.

Jesus, however, was the Son of God and was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. This is not only perfectly reasonable, for with God all things are possible, but it is also completely logical, for how else could Jesus be both Son of God and Son of Man? He was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4) but he is the man from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47). By his miraculous conception Christ partook of human nature without receiving the corruption of human nature. He was the last Adam who succeeded where Adam failed.

His sinless life

The purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was that he might save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). To do so he must be able to offer a perfect sacrifice for sin. He was to be the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and the lamb must be without defect (Exodus 12:5, Leviticus 9:3, 14:10). To bring the unrighteous to God, he himself must be righteous (1 Peter 3:18). It is by his righteousness and obedience that we are made righteous (Romans 5:18-19). If

Jesus had not lived a sinless life he could not have saved us from our sin.

But, thank God, he was sinless. He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). He was tempted in every way just as we are and yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He is holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). For this reason he is able to offer himself 'without defect' to God on our behalf, and because he never yielded to temptation and was always victorious over sin, he knows how to help us when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). By his sinless life he was able to offer a perfect sacrifice for sin. The sinless one bore our sins in his body on the cross in order that we might be free from sin's penalty and free from sin's power. His miraculous ministry

Yes, Jesus was unique: in parentage, for God was his Father; in purity, for his life was sinless; in power, for there was never a man like Jesus! Even the briefest glimpse at the Gospels is sufficient to show that Jesus was no ordinary man!

The purpose of his miracles

To deliver from danger Matthew 8:23-27

To provide for those in need Matthew 14:13-21 John 2:1-11

To teach a lesson on faith Matthew 21:18-22

To destroy the works of the devil Acts 10:38 John 3:8

To demonstrate God's love Matthew 14:14

To prove who he was Matthew 11:2-5 John 5:36

To convince those in doubt John 14:11

To draw people to himself John 6:2

To bring glory to God Matthew 15:30-31

After such a catalogue of mighty works we find it impossible to believe that anyone who takes the Gospels seriously can seriously doubt the miraculous ministry of the Lord Jesus

Christ. Remove the miraculous from the Gospels and there is little left! Indeed to remove the miraculous is to remove Christianity, for our faith is founded on the greatest miracle of all — the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and without that our faith is pointless (1 Corinthians 15:17). But Christ is alive. The proof of his miraculous ministry lies not only in the historical evidence of the Gospels themselves, but in the living experience of millions who have discovered in our own day and generation that he still works miracles for those who believe in his name (John 14:12, Mark 16:16- 18).

His Substitutionary Death

In the last chapter we examined the subject of the life of the Lord Jesus. Now we must consider the importance of his death. It is interesting to notice that although the life of our Lord here on earth lasted for more than 30 years, it is on the week of his death that the Gospel writers focus their attention. Of the 89 chapters of the Gospels, no fewer than 30 (i.e. over one third) centre around the death of Christ. In fact, the cross is central not only to the New Testament, but to the whole Bible. The Old Testament looks forward to it. The New Testament looks back. The gospel by which we are saved is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

When we refer to Christ's death on the cross for our sins, we sometimes use the word atonement. We believe in the substitutionary, atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is the importance of the atonement that we shall be considering in this chapter.

The meaning of atonement

The word atonement is best understood if we break it into three parts: at-one-ment. This is the root Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word. To atone is to make at one. The death

of Christ is an atoning death because it makes sinners at one with God.

The need for atonement

The Bible teaches that it is our sins that have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). We can only be brought back to God if our sins are dealt with. No one is excluded from this, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Again and again the Bible makes this clear. There is no one who does not sin (I Kings 8:46). There is no one who does good, no not one (Psalm 14:3). There is not a righteous man on the earth who does what is right and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20). No one is good except God (Mark 10: 18). If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). No wonder Paul could say, *The whole world is a prisoner to sin (Gal.3:22)*.

But the Bible does not only teach us that all have sinned. It warns us of the seriousness of sin. Sin is an offence to God who is holy. His eyes are too pure to look on evil (Habakkuk 1:13). He simply will not tolerate sin. Consequently sin separates us from God. Our sins have hidden his face from us (Isaiah 59:2) for The Lord is far from the wicked (Proverbs 15:29).

Unless our sins are dealt with, our separation from God will be eternal. Jesus himself talked about hell fire (Matthew 5:22), outer darkness (Matthew 8:12), and eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). Paul tells us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and that the wrath of God is coming (Colossians 3:6).

The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished with everlasting destruction,

and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Sin is serious. It separates from God. There is nothing we can do about it. We cannot hide it, for our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23). We cannot cleanse ourselves from it. We cannot even make up for it by trying to do good. This is the fundamental mistake so many make, but the scriptures clearly tell us that no one can be righteous in God's sight by keeping the law (Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16). We have all sinned. We are all separated from God. There is nothing we can do. We all need a Saviour.

The means of atonement

When God first revealed to man the need for atonement, he made the means of atonement quite clear. It is the blood that makes atonement (Leviticus 17:11). This is not just an Old Testament principle. It is carried over into the New. It is eternally valid. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). And this is why Christ died. This is why he shed his blood. He made peace through the blood of his cross in order to reconcile us sinners to God (Colossians 1:20). He did this by offering himself as a sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2). He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). This was the purpose of his death. He bore our sins in his own body on the cross (I Peter 2:24).

But his death was not only sacrificial. It was also substitutionary. Christ died for us. His death counts as our death. He died in our place. Because of our sin, we should die. Instead, Christ has died for us. He was wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5). He suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). We deserved to die because of our sin, but because he

loved us, he came and died in our place, as our substitute, that we might live. All that he requires of us is that we repent and believe.

The results of the atonement

By his atoning death upon the cross of Calvary, Jesus has made the way open for every sinner to come to God. He died for all. He has no favourites. There is no respect of persons with God. Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. The offer of God's forgiveness is open to all, but it is only received by those who accept it in repentance and faith. Those who will not repent will perish (Luke 13:5), for Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6).

But to those who have accepted his offer of mercy amazing privileges are given. Our sins are forgiven. God's wrath is removed. We are no longer his enemies (Romans 5:10). He declares us righteous - looks on us as though we had never sinned at all! Amazing grace! We are adopted into his family. We already have the rights of sons (Galatians 4:4-7), but there's more to come!

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

...Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is! (1 John 3:1-2).

What a glorious destiny! And all because Jesus died for us

His Bodily Resurrection

We have already considered in an earlier chapter why we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Having agreed that this is so, it is hardly necessary to ask the question, Did Christ rise from the dead? as the Gospel records make it quite clear that he did. In this chapter, however, we shall

attempt to show, even to the person who does not accept the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture, that it is reasonable to believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scriptural evidence

The New Testament teaches that there were at least ten separate occasions on which the Lord Jesus appeared to his disciples in bodily form. The order of events seems to have been as follows:

On the first day

- To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18)
- To women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:8-10)
- To Peter (Luke 24:34, I Corinthians 15:5)
- To the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13-35)
- To the disciples - Thomas absent (Mark 16:14, Luke 24:33-39, John 20:19-23)

A week later

- To the disciples — Thomas present (John 20:26-29)

On subsequent occasions

- To seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
- To the eleven and others on a Galilean mountain (Matt.28:16-18, 1 Corinthians 15:6)
- To James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- To the eleven (Mark 16:14-19, Luke 24:50-52).

Opponents of Christianity have argued that the accounts in each of the four Gospels are so different that they cannot possibly all be true. However, although the exact order of events as they took place on resurrection morning is difficult to follow, various solutions have been suggested. The Schofield Reference Bible, for example, offers the following explanation:

"Three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome, start for the sepulchre, followed by other women bearing spices. The three find the stone rolled away and Mary Magdalene goes to tell the disciples. Salome and Mary the mother of James and Joses draw nearer the tomb and see the angel of the Lord, and go back to meet the women with the spices. Meanwhile, Peter and John, warned by Mary Magdalene of the empty tomb, arrive, look in and go away. Mary Magdalene returns with them, but remains weeping, sees two angels, and then Jesus, and goes as he told her to tell the disciples. Meanwhile, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome have met the women with the spices, and returning with them they see two angels. They also receive the angelic message, and going to seek the disciples are met by Jesus".

This attempt to harmonise the Gospel accounts may or may not be correct, but at least it shows that harmonisation is possible. Whatever we may make of the order of events and appearances, one thing is abundantly plain. The Gospel writers are all agreed that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. But how historical is this evidence as far as the sceptic is concerned?

Historical evidence (apart from the scriptures)

Even for those who do not accept the divine inspiration of the Gospel records, the evidence from the historical standpoint is extremely strong. Those who wish to study this at some length should read *Who Moved the Stone* by Frank Morison, the story of a man who set out to prove that Christ did not rise from the dead, but who, upon examining the evidence, became convinced that he did! A shorter work is the booklet by Professor J.N.D. Anderson entitled *The Evidence for the Resurrection* in which the author informs us that the New Testament documents are reliable. With reference to the resurrection accounts in 1 Corinthians, Mark and Luke, he states that

There is scarcely a scholar who has doubted the genuineness of 1 Corinthians, and its date is generally accepted as about 56AD. Some modern scholars believe that an Aramaic version (of Mark) was in existence as early as 44AD.

Not only have the third Gospel and Acts been widely accepted as the genuine composition of Luke, the beloved physician, but Sir William Ramsay and others have shown us what a minutely accurate historian he was.

We see, then, that the Gospel records are historically as reliable as any others, even when we discount our own view of divine inspiration. What then are the arguments of those who disbelieve and how can we answer them?

Arguments and answers

First, there are those who tell us that the whole story was a deliberate invention. But in 56AD Paul told the Corinthians that the majority of over 500 people who saw the risen Christ were still alive. Were they all deceivers? The Christian faith has given the world the highest moral and ethical teaching it has ever known. Can this have begun with a lie? The suggestion that the story of the resurrection was a deliberate invention on the part of the disciples is utterly unthinkable, as is the equally absurd suggestion that the disciples stole the body. Most of the first disciples were eventually put to death for preaching the resurrection. If they knew it were untrue, wouldn't they have owned up and saved their lives?

Then there are those who have suggested that the women mistook the tomb. They went to anoint the body of Jesus, but went to the wrong tomb, and so assumed that he had risen! But if this were so, why did the Jewish priests accuse the disciples of stealing the body? Why did they not simply point out the right tomb?!

Others maintain that Jesus was not really dead. He appeared to die on the cross, but recovered in the tomb and presumably walked out! But could a man who had suffered the agony of crucifixion have survived for three days without food, water, or medical attention and then have been strong enough to move a stone that three women felt unable to tackle, and to walk for miles on nail-pierced feet? It is easier to believe in the resurrection! Besides, this theory also involves Christ in gross deception, which is inconsistent with the character he is described as possessing in the Gospels. Lastly, there have been those who have suggested that the resurrection was in fact a psychological hallucination. But those who know anything about such phenomena will admit that the resurrection appearances of our Lord cannot be explained in these terms. Only certain types of people are susceptible to hallucination. Were the 500 witnesses all of the same type? Further, it is a recognised fact of psychiatry that two people seldom, if ever, suffer from the same hallucination, and such experiences are usually recurrent over a long period of time (not just for a period of 40 days). And were the founders of the world's greatest religion all mentally disturbed?

As we look at the alternative 'explanations' of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, we are drawn to the inevitable conclusion that some people will believe anything rather than believe that a man could rise from the dead. But this was no ordinary man! His life was unique. His teaching was unique. His miracles were unique. There was never a man like this man! Did he not say that he would rise from the dead? If he really was who he claimed to be, would we not expect him to conquer death itself? To those of us who accept him as our Saviour, our Lord and our God, there is no difficulty

whatever in believing in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to accept his resurrection are those who refuse to accept his Lordship!

For Christians, however, there is evidence not only from the scriptures, but also from our own experience. We experience the power of Christ's name in prayer, the confirmation of Christ's word in evangelism, and the effects of Christ's gospel in life-transforming power. In the words of an old hymn:

You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

His Triumphant Ascension

The triumphant ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a sadly neglected subject. Every year at Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Sunday we remember his birth, death and resurrection, but little attention is paid to 'Ascension Day', the sixth Thursday after Easter. And yet the ascension of our Lord is of great importance to us as Christians. In fact, Carl Brumback has claimed that, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not ascended,

- The infallible proof of the incarnation would be lost
- His sacrificial death on Calvary would have been in vain
- Access into the presence of God would be denied to all
- It would be impossible to be saved
- None would be indwelt or infilled by the Holy Spirit
- We would have no advocate with the Father
- The Church would be bereft of its blessed hope.

When the disciples stood on the hill called Olivet, just three-quarters of a mile from the city of Jerusalem, they listened with eager interest as Jesus told them about the power of the Holy Spirit which was shortly to come upon them. And while they were still looking at him, He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight (Acts 1:9-11).

So ended the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. He had returned to his Father. His disciples were to see him no more. He had ascended into heaven. Few Christians have realised the tremendous significance of this momentous event, yet as Brumback points out, without the ascension, Christianity is meaningless. To help our understanding of the importance of this great subject, we will consider briefly eight aspects of the ascension:

Jesus demonstrated his deity

In John 6:41-42 Jesus claimed quite clearly that he had come from heaven. The Jews understandably found such a claim extremely difficult to believe. Jesus replied that the evidence that he had come from heaven was that he would one day be seen to return to heaven (v.62). The ascension is the final proof of the incarnation. If there had been any remaining doubt in the disciples' minds as to who he was, it was dispelled by the ascension. They had seen him go! Far above all principality and power and might and dominion! By his ascension Jesus demonstrated his deity.

He reclaimed his rights

When Jesus had left his Father's throne in heaven, the Bible tells us that he had emptied himself. He was essentially one with God and possessed all the attributes that make God God, but he voluntarily stripped himself of all his privileges and rightful dignity and assumed the place of a slave and was born as a human being (Philippians 2:6-7). He did this that he might come and die for us sinners. But having died for us, and having risen again the third day to demonstrate his power over death, he finally ascended forty days later. He returned to his Father and reclaimed his rights.

He had, of course, never ceased to be God. Even during the thirty three years of his life on earth as a man, he was still,

always, God. But he did not choose to draw upon the attributes of deity which as God he still possessed. His miracles were performed by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was completely man, yet completely God. The nature of his person will remain a mystery. Our human minds fail to grasp it. Yet this we know. He who was and is the creator and sustainer of all things, upholding all things by his powerful word, the eternal Lord of the universe, he in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, in whom all things consist, took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. He humbled himself and became obedient to the death of the cross. And for this reason, God has highly exalted him. He has ascended into heaven. He has reclaimed his rights. God has put all things under his feet. He is head over all things for the Church. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and he shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah! By his ascension, Jesus reclaimed his rights.

He assures us of access into heaven

Without the ascension, Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary would have been in vain. In the Old Testament

‘The supreme moment in the ministry of the High Priest was not at the altar but at the mercy-seat. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest became the representative of all the priests who had ministered at the altar throughout the year; the offering on that day was the one from which all other sin-offerings derived their efficacy; hence the ministry at the altar was an exceedingly solemn and sacred moment for the High Priest. But the high point of the great day came when he bore the blood of the sacrifice beyond the veil...

Until the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, there was no atonement, no remission of sins. For no matter how perfect

the sacrifice, the blood was not efficacious unless the High Priest took that blood within the veil¹ .

But, thank God, Jesus has ascended. By his own blood he has entered the Holy Place as our great High Priest (Hebrews 9:12) and because he has so entered, we too may have boldness to enter (Hebrews 10:19-22). By his ascension Jesus assured us of access to heaven.

He has poured out his Spirit

But our Lord's ascension to the right hand of the majesty on high is not only the basis on which we too may enter into the presence of God himself. It was the necessary prelude to Pentecost. The descent of the Spirit was dependent on the ascent of the Son. Jesus had said:

Unless I go away the Counsellor will not come to you. but if I go I will send him to you (John 16:7).

During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, for Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:39). But as a result of his ascension Jesus was glorified.

Peter, preaching to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, declared:

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

Because of his ascension Jesus has poured out his Spirit.

We have now considered four aspects of the ascension. These all relate to the past. They tell us what Christ has accomplished by his ascension. The remaining four aspects relate to the present and the future. Christ's ascension is not merely a fact of history. It is vitally relevant to us here and now.

¹ Brumback, op. cit. pp.69-70.

He acts as our advocate

We will discuss this subject more fully in the next chapter, but it is important to remember that it was because of the ascension that we have someone who speaks to the Father in our defence (1John 2:1). As our heavenly lawyer, Jesus defends us against the accusations of Satan, 'the accuser of the brethren'.

He sends out his servants

Ephesians 4:18-11 tells us that when Jesus ascended he *led captives in his train and gave gifts to men*. It is the ascended Christ who gives men and women to the Church who will equip others for works of service - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. As we work for him on earth we do it in the knowledge that he is at the right hand of God exalted in majesty and power! For more on this subject, see Chapter 17.

He prepares a place for his people

Another amazing aspect of the Lord's ascension is that he has gone to prepare a place for us. The exact details we do not know. We still see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is enough for the time being to know that we shall be where he is (John 14:3).

He awaits his advent

If I go, said Jesus, I will come again. He has gone, and he is coming. This was confirmed by the angels at his ascension: *Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:10-11).*

But that too is a subject for another chapter (see Chapter 8).

His Abiding Intercession

The heavenly ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is closely connected with the subject of his ascension into

heaven which we considered in our last chapter. It would be a mistake to imagine that when Jesus cried *It is finished* on the cross he had done all that he ever could do for his people. Certainly his work as a substitute and a sacrifice for our sins was complete. But his resurrection, ascension and glorification were in a very real sense for us and form an important part of our salvation. Romans 5:10 tells us that we are not only saved by his death on Calvary, but that he continues to save us by the power of his life. The Bible indicates three main ways in which he does so.

Christ is our mediator

By his death upon the cross the Lord Jesus Christ atoned for our sins. He bore on our behalf the punishment that our sins deserved. He paid the price of our redemption. By his death we are reconciled to God. Jesus died as our saviour, our substitute, our sin-bearer. Now he lives as our mediator. When two countries have been at war and cannot come to peace on agreeable terms, a representative from a third country, not involved in the fighting, will sometimes act as a 'go-between' or mediator between the two sides. We were God's enemies because of our sin, but Jesus has not only died to save us from sin's consequences, but lives to keep us in right relationship with God. 1 Timothy 2:5 tells us that there is one God, and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus. It is through Jesus and Jesus alone that we have access to the Father, for it is he alone who has died to save us and it is he alone who lives to keep us.

Christ is our intercessor

But Jesus does not only live to act as our mediator at God's right hand. He is also there as our intercessor. He is able to save completely those who come to God through him *because he always lives to intercede for them* (Hebrews 7:25). While he was

here on earth *he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7)*. Now he is in heaven Jesus is constantly praying for us! He has entered *into heaven itself now to appear for us in God's presence (Hebrews 9:24)*. Why is Jesus in the presence of God? *For us!* Why is he at God's right hand? *To intercede for us!* Of course he is there by virtue of his own sovereign right. He is at God's right hand because he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He is there because he rules the universe and because the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever! But he is also there *for us!*"

*He ever lives above
For me to intercede His all-redeeming love
His precious blood to plead
His blood atoned for all our race
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*The Father hears him pray
His dear Anointed One
He cannot turn away the presence of His Son
With confidence I now draw nigh
And 'Father, Abba, Father' cry.*

Christ is our advocate

As our mediator Jesus has brought about our reconciliation to God. As our intercessor he is constantly praying for us. As our advocate he defends us against the false accusations of Satan.

Peter tells us that our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Peter 5:8).

Revelation 12:10 suggests that his role is that of an accuser. It seems as though he is allowed to appear in the court of heaven as a kind of counsel for the prosecution.

With a little sanctified imagination let us picture the scene. The heavenly judge, the judge of all the earth, is seated upon his throne. The prisoner on trial is charged with transgressing the eternal law, the word of God. We tremble as we remember that like the prisoner, we too have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is appointed unto us once to die and after death, the judgment.

The prosecution begins his case. It is extremely lengthy, but clear and convincing. The prisoner's whole life seems under review. Sin after sin is listed - catalogues of transgressions! Surely the verdict must be guilty. At last the Prosecution brings his case to a conclusion. He insists that he has established the guilt of the prisoner. He reminds the judge of the eternal law: *The soul that sins shall surely die.* The prisoner trembles. The Prosecution demands the sentence of eternal death.

In desperation the prisoner turns to his advocate, the counsel for the defence. Our heavenly lawyer takes his stand before the judge. He acknowledges the prisoner's guilt. He does not seek to contest the charge brought against him. It is true that the prisoner is guilty. He deserves to die. Satan the accuser rubs his hands in glee — another victim!

But what is the defence saying? It is true that the prisoner is guilty, but his advocate demands his release! The punishment for the crimes of which he is guilty has already been taken. It has been borne by another. The advocate approaches the judge and kneels before him. He stretches out his arms and shows him his hands. The nail-prints are still visible. The price has been paid. The prisoner is free.

In horror Satan recoils from the sight. The nail-prints are the symbols of his greatest defeat. The accuser has been overcome once again by the blood of the Lamb

(Revelation 12:10-11). He quits the courts of heaven and returns to his appointed place.

The court is silent as the advocate speaks to the prisoner: Where is your accuser? Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. The prisoner is pardoned. He was demonstrably guilty and deserving of death, but he called upon the only advocate who could save him. No other defence is adequate against the accusations of the adversary. But, thank God, no other defence is necessary. We have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). His name is Jesus.

His Second Coming

So far we have considered the importance of doctrine, the authority of the Bible, the nature of the Godhead, the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, and the nature and purpose of his heavenly ministry. We must now turn our attention to an event which has yet to take place in world history - the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The fact of his coming

The Christian's certainty about the second coming of Christ is based upon the definite statements of the infallible word of God. The apostles and leaders of the early church taught very clearly that Christ would return. James tells us that *the Lord's coming is near (James 5:8)*. Peter assures his readers that *the day of the Lord will come (2 Peter 3:10)*. Jude declares *The Lord is coming (Jude 14)*. It is Paul, however, who gives us the details: *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet-call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16)*.

In the light of this glorious prospect, John, exiled on Patmos, cried *Amen, come Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20)*.

The apostles' certainty that Christ would return was undoubtedly based on three main facts. First, they were directed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they wrote the scriptures. Secondly, they remembered the promise of the angels at the ascension:

This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

They were sure he would come because they had seen him go. And thirdly, they were sure that Jesus was coming again because they had his personal promise that they would do so: *I am going to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me (John 14:2-3).*

On other occasions he had given them further details as to the nature and purpose of his return, telling them that *The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his holy angels (Matthew 16:27, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26)*. Christians may be quite sure that Jesus is coming. It is promised by the apostles, by the angels, and by Jesus himself.

The nature of his coming

There have been considerable differences of opinion among Bible-believing Christians as to the precise nature of the second coming of Christ. It is not possible within the scope of this book to enter into discussion upon the various points of view held by equally sincere evangelical Christians. It should be fairly safe to say, however, that there are certain facts about the return of our Lord which must be accepted if we are to be consistent in our belief in the authority of scripture.

The statement of the angels at the ascension (Acts 1:11) is sufficient evidence alone that the return of Christ will be personal, physical, and visible.

Jesus will return **personally** for it will be 'this same Jesus'. It will be 'the Lord himself who will descend from heaven (1Thess.4:16).

Jesus will return **physically**, for he is coming '*in the same way*' as they saw him go. He will descend with the same resurrection body with which they saw him ascend.

And Jesus will return **visibly**, for he will return '*in the same way as you have seen him go*'. The early disciples were privileged to see him go into heaven. How marvellous to consider that we may very well be among those who are privileged to see him return!

The purpose of his coming

Since the second coming has yet to take place, all that we know about it is what God has chosen to reveal in his word.

As we examine the New Testament there seem to be five main purposes of our Lord's return.

First, he is coming for his church. 1Thess.4:16-17 tells us that when the Lord returns

the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so we will be with the Lord for ever.

Jesus is coming in order that we might meet him and be with him for ever. Hallelujah!

Secondly, Jesus is coming for the destruction of death. In those majestic verses in 1Cor.15:51-57 Paul gives us another description of the events which will take place when the trumpet sounds. *Then, he says, the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory (v.54).*

Thirdly, Jesus is coming to judge the world. Those who have rejected him will be judged, for the Lord Jesus will be *revealed from heaven with his powerful angels in blazing fire. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our*

Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, shut out from the presence of the Lord and the majesty of his power (2Thess.1:7-9).

True Christians, of course, will not be judged for their sins. Our sins were judged at Calvary. It does seem, however, that there is to be a judgment for Christians which is related to reward for service (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Closely connected with the fact that Jesus is coming as judge is the glorious truth that he is coming as king. He is coming to reign (Revelation 20:4, 6). Paul tells us that Jesus must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). *The kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever (Revelation 11:15).*

Finally, Jesus is coming to make all things new. There will be no more death, no more sorrow, or crying, or any more pain; they will all have passed away (Revelation 21:4-5). There are to be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13). What a wonderful promise! What a blessed hope! Thank God, Jesus is coming!

Preparation for his coming

In the light of this divine revelation, the Bible tells us that we must be prepared. It is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put under his own authority (Acts 1:7). Jesus says that no one knows the day or hour when he will come again (Mark 13:32). The day of the Lord will be as unexpected as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). We do not need to know the time of his coming. But we do need to be ready.

In Matthew 24:42-51 Jesus warns us of the dangers of those who say, 'My master is staying away a long time'. In the next chapter he tells us that we are to be ready by keeping watch

(v.13). We are to be ready by making sure that we are using faithfully the talents which the Lord has entrusted to our care (Matthew 25:14-30). If we do, we may be sure that we too will hear the commendation of our Lord when he comes: *Well done, good and faithful servant come and share your master's happiness.* In the light of the unthinkable alternative (v.30), may God help us to be ready.

The Atonement: Biblical Teaching

Milne, Bruce, *Know the Truth*, Leicester, Inter Varsity Press, 1982. (Chapter 16. *The Person and Work of Christ: The Atonement: Biblical Teaching*, pp 150-163)

Atonement, the technical term for Christ's work, is one of the few Anglo-Saxon words in the theological vocabulary. It refers to the reconciliation of God and man, in particular the means whereby they are reconciled to one another, made at one.

Atonement in the Old Testament

Although it is admitted that we meet the same God in both Testaments, many suspect that while NT religion is grace (we are accepted on the basis of our response to Christ), OT religion is law (our acceptance with God depends on moral obedience). We need to begin, therefore, with the unambiguous assertion that in the OT salvation is as assuredly by the free grace and mercy of God as in the NT. The basis of Israel's relationship with God and of her hope of salvation lay in God's electing grace (Gn. 12:1-7; Ex. 3:6-10; Dt. 6:21-23; Is. 41:8f.), realized through the covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gn. 15:18; Ex. 6:6-8; Ps. 105:8-15,42-45; Is. 51:1-6; Ezk. 37:25f.; Lk. 1:32f.,54f.; Acts 13:17-23). This grace called for a response of faith or trust (Gn. 22:17f.; Ps. 33:16-20; Is. 31:1).

On this covenant basis the law came into effect as God's demand that his people live in accordance with his holy character (Ex. 20:1f.). Judaism, however, lost sight of this; the law itself became the dominant factor, leading to the legalism and self-righteousness of people such as the Pharisees, exposed by Jesus (Mt. 6:5f.; Lk. 18:9-14) and later by Paul (Rom. 3:19-22; Gal. 2:15f.; 3:10-14). This legalism was OT religion gone wrong, not the religion of the OT itself. There salvation and atonement are rooted not in the law but (as in the NT) in God's grace.

Similar accord with NT atonement teaching is expressed in the Jewish sacrificial system. The sacrifices were of several classes. Gift offerings expressed homage and thanksgiving (Dt. 33:10; Jdg. 6:21); burnt offerings most commonly concerned the community as a whole (Ex. 29:38-42; Nu. 28f.). Of particular significance for atonement were the sin and guilt offerings. These dealt with unintentional offences against God for which the worshipper sought pardon (Lv. 4 — 5). The most important were made on the annual Day of Atonement when the High Priest, on this occasion only, entered the Holy Place behind the veil with a blood sacrifice to make atonement for all the sins incurred by the people of Israel in the course of their worship (Lv. 16). The crucial aspect of the whole system was the shedding of blood in the death of a substitutionary victim.

These sacrifices inculcated an awareness of God's holiness and taught that breaches of God's will (infringements of his law) necessitated the death of a ritually clean substitute to secure reconciliation with God. When offered in obedient faith, regardless of any possible accrual of merit and with trust in God's mercy alone, the sacrifices brought appropriation of the covenant blessings. Here again, the OT clearly recognizes

that the sacrifices in themselves were quite unable to atone for sin (Ho. 6:6; Mi. 6:6-8). Psalm 51 is particularly eloquent in this respect; moral guilt cannot be blotted out by sacrifices (v.16) but only by God's free grace (v.1) in response to the heart repentance of the psalmist (v.17). The point is made very clear in the NT commentary on the OT sacrifices, in Hebrews 9:9f.

The ultimate reference of divine grace is also identical in the two Testaments, the person and work of Christ. While for us today the virtue of Calvary is projected forward, in the case of the OT saints it is projected backwards (Mt. 8:16f.; Lk. 2:38; Jn. 3:14f.; 8:56; Rom. 4:1-25; 10:11-13; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:15; 10:12-14; 1 Pet. 1:18f.). For them as for us atonement, ultimately considered, is by the blood of Christ.

Jesus The Messiah

Messiah, we saw, means God's anointed. In Israel three offices were established to which men were appointed by anointing with oil: kings (1 Sa. 16), priests (Lv. 8) and prophets (in this case spiritually, perhaps, rather than literally, Is. 61:1). Generations of theologians have spoken of Jesus' 'three-fold office', meaning that he was anointed by God (Acts 10:38; Heb. 1:9) in order to fulfil, perfectly and normatively, the triple office of priest, prophet and king for the people of God. The use of the singular (office) is important. We are concerned with what are simply three distinguishable facets of one indissoluble reality, the work of Jesus Christ the mediator.

The prophetic office

The prophet is one who speaks for another (Ex. 7:11; Dt. 18:18f.). His office presupposes people's ignorance and blindness with respect to God's will and purpose, which the prophet as spokesman of the Almighty seeks to dispel.

Prophethood was classically expressed in the person of Moses and the later OT figures like Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah. The OT Messianic anticipation includes this prophetic role: 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me.. You must listen to him' (Dt. 18:15). The early church saw this fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22f; 7:37). It was as prophet that Jesus was first acclaimed by his contemporaries (Mt.21:46; Mk.8:28; Lk.7:16; Jn.9:17). He himself accepted the title (Mk. 6:4; Lk. 13:33), though with reservation (Mt. 11:9— 11), and in the traditional sense it was clearly not adequate to Jesus' claims for himself (Mk. 9:1-8; Jn. 10:30; 14:6). He stands within the long line of prophetic heroes who bore the Word of God, and yet he towers above them for he also is the Word he bears (Jn. 1:1-14). This fundamental link between the work of Christ and his person is explicit in John 1:14, 'the Word became flesh.' In Jesus, the prophetic Word of God finds its ultimate expression as a truth not only of his teaching but of his very being. The later NT amplifies this dimension; Jesus is the incarnate wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30), the one 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:3). Christ's prophetic function therefore consists in his bringing to ignorant, sin-darkened humanity the very truth of God. In revealing God himself to us (Jn. 14:9) he is the supreme Teacher whose word bears authority and to whom we must submit in all things (Mt.7:24-29; Mk. 1:22f.; Jn. 13:13f.). He both proclaims and incarnates God's demands on us, as well as the divine grace by which alone we can enter the kingdom of the God of truth (Mk. 1:14; Jn. 1:17; 10:9).

The priestly office

The presupposition of priesthood is man's sinful estrangement from God. The priest is God's appointed

mediator through whom the estrangement is overcome (Heb. 5:1). This crucial strand of OT religion (Ex. 28 — 29) was particularly embodied in the High Priest whose functions included the annual Day of Atonement offering in the Holy Place in the temple (Lev.16; Heb.9:1-8). The work of Jesus Christ is interpreted in terms of his fulfilling the priestly office primarily in the Letter to the Hebrews, which links him to the OT High Priest at two points.

First, his identity: the 'high priest is selected from among men . . . to represent them' (5:1). As true man Christ was qualified to act on our behalf in relation to God (2:7-17; 4:15; 5:1-3; 10:5-9). This solidarity with our humanity, foundational to his priestly mediation, is further pictured in the OT idea of the *go-el*, or *kinsman-redeemer*. In certain circumstances a blood relation could act as *go-el* on behalf of a relation to deliver him or her from a particular distress (Lev. 25:48f.); the action of Boaz with respect to Ruth (Ruth 4:1-13) is the classic OT example. This title is also applied to God (Ex. 6:6; Is. 41:14). In Christ God has acted as our kinsman-redeemer by taking our flesh (Jn. 1:14) and acting on our behalf to save us from the curse and dominion of sin.

Second, his self-offering: 'Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices' (8:3). Christ was not only the offering priest but also the sacrificial victim; in unspeakable love and grace he entered the Holy Place and offered himself on the altar of the cross (Heb. 1:3; 9:12-14; 10:10-22; 13:12). That Jesus understood his own mission in priestly terms is clear from his free use of sacrificial language (Mk. 10:45; Lk. 22:20; Jn. 10:11,15; 15:13).

His allusions to Isaiah's Suffering Servant reinforce the idea. The Servant passages (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13 — 53:12) were variously interpreted at the time of Jesus, but

there was almost no inclination to interpret them messianically, for they were apparently irreconcilable with the messianic-kingly motif. Jesus' link with the Servant was established by the Father at his baptism (Mk. 1:11; cf. Is. 42:1) and there are frequent references in the gospels (Mt. 8:16f.; 12:18-21; Jn. 1:29), echoed in other NT books (Acts 3:13; 8:32f.; 1 Pet. 2:21f.). There may be yet another hint of Jesus' appropriation of the priestly office in Mark 14:62 where he applied Psalm 110:1 to himself and hence by implication Psalm 110:4.

The priestly office covers the whole saving work of Christ in his death. In order to unfold its full significance we need to expound the three major NT metaphors used to interpret Christ's death.

The penal metaphor: justification

Hebrew thought concerning righteousness has an invariable legal (forensic) atmosphere. The righteous man is the one 'whose sin the LORD does not count against him' (Ps. 32:2). But we are all in a state of guilt, having breached the moral law of God (Ps. 14:1-3), and are under its curse or condemnation (Dt. 27:26; Ps. 1:5f.). Nor is there any way out in terms of God's simply relaxing his law and ignoring man's law-breaking. The law is not some arbitrary series of demands which God chooses to lay upon the human conscience; at its heart it is nothing less than the demand of the character of God that man should conform to God's being and side with him against all that threatens and opposes God (Lv. 11:44f.; Is. 1:4). It is the law of God, 'holy, righteous and good' (Rom. 7:12,22).

Any infringement of the moral law, therefore, amounts to a direct assault upon God. The moment we commit it, it becomes an integral part of that whole resistance movement

which, in affirming his Godhead, he is bound to take account of and to oppose.

God's 'taking account of sin draws attention to the guilt which inevitably accompanies all our sinning. The moment we commit sin, it enters the unalterable past. To be a sinner means to be a person with a past; the copy-book is marked and stained. We cannot begin again because the sin of yesterday remains to our account, inexorably confronting God, opposing his majesty and Godhead. 'We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speaker's and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact, or to the guilt of sin' (C. S. Lewis). Relativity theory has sharpened our awareness of this, for it recognizes that time itself belongs to the relativity of existence; hence along one line of God's multi-dimensional eternity we are still committing every sin which we have ever committed. The past remains, time does not heal this particular breach; it cannot.

What then can be done? In one sense, nothing. In face of our guilt we are helpless and can but await the coming judgment which is the inevitable consequence of sin in God's world.

At this very point, in face of our helplessness, Scripture directs us to the wonder of God's grace in Christ, the work of Christ. As man he was 'born under law' (Gal. 4:4) and fully obeyed all of God's commands (Jn. 4:34; 8:29), even 'to death' (Phil. 2:8). In his death he bore the 'curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13). Thus in the death of Christ the sins of his people were judged (Rom. 3:23-26) and 'forgotten' (Heb. 8:12), and 'the result of [his] act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men'

(Rom. 5:18). The judgment and curse of our disobedience passed to Christ at the cross and he bore it there for us, being 'made sin', treated and punished as a sinner, 'so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21). This act whereby God remits the sins of guilty men and women, accounting them righteous on the basis of Christ's representative obedience and redemptive death, is called in Scripture justification (Lk. 18:14; Rom. 3:24; 4:25; 1 Cor. 6:11; Tit. 3:7). It is in no way a reward for our own righteous efforts nor in any respect a matter of our co-operating with God to make any moral contribution to our justification. Justification is an act of sheer unmerited mercy on God's part. The glorious positive side of justification (Rom. 4:1-12; Phil. 3:9) should be noted since it is frequently given inadequate stress. Our justification is not simply a matter of God's overlooking our guilt; our need can be met only if righteousness, full and entire holiness of character, is credited to us. This is the amazing gift of grace. Christ's law-keeping and perfect righteousness are made ours by faith in him (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9). It is not simply that our abysmal failure in life's moral examination is overlooked; we pass with 100%, First Class Honours! Well may Athanasius speak of 'the amazing exchange' whereby, as Calvin puts it, 'the Son of God though spotlessly pure took upon himself the ignominy and shame of our sin and in return clothed us with his purity'. In justifying sinners in Christ, God acts justly, for he does not overlook sin thereby or condone it (Rom. 3:25f.). He truly judges and punishes it on the cross, and thereby affirms his eternal, holy antagonism to it. Correspondingly there is no lowering of standard as far as the sinner is concerned; God receives him only on the grounds of the perfect righteousness

of Christ, which is credited to him through his faith-union with him.

To be justified means we can sing:

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

To summarize, the Bible teaches that the heart of Christ's work consists in his having on our behalf and in our place borne the punishment due to us on account of our sin and brought us pardon and reconciliation with God in righteousness. This is often referred to as 'penal substitution' and has been the centre of evangelical teaching and preaching on the atonement since the Reformation. It is frequently assailed by critics who argue: (i) the use of legal terminology, God as a judge inflicting punishment, man as a criminal, etc., seriously depersonalizes man's relationship to God; (ii) the God of this theory who demands punishment is not the forgiving God of love who pardons freely; (iii) the whole idea of substitution is unjust, even immoral, in this context, since it means that the innocent is punished and the guilty go free; or, alternatively, God's justice appears more easily satisfied than man's, since in human thought justice is not done until the guilty pays the penalty himself.

Penal substitution can, however, be readily defended against all three criticisms. First and generally, we recall that it is clearly taught in God's Word; this is no man-made construction but part of what God himself teaches us about the cross. More particularly, against the charge of depersonalization, it is evident that the Bible does not

contrast personal and legal in this manner. The biblical writers clearly loved legal metaphors and appeal to legal processes again and again to explain God's dealings with man. 'To deny that the New Testament makes use of legal imagery to describe Christ's work for us is to refuse to face reality' (L. Morris). Underlying this line of criticism is almost invariably a failure to interpret law in a biblical way, i.e. as the unchanging character of God impinging upon human existence.

As for the second charge, objecting to the concept that God requires punishment, the alternative proposed, the God who simply overlooks sin, is really a figment of the human imagination, nowhere found in Scripture. He is certainly not the God of the OT and therefore not the God in whom Jesus believed. Nor is he the God whom Jesus himself revealed, as is clear from his frequent and solemn warnings of the dangers of impenitence (Mt. 11:20-24; Lk. 13:1-5; 16:19-31) and the place which his impending death held in his understanding of his mission (Mk. 8:31; 10:45; 14:24; Jn. 10:11; 12:24).

As far as the third charge of injustice is concerned, there is the obvious point that penal substitution involves the Trinity and the incarnation, i.e. the unity of Father and Son in Godhead, and Christ and ourselves in manhood; hence there is a fundamental propriety in Christ's entering into our guilt under the Father's wrath.

More substantially, J. I. Packer has pointed out that it is a mistake to press biblical categories such as penal substitution beyond their limits. They are essentially thought-models given us by God to instruct us concerning himself and his activities. Because they are God-given they should command our total trust, and indeed it is only by submitting our minds to them and tenaciously retaining them that we can be assured of arriving as near as we may to the truth about the atonement.

When seen in this way penal substitution can be fully defended (assuming we can demonstrate its biblical basis) without our having to justify it at every point by appeal to common law practice or to general norms of personal relationships. While we do not lightly set aside man's general moral instinct since God is creator as well as redeemer, equally we cannot make our fallen norms the final determination and judge of God's action. In fact, of course, there is the most profound justice expressed in God's pardoning condemned and helpless sinners through the cross — the justice of God's redemptive love (Rom. 3:21-26).

The cultic metaphor: reconciliation/propitiation

In a measure this locks into the previous metaphor, further expounding the means of our justification. One result of man's disobedience to God's law lies in his unfitness for God's presence and exposure to his holy wrath; the way back to Eden is barred by a flaming sword (Gn. 3:24). Mankind, estranged from God, is now his enemy. Again we see in stark terms the utter helplessness of mankind in sin. In this context Scripture directs us again to the wonder of God's love in Christ.

Reconciliation means the abolition of enmity between two parties who have quarrelled. It is used of Christian salvation in several important NT passages (Rom. 5:10f.; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20). An allied notion is 'making peace' (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20). For mankind is indeed the enemy of God (so Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21; Jas. 4:4), and not simply just short of being God's friend. Reconciliation is effected by removing the cause of the quarrel (in this case our sin) which God has done in Christ, in particular by his death. Christ is therefore 'our peace' (Eph. 2:14); we are reconciled 'through

the death of his Son' (Rom. 5:10), 'through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col. 1:20).

The Bible's teaching is seriously misrepresented when reconciliation is confined to our side of the relationship, as though it were simply our attitude that needs changing. While it can be badly distorted, the wrath of God is a solemn biblical reality (Ex. 22:24; Ps. 78:31; Ho. 5:10; Lk. 3:7; Jn. 3:36). To suggest, as some do, that the cross simply demonstrates the love of a God who is already reconciled to us, ignores God's wrath and misses the real purpose of the cross. Indeed the cross demonstrates God's love only because of this deeper theological meaning: it is love dealing sacrificially with the implications of our sin (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9f.). Only such an understanding does justice to the NT view of the cross as a decisive act of redemption by which alone we are delivered from divine wrath. We must therefore speak of a 'change from wrath to grace in the historical sphere' (Berkouwer).

The means of this reconciliation is spelled out more precisely by a closely related term, propitiation (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). It refers to the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift. Christ's, however, was no impersonal or arbitrary offering; nor was he a third party introduced from outside man's relationship to God: 'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:19). Christ is none other than God himself taking upon his own holy and eternal heart the implications of his own wrath. Obviously there is impenetrable mystery here, but all the terms of this equation are clearly present in the NT interpretation of the work of Christ, in the notion of propitiation in particular.

In order to avoid any suggestion of 'placating an angry deity', some writers opt for the term 'expiation' as an alternative to propitiation. This latter implies 'removal of guilt', without any

particular explanation of how this is effected. It is difficult to see how this leads either to greater clarity or to a more biblical understanding. The guilt concerned cannot be reduced to subjective guilt feeling; God objectively resists us in our sin. The removal of that personal divine antipathy is what is involved in our reconciliation and which constitutes it. But that in turn implies some sense of God's treating the sinner differently, his wrath giving place to grace, on the basis of Christ's self-offering. That is precisely what propitiation indicates.

The real reason expiation was preferred by some was uncertainty about the fact of God's wrath. If expiation is tied to a denial of wrath, then its unbiblical character stands exposed; if it is not so tied, it is difficult to see why it is to be preferred to propitiation.

Sacrifice belongs in this context (1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 7:27; 8:3; 9:23-28; 10:10-26; 13:10-13). The NT draws on various aspects of the OT sacrificial system to expound the meaning of Christ's death: he is the lamb slain (Jn. 1:29f.; 1 Pet. 1:18f.); the passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:6-8; cf. Ex. 12:1-12); the sin offering (Rom. 8:3; cf. Lv. 5:6f.); the Day of Atonement offerings (Heb. 9:1; cf. Lv. 16); the fulfilment of the covenant sacrifices (Mk. 14:24; cf. Ex. 24:8). The basic theme of the OT sacrificial system was propitiation: God's wrath was averted as a price was paid for the people's guilt and sin.

Another fundamental element of Christ's work which comes into focus in this picture is substitution. There is no evading this when the OT context is kept in view. The death of the ritually clean animal (which is what blood shedding refers to) was essentially substitutionary; the sacrificial animal died in the place of the guilty offerer (Lv. 1 — 5; 16). Substitution

also lies at the heart of the ministry of the Servant (Is. 53:4-6, 10-12). Likewise, when Christ shed his blood on the cross, it was a substitutionary death, 'for us', in our place, that we might escape the death our sin had brought on us (Mk. 10:45; Jn. 11:50f.; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:21,24; 3:18).

It is sometimes urged that substitution should be dropped in favour of the term representation, in order to convey better the relationship between Christ and sinners in his work of atonement. The word is acceptable enough, particularly to express our union with him in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1f.; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12; 3:1f.; 2 Tim. 2:11); it also covers the thought of Christ as the last Adam (Rom. 5:12f.; 1 Cor. 15:22f.). As far as atonement is concerned, however, it cannot tell the whole story, for it implies that the representative is provided and put forward by those he represents. At that point the word is fundamentally misleading; we do not put Christ forward on our behalf. We are helpless and condemned, 'separated from Christ . . . and without God in the world' (Eph. 2:12); his is wholly a work of grace. He acts for us in the radical sense of going on our behalf where we cannot, doing in our place what we cannot do. Substitution is the obvious, indeed only, way of expressing that essential factor at the heart of the atonement.

The dramatic metaphor: redemption

Redemption is a term with two levels of meaning. It is used as a general synonym for the work of salvation, often coupled with creation (Ps. 19:1,14; Is. 43:14f.; Heb. 9:12). It also has a more precise meaning, relating to our enslavement to sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 7:14; 2 Pet. 2:19) and the devil (Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19). In his grace God brings redemption to us in our helpless condition.

Redemption carries the idea of deliverance by the payment of a price (Ps. 49:7; Is. 43:3; Mk. 10:45; 1 Pet. 1:18f.). There are several OT examples. Exodus 21:30 speaks of ransoming a man's life by paying a sum of money. The central act of redemption in the OT was Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 6:6; 13:13f.). Here the ransom price was the death of the animals sacrificed by Israel. In the NT bondage to sin and evil is focused in the saying of Jesus: 'everyone who sins is a slave to sin' (Jn. 8:34). The ransom price is Christ's own death: 'we have redemption through his blood' (Eph. 1:7), 'the redemption that came by Christ Jesus . . . a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood' (Rom. 3:24f.). This latter passage welds into a perfect unity the three figures of justification, propitiation and redemption.

Hesitation has been expressed over the ransom price. Why should God have to pay a price? And to whom? Some avoid these difficulties by reducing redemption to a synonym for deliverance, but this is inadequate and misleading. The redemption which the Bible expounds as an aspect of our salvation was accomplished by Christ's self-offering at Calvary. The point of the ransom price idea is that salvation is costly. God cannot deliver man by an arbitrary act of power; there is a price to pay and that is nothing less than the life of Christ, the God-man.

The kingly office

This office is rooted in the OT prophecies of the perpetual throne and kingdom of David (2 Sa. 7:12f.; Ps. 89:3f.). Thus Messiah is anticipated in regal terms (Is. 9:6f.; Je. 30:8f.; Ezk. 37:21f.; Zc. 9:9). The presupposition of kingship is our weak and rebellious submission to sin and darkness, which leaves us helpless under the reign of sin and its allies, demonic

powers, death and judgment (Lk. 4:6; Rom. 5:17f.; 7:14-24; Eph. 2:1ff.; 1 Jn. 5:19).

At his birth Jesus is welcomed as the one who fulfils this OT hope (Mt. 1:1; 2:2; Lk. 1:31). He is the King come to restore the fortunes of God's people and to exercise God's rule on earth. The title has very close links with 'Lord'. Again, Jesus hesitated to take up the title, for fear of misunderstanding on the part of those around him (Jn. 6:14f.; Acts 1:6). It is, however, implicit in the central category of his preaching, the Kingdom of God, which was at hand (Mk. 1:15), because he, its instrument and embodiment, was at hand (Mk. 12:34; Lk. 17:21). His triumphal entry ('Blessed is the King', Lk. 19:38) and his trial (Mk. 14:61f.; Jn. 18:33-37; 19:14-22) are clear witness to his fulfilment of this Messianic role, and the later NT echoes this (Acts 17:7; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14).

His kingship is significantly linked with Calvary, for there he grappled with the enslaving powers of darkness (Jn. 12:31; Col. 2:14f.; Heb. 2:14f.). His resurrection sealed his triumph, 'declared with power to be the Son of God' (Rom. 1:4), King and Lord over all things (Mt. 28:18; Acts 2:33f.; 7:55f.; Rev. 1:5). This office in Scripture is bound up with three particular moments in Jesus' mission: his resurrection, his ascension and his glorious return. These together form the climax of his work.

The resurrection

We have already commented upon the resurrection in terms of the light it casts upon our Lord's person. Here we examine its implications for his work.

It fulfils his priestly work. Christ's priestly mediation consisted in going to the cross to bear God's penal judgments and holy wrath in order to bring us righteousness, reconciliation with God and freedom from sin's power. In the resurrection God the Father in effect pronounced his divine 'Amen' on the

priestly work of his Son (2 Cor. 1:20). He openly declared it effective; real atonement has been attained and hence righteousness, reconciliation and freedom are truly brought to sinners (Rom. 4:25). Further, in the risen Christ we see our flesh-and-blood humanity preserved and affirmed before God on the further side of condemnation, wrath and all the assaults of evil. Here is mankind beyond the reach of judgment. Thus in face of all the assaults of our conscience or of the devil we can reply with defiance: 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life' (Rom. 8:33f.).

It manifests his kingly work. In the cross Jesus confronted the age-long enemies of our sorry race: sin, death and the powers of darkness. His resurrection proclaims his victory over all three. He has conquered sin (Heb. 9:28), the principalities and powers of darkness (Eph. 1:20f.) and even destroyed death itself (2 Tim. 1:10). The risen Jesus is the evidence of God's victory in him over all challenges to his lordship and rule and therefore demonstrates the establishment of the kingdom of God. It embodies the promise of his future reign. When the disciples met the risen Jesus they were quite literally gazing on the end of the world: God's final triumph in the creation of a righteous new heaven and earth (Is. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21 — 22). Paul links the Easter triumph of Christ to his final triumph and his coming, visible reign over all things at 'the end' (1 Cor. 15:20-25). The risen Jesus is the 'first-fruits' of the coming harvest of the dead at his return in glory (See Part 7).

The ascension

Christ's kingly office is manifested in his ascension to the right hand of God.

It proclaims Christ's triumph. He is 'at God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him' (1 Pet. 3:22). He is 'crowned with glory and honour' (Heb. 2:9) and 'exalted to the highest place' (Phil. 2:9). 'He led captives in his train' (Eph. 4:8). The ascension confers on Jesus Christ the sovereign rule over the cosmos which the OT ascribes to the LORD (Ps. 8; 115; Is. 40:28). The man of Nazareth is now Lord over all things (1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 1:22f.). His reign is not confined to the sphere of the church, nor is it suspended until his return at the end. The NT is absolutely unambiguous that Jesus Christ is now Lord and King over all.

It establishes the conditions under which the church is called to serve. We live, work, pray, believe, witness, serve, worship, obey and die under a Lord who is now exalted as head in earth and heaven. This was the secret of the early Christians' unquenchable zeal and buoyant optimism in the face of persecution and violent opposition. Here is the church's secret of peace in a world of turmoil, its resources for effective ministry and service to a fallen world: Jesus its head is exalted over all and sends his blessed Spirit to the church, as the life-flow from the exalted head to the earth-bound members of the body, communicating thereby the power of his victory.

This is also the great encouragement of the church in terms of Christ's High Priestly ministry. Christ carried his humanity into the presence of God when he ascended. He is therefore able to identify sympathetically with us and to minister his grace to his people in the variety of their human suffering and need (Heb. 4:14-16). This ministry is also one of intercession (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), in which he appears in the presence of God as our heavenly advocate (1 Jn. 2:1).

It guarantees Christ's future final rule in glory. His ascension is his taking of authority in the universe. Nothing exists which

can hold back the completion of his triumph. Hence 'God has appointed a day' (Acts 17:31; cf. Mk. 13:32); Christ is destined to reign 'until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1Cor.15:25).

The return of Christ

Some reference is necessary here to complete the present exposition. Any account of the work of Christ which neglects the future dimension can make no claim to adequacy. Christ's future reign in glory is the perspective from which everything else must be viewed, when he shall gather up all things under himself, and reign openly over a fully redeemed cosmos (Rom. 8:21-23). Here is the supreme expression of Christ's kingly office, for at his glorious return he will be manifested as King and head over all, King of kings and Lord of lords (Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 19:11-21; 21:22-27).

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Canty's "I Was Just Thinking".

Christianity - The Bare Facts

Canty, G., www.canty.org.uk (*IWT 3, Christianity – the bare facts*)

Jesus Christ came. That affects everything that matters, this world and the next. It is the supreme gift setting the bells of thanksgiving ringing alone among all the religions on earth, pealing out the glory of Divine favour and grace.

Jesus' being here, living, even dying, puts firm ground under our feet. Jesus didn't set us on another pilgrim path climbing and striving to reach God. He said "Come to me. I am the way". He came and is accessible. We can come to him. He is the 'somewhere' that all religions hope to reach. Where Jesus is, that's heaven, and there's nowhere else. He came to seek us. Some search for the truth, but Christ is the truth.

Christians live in the truth.

Religions start with prophets. Jesus is no mere prophet. He is the one the prophets prophesied about. He is not a messenger from God, he's the message.

Christ's way is not laws, rules, directions, do and don't ways to God, but the miracle gift of a new heart. His teaching is about himself and he said "Follow me! I am the way. I am the door'-the door, to goodness".

The Bible is not visions and dreams of just one individual man. Many godly people wrote as they saw God at work across 1500 years. It is a miracle Bible all 66 books coming together in Christ.

Christian worshipers don't seek God just to curry favour with him about their sins. Jesus is with every believer, already, all the time. They have found grace with him. Their sins blotted out by his sacrifice on the Cross. Christians are not made by words, ceremony, joining a church, or by belonging to a special race or country, but it is a personal relationship with Jesus.

Christians don't await judgment to know their eternal destiny. They belong to Jesus now and always will. He gives them eternal life, and they will never come into judgment.

Christianity is power, not just words or a way to worship. Christians don't have to keep 'holy days', but they have days when they rejoice. Days that have no parallel in all the world. At Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost Jesus wrought historic and eternal victories, releasing the power of salvation to all who believe.

Jesus only asks for trust and love, not ritual. He demands no pilgrimages, no visits to holy shrines or places. Christians need no holy clothes or special physical posturing; Christianity is of the heart, not the knees. Jesus does demand love and concern, to do good, and to pray even for one's enemies.

Whatever benefit or quality any religion or system offers, old or New Age, in Jesus people find far more peace, strength, goodness, and purpose. "In him is life, and the life is the light of men". Without Christ there's no life, only substitutes, self-help, possessions, excitements.

What does not relate to Christ, has nothing to relate to, neither people nor the whole world itself. Christ is the one positive certainty known. Death vitiates all hopes, but Christ conquered death and rose from the tomb in the power of his immortal Deity. Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man, Son of God.

When The Creator Became A Creature

Canty, G., (*IWT 6, When the Creator became a Creature*).

Christ came into the world to save sinners but in any case He would have come. He loved us "while we were yet sinners" but not because we were sinners. There's nothing endearing about sinfulness.

God could save us only by coming. He did come and salvation is achieved - but that 'coming'! The how of it is awesome! He was the Creator, and His condescension brings worship and praise, but it was infinitely more than coming as a visitor in an act of Divine humility. He became one of us and part of His own material world. I had to think about that - He owned the world and then the world owned Him.

"The Word was made flesh". The Word by whom "All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." To save us was possible only by the stupendous act and mystery of incarnation. He was not a special form or appearance and didn't put on a temporary guise for the occasion distinct from His eternal self. He WAS His eternal self, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever", 'very God of very God'. The invisible joined Himself with the visible, Spirit with matter, Divine nature with human nature. He entered the heart of His own world, for ever.

That is the truth about the world, a new work of God. The Lord and His world united, Nature subject to God, and God subject to nature. He shared our material and mortal experience, even death. The Builder occupies the house. "In Him we live and move, and have our being." Made one with us, His hand is in everything. His local Bethlehem coming was a cosmic occasion.

Christ "upholds all things by His word of power". He clothed Himself with a material garment, His mighty arm a human arm, sleeved in nature. When He died on the Cross the planet shuddered and the sunlight flickered. The universe reacts to Him, for the whole natural order has met its Lord (See Romans 8)

However, that Creation has been cankered by evil. The Holy One took our nature upon Himself, and suffered to be one with the world as it was. But its corruption did not corrupt Him. The world reeked like an abattoir with the blood of murder and war but the smell did not cling even to his robes. Then In His own body He experienced the horrors of sin and knew what it was like to stand in the shoes of the guilty, or rather hang on the cross of the guilty.

Bernard Shaw said forgiveness of sin is impossible, because what's done can't be undone. Clever but misinformed! Christ broke into the dark world where all our past sins still muttered threats against us. He invaded the past were all wrongs can be righted, justified the wrongdoer as if he had done no wrong, and saved His people from their sins.

But God can't forgive and leave everything as it was. Sin had not left everything as it was. It turned Eden into a wilderness, and "the heavens are not clean in His sight". To forgive, God did this incredible thing, joined us and our world, worked from within the sinful order and tore the very roots of evil. Salvation affects heaven and earth.

When God created this world He had another act in view, the coming of Jesus. It was not an afterthought in an emergency but pre-planned. This world was made for Christ, and also for His Cross, "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). He died for our sins according to the Scriptures". The gross weight of everything God detested rested upon Him crushing Him in the garden to the ground in bloody sweat, but He carried the mountainous load up the Calvary road, and left it there.

That dark Friday afternoon He tasted death in solidarity with sinners at the heart of things. From Him flows a stream of holy cleansing through the universe. Calvary built concrete

hope into all existence, and saving power. The hell He knew we shall never know. The Carpenter turned the wooden cross into the door of life.

But the crucial fact was that the crucified One was also the Eternal one. No physical grave could contain the life-power of the universe. The resurrection was bound to happen. He rose, and planted resurrection life in the world for ever. The upholder of all things said "I am the resurrection". From Him a resurrection cataract pours through the old order with renewal and life.

The world is not what it was. Something new is here, and that something is all Christ was, salvation, renewal and power. He did not slip into the world and out again, but belongs to us all for ever. Our world environs Him. He cares about it all. He has an eternal purpose, beginning with a new heaven and a new earth.

God eternally linking Himself with this material universe makes it more than a pro-tem arrangement until God can do something different. Humans will always be human, just as the Son of Man is, but joined to His immortality, are transformed into the children of God, never to be bodiless, gibbering, bloodless ghosts, as the ancient pagan world believed. Christ saves people, not just souls. We shall see Him and be like Him, body mind and spirit adapted to be with Him forever. Amen!

Christmas

Canty, G., www.canty.org.uk (*IWT 8, Christmas*).

It was Christmas, and I had just attained my teens, a hungry year of malnutrition and rickets, but in my hand lay a valued gift. There I sat, trying to extract my 'merry Christmas' from it and determined to revel in the spirit of the day with my special present, a tin of home-made toffee. That evening it

filtered into my head that chewing toffee was not a catalyst of Christmas joy. This realisation could be early evidence that I had crossed the gap between childhood and adolescence except that millions of adults still think the Christmas spirit derives from comestibles, and from bottles in particular. A TV character once said she wasn't celebrating Christmas so had sent it back to the shop. However, after I became a Christian, I did not depend on eatables as a source of delight, though perhaps that was because food in the depressed north-east was hardly of delightful quality. Jesus said "Is not life more important than meat?" and I think we had begun to prove it.

My earliest theology was rudimentary but adequate. I knew Jesus had come to Bethlehem, lived, been crucified for me, and gone back to heaven. Only, at 15, I was not surprised that Jesus having been killed left us. (Although of course I knew He had been raised from the dead). I attended regular teaching which in those early years did not reach very high or plumb very deep so I soon picked what everybody knew. It was enough for us to rejoice in salvation. While singing Christmas carols at home around our old American organ, some complained that we sang them as if we meant them. Well we did. Christmas set me pondering. Aren't they one sided (joy to us, joy to me, joy to the world)? Wonderfully true of course, and the greatest fact about this planet is that Jesus came here. But what about Him and His side? He became human – a stupendous event for Him as well as for us.

So we come to Bethlehem, shepherds, wise men, lowing cattle, and this tiny new baby. A door had opened in Bethlehem's skies and He had come through accompanied by the music and trumpets of ranks of angels. From where, from

what vastness? We have heard of a dominion of joy, of glittering-winged angels, lords of ancient worlds, dazzling living creatures, great intelligences, and glorious spirits that populate unknown heights and depths of that other world. This baby had emerged from there, His glory disguised in gross flesh. Incarnation!

This is shattering drama. The implications are beyond human imagination. "The Word made flesh"! The greatest Bethlehem impact was not on us, but on Him, the babe in the manger straw. What we must see is that what impacts God impacts all things. Thinking about that, the incarnation was a Divine event that crashed across the entire universe. It is an ocean of truth to explore. God's view of Christmas is deep and imponderable. How did the Father "feel", surrendering Jesus to us? He is infinite God. Did He 'feel' it at all? Could it really 'cost' the Almighty and unchangeable Creator anything? One thing we know. The Father not only gave us His Son, but meant it as a supreme sign of His love. If it cost God nothing, how could it show He loved us? A gift that costs nothing proves nothing. God had made the world just by saying "Let it be!" Was the miracle of Jesus in the same category? Obviously not. What value would that express? Jesus was never the product of a word. He was THE word, born to the Virgin by the eternal passion of a God bent on saving His world. "O generous love", unknown, incomprehensible. The truth is we will never know what this gift actually did to God. The human can never encompass Deity. Yet, we know He expended all He had. This is the Christmas mystery for which we adore Him.

God gave. He could not give meanly. Infinite God can only give infinitely, to the utmost. Jesus is the declaration of His immeasurable greatness. What a gift Jesus is! Even God was

proud of Him. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". He is the love gesture of the Sovereign Majesty of the Almighty, and worthy of our praise.

God didn't loan Jesus. God doesn't do things on a temporary basis. He has no pre tem or occasional interests, no one-off phases, no past, no yesterdays and no dispensations. What He ever was, He is for ever. The greatest paradox and mystery is how the unchangeable God became Man, and became what He wasn't. But "great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Timothy 3:16.

Putting on manhood He never cast it aside. He didn't doff humanity like a diver taking off his suit after a plunge into an alien element. The greatest name in heaven and earth today is Jesus Christ, a human name, and "Jesus Christ (is) the same yesterday, today and for ever".

Time after time the New Testament names Him as the undying Mediator and changeless Man Christ Jesus. "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, THE MAN Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). He presents us to God as Man and presents God to us being Himself God, always 'this same Jesus'.

Such a transcendent mystery of God becoming Man, the mystery of the Person of Christ, God's most profound act, shakes all creation. It is like looking into the face of God. Deity suffering human experience. The old deists' "natural religion" said "God's in His heaven and all's well with the world" - their two-tier world. That isn't our world. Christ has tied heaven and earth together, the Divine and the physical. On Calvary He outstretched His arms, his feet off the earth, and His head lifted to heaven, bound us all in the bundle of life with Himself and made us citizens of the Kingdom of God. What lies beyond it?

This cross-over of God and man is the second phase of creation that was always intended. "The lamb was slain from the foundation of the earth" (Revelation 13:8). The earth was God's stage, made for Jesus, on which eternal redemption would take place. He was not an after thought or an emergency measure. He always was the keystone to the complexities and architecture of the Divine purposes arching eternity.

When God became man, it happened in Bethlehem but it was the epi-centre of a cosmic earthquake. The Lord of all things affected all things, impregnating them with a new reality, new forces and new possibilities. Healing, restoration, resurrection and cleansing are planted in earthly soul. Today has become the day of salvation! Powers of regeneration are part of the new order of spiritual potential. Forgiveness flows in our mundane channel. The explosion of life in Christ's tomb ripples for ever across the universe, bringing the death of death.

This Christmas time, that is our world, Christ-visited. Ring the bells! Disguise the drab day with the prettiest decorations! Eat, drink, cast off dull care, rejoice and be glad in the Lord, let all creatures in heaven and earth rejoice! The Lord has done it! He has wrought salvation and His victory is ours.

Seeing The Kingdom Come In Power

Canty, G., www.canty.org.uk (*IWT 10, Seeing the kingdom come in power*).

Jesus promised that some listening to Him "would not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). They would see the Kingdom in power in their lifetime. Normally we think of the coming of the Kingdom as bringing immortality to all believers, not that they would die when it came. So, did they see it come? When?

Critical scholars say Jesus expected His kingdom to be set up very soon, in the lifetime of people present, and that He was therefore mistaken. But that is the difference between scholars concerned only about who wrote what - whether Luke copied Mark, or if Mark had another source, and so on - and those who use of the Word as God intended to instruct us all in Divine matters.

In that connection I remember that Jesus told the Scribes they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God, yet the Scriptures were their daily employment. It can be like that today. For example, I looked up many learned authorities on this particular passage but they showed no insight whatever, only critical concerns about the passage. But I take it that Jesus meant us to understand Him. So, I can ask - did some of Christ's audience ever see the Kingdom come with power while they were still alive? If so, when?

Jesus had preached that the Kingdom had come, and that it was proven by the fact he was casting out demons (Matthew 12:28). But there would be something more, a further advance of the Kingdom into the world, and 'in power'. That was His emphasis.

Jesus had cast out demons and He said His followers would also do so. They did and came back and reported it to Him (Luke 10:20), but Jesus predicted greater Kingdom power. Now - did they see it, something more than had then been seen in Christ's own ministry? Was that even possible?

This was not the only reference Jesus made to greater things. For example, John 14:12-14, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever". Again in Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost

is come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me". This was not healing power, which they had previously operated, but a greater form, witnessing-power, to draw people to God. The Kingdom of God was manifested in new power when Peter used the keys of the Kingdom by preaching the first Gospel message. That day the first Christian converts streamed into the Kingdom - the Kingdom had come with power. Salvation power had come, the greatest power of all, the Holy Spirit convincing and converting. That same Kingdom is with us today in power. If it were not, then soul-saving would be impossible.

However, this promise was followed in v.2 as follows: "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up into a high mountain, where they were alone. There he was transfigured before them."

Now, why after six days? Six days since when? Six days before, Jesus had raised the question of His own identity. He asked who people said He was (Mark 8:27). Then Peter declared, "You are the Christ", which Jesus said was a revelation from God. But then came a dramatic confirmation. There on the mountain, Peter, James and John saw His glory, the exposition of who Jesus really was. It was so great that the disciples were warned not to talk about it at that time.

The Christ, radiant as the sun, now in blinding splendour spoke with Moses and Elijah and the disciples heard them talk about "His exodus which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." After the glory on that mountain there would be the glory on another mountain, at Calvary. Jesus always talked about 'His hour' when He would glorify the Father and Himself.

That is the amazing situation. The Christ of transformation majesty and glorious Deity, seen in the splendour of His

power, was soon to be a battered corpse gibbeted on a crude cross. Incredible! But what we have to note is this; that the Kingdom did come with power, but only AFTER that terrible Friday when God in the flesh submitted to the assault of evil men. There was no Pentecost until after Calvary. There never is any Kingdom power without the Cross.

The Gospel message of Christ crucified releases the work of the Holy Spirit. The word of the Cross is the key word to power. There's no healing except from His pierced hands, and no power to save except at His wounded feet.

While we bring the same apostolic message of the crucified Lord, we live in the same age of power. There is no other 'Kingdom power' greater than the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the performer in all we know of God at work. His is the supreme power of the universe let loose. He takes of the finished work of Christ and translates it into our experience of salvation. Christ triumphed at Calvary, the Spirit has come and we preach Jesus. The sources of salvation are open. Today is the day of salvation.

“The Passion”

Canty, G., www.canty.org.uk (*IWT 12, The Passion*).

My 'Passion' experience was partially eclipsed by the novelty of it being my first cinema experience since I was 11 - except for one in the West End where after ten minutes I stormed out protesting the mockery of Christ.

The Passion film left a mass of viewers shocked and speechless. These scenes were the sword that went through the soul of Mary, Christ's mother, too searing to contemplate. But I own that the screen portrayal did not affect me too greatly. I suppose I knew the actuality so well from the Gospels. Also, as a newcomer to cinema, like a dinosaur (a very small one!) coming alive from the past of extreme

holiness separation-ism, my focus was on Biblical accuracy and the techniques of acting, so the force of the presentation struck me more obliquely at the time.

But Mel Gibson did what the Bible does not, that is describe or dramatise the suffering. Scripture uses few descriptive adjectives, depending on facts without embroidery, like the French writer Gide. But the film, especially the fiendish scourging, was adjectival throughout. God left it to us, our imagination and the skill of Mel Gibson and others to bring home to us the convulsing realities. Being critical for a moment I wished I had been consultant for those scourging takes. As I watched I felt it was too overdone. Jesus, or any other man, would have died half way through such extreme violence. Similarly, 'Jesus' was unrealistically shown as never losing consciousness even struggling uphill on the Via Dolorosa with a very weighty cross - which would only have been the crosspiece - and collapsing at the Stations of the Cross. I observed too that that precious blood of His, which would have been a crimson pool on the ground, appeared only as a lace of lacerations.

Brutal scenes are a feature of Mel Gibson films, I am told. He is Catholic and the Catholic view of the Cross is pity and empathy, gazing at length on crucifixion pictures to identify with His sufferings as a road of salvation. The message of the film is similar but it quotes Isaiah texts during the introduction, making it clear that Christ bore our sins and by His stripes we were healed.

For all my years submerged in theology (the Cross being my life long focus) this visual display remains for me weeks later as the reminder of what our iniquity has really done, and done to God. Its vile hand dragged that Holy One from His

sublime throne down to that sordid and hellish Roman cockpit.

I can't get over the fact that He was my victim, impeached for my sins. The screen presented me with a new realisation of wickedness. My sin scalds others, sometimes even terribly, yet what did it do to Him, His suffering, photographed on a 30 foot screen! There are no words - tears are superficial. What a price tag for our illegitimate pleasures! Hollywood gloss and all, but to see Romans trying to cut my Lord in pieces with their lashes was unbearable. He, Christ – and me! My sin associated Him with me! My sin Offering, my Redeemer. Now, the viciousness of Roman whips was sickening enough and I know that 'by his stripes we were healed', but it was on the Cross that my hell-fires scorched His soul. The scourging was so grotesquely cruel, so what actually went on in the infinite consciousness of our Saviour during those 6 hours gibbeted on a tree? That is the mystery of God and of eternity. No film, no portrayal could convey that. "None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, how dark was the night that the Lord passed through e'er he found the sheep that was lost".

Jewish critics bitterly claimed the film was anti-Jewish propaganda. To me, the allegation sounded prejudiced and untrue. The story Mel Gibson gave us was, as the Pope said, ".. as it was". Jealous Israel leaders did hand Christ over but the brutality was not shown as Jewish, but Roman. To eliminate Jewish involvement from the Passion story would have been false and blind. Does political correctness want us to re-write history? (Like the American film showing USA forces, not the British, capturing the Enigma machine.) In the Passion film Jewish women were paid tributes.

The film's scenes are numbing. Like the Cross itself, it highlights what sin does, not only to God but also to ourselves, twisting our thinking, corrupting our conscience, distorting our understanding of truth, and finally crucifying God and putting the devil on the throne. It puts into pictorial form the most devastating statement ever made about mankind: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and who can know it?" Who can know it? We reply 'nobody', and TV news confirms it, daily.