



## **Week 12 – The Work of Christ**

It has been important to make a thorough study of Christ's person, his deity and humanity, so that we might better understand what his unique nature enabled him to do for us. He always was, of course, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity.

He became incarnate, however, because of the task that he had to accomplish— saving us from our sin.

Until we understand the person and nature of Jesus Christ, one cannot fully understand the work which he did. Who he was especially fitted him for what he was to do. With this knowledge we are in a much better position to understand Christ's work than if we had to interpret from our mere human perspective all that he has done.

### **The Stages of Christ's Work**

Jesus' work, can be explained in two basic stages, which are traditionally referred to as the state of his humiliation and the state of exaltation.

Each of these stages in turn consists of a number of steps. What we have are two steps down from his glory (incarnation and death), then a series of steps back up to his previous glory, and even something beyond that.

## The Humiliation Incarnation

***The Incarnation, (Theology) The doctrine that the second person of the Trinity assumed human form in the person of Jesus Christ and is completely both God and man.***

*(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/incarnation?s=t>)*

Some verses highlight what He became.

*John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Some highlight what He gave up.

*Philippians 2: 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

*Galatians 4: 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,*

What Jesus gave up in coming to earth was immense.

From a position of “equality with God,” which included the immediate presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit as well as the continuous praise of the angels ... he came to earth, where he had none of these.

Even if Christ had come to the highest splendor that earth could afford, the descent would still have been immense.

- But it was not to the highest of human circumstances that he came.
- Rather, he took the form of a servant, a slave.
- He came into a very common family.
- He was born in the very obscure little town of Bethlehem.
- And even more striking, he was born in the very humble setting of a stable and laid in a manger.
- He was born under the law. He who had originated the law, who was the Lord of it, became subject to the law, fulfilling all of it.

*Galatians 4: 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

Jesus emptied himself of equality with God by adding or taking on humanity. In doing so, Jesus gave up the independent exercise of his divine attributes.

This does not mean that he surrendered some (or all) of his divine attributes, but that he voluntarily gave up the ability to exercise them on his own.

He could exercise them only in dependence upon the Father and in connection with possession of a fully human nature.

Both wills, the Father's and His were necessary for him to utilize his divine attributes. (Humility)

There was, then, an immeasurable humiliation involved in assuming human nature. He could not freely and independently exercise all of the capabilities which he had when he was in heaven.

## **Death**

The ultimate step downward in Jesus' humiliation was his death.

He who was "the life" (John 14: 6), the Creator, the giver of life and of the new life which constitutes victory over death, became subject to death.

He who had committed no sin suffered death, which is the consequence or "wages" of sin.

By becoming human, Jesus became subject to the possibility of death, that is, he became mortal; and death was not merely a possibility, but it became an actuality.

And Jesus suffered not only death, but a humiliating one at that! He experienced a type of execution reserved by the Roman Empire for grievous criminals. It was a slow, painful death, virtually death by torture.

Add to this, the mockery and taunting by the crowds, the abuse by the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers, compounded the humiliation.

Death seemed to be the end of his mission; he had failed in his task. His voice was stilled, so that he could no longer preach and teach, and his body was lifeless, unable to heal, raise from the dead, and quiet the storms.

## **The Exaltation - Resurrection**

The death of Jesus was the low point in his humiliation; the overcoming of death through the resurrection was the first step back in the process of his exaltation.

Because the resurrection is so important, it has occasioned a great deal of controversy.

There were, of course, no human witnesses to the actual resurrection, since Jesus was alone in the tomb when it took place. We do find, however, two types of evidence.

- First, the tomb in which Jesus had been laid was empty, and the body was never produced.
- Second, a great variety of persons testified that they had seen Jesus alive.

The most natural explanation of these testimonies is that Jesus was indeed alive again.

There is no better way of accounting for the transformation of the disciples from frightened, defeated persons to militant preachers of the resurrection.

The triumph of Jesus over sin and death was the fundamental step in his exaltation— he was freed from the curse brought on him by his voluntary bearing of the sin of the entire human race.

### **Ascension to the Father's Right Hand**

The first step in Jesus' humiliation involved giving up the status which he had in heaven and coming to the conditions of earth; the second step in the exaltation involved leaving the conditions of earth and reassuming his place with the Father.

Jesus himself on several occasions foretold his return to the Father- (John 6: 62; 14: 2, 12; 16: 5, 10, 28; 20: 17).

Luke gives the most extended accounts of the actual ascension

*Luke 24:50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*

*Acts 1: 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*

In premodern times the ascension was usually thought of as a transition from one place (earth) to another (heaven). We now know, however, that space is such that heaven is not merely upward from the earth, and it also seems likely that the difference between earth and heaven is not merely geographical.

One cannot get to God simply by traveling sufficiently far and fast in a rocket ship of some kind.

God is in a different dimension of reality, and the transition from here to there requires not merely a change of place, but of state.

The significance of the ascension is that Jesus left behind the conditions associated with life on this earth. Thus the pain, both physical and psychological, of earth is no longer his.

The opposition, hostility, unbelief, and unfaithfulness which he encountered have been replaced by the praise of the angels and the immediate presence of the Father. What a contrast to the abuse and insults he endured here!

There were definite reasons why Jesus had to leave the earth.

- One was in order to prepare a place for our future abode (John 14: 2– 3).
- Another reason he had to go is that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, might come (John 16: 7). The sending of the Holy Spirit was essential, for whereas Jesus could work with the disciples only through external teaching and example, the Holy Spirit could work within them (John 14: 17).
- And through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, God would be present with them; thus Jesus could say that he would be with them forever (Matt. 28: 20).

### **Jesus' ascension means that he is now seated at the right hand of the Father**

*(see Matt. 26: 64; Acts 2: 33–36; 5: 31; Eph. 1: 20– 22; Heb. 10: 12; 1 Peter 3: 22; and Rev. 3: 21; 22: 1).*

The right hand is the place of distinction and power.

Jesus' sitting at the right hand of God should not be interpreted as signifying rest or inactivity. It is a symbol of authority and active rule.

The right hand is also the place where Jesus is ever making intercession with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7: 25).

## **Second Coming**

One dimension of the exaltation remains. Scripture indicates clearly that Christ will return at some point in the future; the exact time is unknown to us.

Then his victory will be complete. He will be the conquering Lord, the judge over all.

At that point his reign will be total.

He himself has said that his second coming will be in glory (Matt. 25: 31). The one who came in lowliness, humility, and even humiliation, will return in complete exaltation.

*Philippians 2: 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

## **The Functions of Christ**

### **The Revelatory Role of Christ**

Many references to the ministry of Christ stress the revelation which he gave of the Father and of heavenly truth.

He had come from the very presence of God. His preexistence with the Father was a major factor in his ability to reveal the Father, for he had been with him.

*John 1: 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Jesus reveals the Father and heavenly truth.

Christ's revealing work covers a wide span of time and forms.

He first functioned in a revelatory fashion even before his incarnation. As the Logos, he is the light which has enlightened everyone coming into the world; thus, in a sense all truth has come from and through him.

*John 1: 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.*

A second and most obvious period of Jesus' revelatory work was, of course, his prophetic ministry during his incarnation and stay upon earth.

Here two forms of revelation come together. He spoke the divine word of truth. Beyond that, however, he was the truth and he was God, and so what he did was a showing forth, not merely a telling, of the truth and of the reality of God.

There is, third, the continuing revelatory ministry of Christ through his church.

He promised them his presence in the ongoing task (Matt. 28: 20).

He made clear that in many ways his ministry would be continued and completed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would be sent in Jesus' name, and would teach his followers all things and bring to remembrance all that he had said to them (John 14: 26).

In a very real sense, then, Jesus was to continue his revelatory work through the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps this is why Luke makes the somewhat puzzling statement that his first book pertained to all that Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1: 1).

We conclude that when the apostles proclaimed the truth, Jesus was continuing his work of revelation through them.

The final and most complete revelatory work of Jesus lies in the future. There is a time coming when he will return; one of the words for the second coming of Christ is "revelation" (apokalypsis).

At that time we will see clearly and directly (1 Cor. 13: 12).

When he appears, we shall see him as he is (1 John 3: 2).

Then all barriers to a full knowledge of God and of the truths of which Christ spoke will be removed.

## **The Rule of Christ**

The Gospels picture Jesus as a king, the ruler over the whole universe.

Jesus himself said that in the new world the Son of man would sit on a glorious throne.  
*Matt. 19: 28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

He claimed that the kingdom of heaven was his.

*Matt. 13: 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,*

There is abundant evidence that Christ is ruling today.

The kingdom of God, over which Christ reigns, is present in the church.

He is the head of the body, the church.

*Colossians 1: 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

When he was on earth, his kingdom was present in the hearts of his disciples. And wherever believers today are following the lordship of Christ, the Savior is exercising his ruling or kingly function.

There is a time coming when the reign of Christ will be complete; then all will be under his rule, whether willingly and eagerly, or unwillingly and reluctantly.

### **The Reconciling Work of Christ**

One aspect of Christ's work as reconciler is his intercessory ministry.

The Bible records numerous instances of Jesus' interceding for his disciples while he was here upon the earth.

The most extended is his high-priestly prayer for the group (John 17).

- Here Jesus prayed that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves (v. 13).
- He did not pray that they be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the evil one (v. 15).
- He also prayed that they might all be one (v. 21).
- In addition this last prayer was for those who would believe through the word of the disciples (v. 20).

What Jesus did for his followers while he was on earth, he continues to do for all believers during his heavenly presence with the Father.

*Romans 8: 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

*Hebrews 7: 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

*Hebrews 9: 24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*

Jesus presents his righteousness to the Father for our justification.

He also pleads the cause of his righteousness for believers who, while previously justified, continue to sin.

And finally, it appears, particularly from the instances during his earthly ministry, that Christ beseeches the Father that believers might be sanctified and kept from the power of the evil tempter.

There is another, even more fundamental aspect of Christ's reconciling work, the aspect upon which his intercession is based. It is in the atonement that we come to the crucial point of Christian faith.

**Atonement is the doctrine concerning the reconciliation of God and humankind, especially as accomplished through the life, suffering, and death of Christ.**

*(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/atonement?s=ts>)*

The doctrine of the atonement is most critical for us, because it is the point of transition where we shift our focus from the nature of Christ to his active work in our behalf; here systematic theology has direct application to our lives.

The atonement has made our salvation possible.

It is also the foundation of major doctrines which await our study.

Our doctrines of God and of Christ will color our understanding of the atonement.

For if God is a very holy, righteous, and demanding being, then humans will not be able to satisfy him easily, and it is quite likely that something will have to be done in their behalf to satisfy him.

On the other hand, if God is an indulgent, permissive Father who says, "We have to allow humans to have a little fun sometimes," then it may be sufficient simply for him to give us a little encouragement and instruction.

If Christ was merely human, then the work that he did serves only as an example; he was not able to offer anything in our behalf beyond his perfect example of doing everything he was required to do, including dying on the cross.

If, however, he is God, his work for us went immeasurably beyond what we are able to do for ourselves; he served not only as an example but as a sacrifice for us.

The doctrine of humanity, broadly defined to include the doctrine of sin, also affects the picture.

If human beings are basically spiritually intact, they probably can, with a bit of effort, fulfil what God wants of them.

If, however, they are totally depraved and consequently unable to do what is right no matter how much they wish to or how hard they try, then a more radical work had to be done in their behalf.

## **Things to Mull**

1. When attempting to understand the work of Christ, what did it mean for him to humiliate himself by becoming incarnate?
2. What does Christ's humiliation mean for the believer today?
3. Why would God choose for Jesus to come as the lowest of the low?
4. How does the account of the crucifixion of Jesus', when He said, "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?" help you understand His "humiliation process"?
5. Why did God not have physical witnesses present at the resurrection of Jesus?
6. Describe the works of Christ since He has returned to the right hand of the Father.
7. How did/does Jesus reveal truth to people?
8. How does Christ still rule on the Earth today?
9. Is man basically good or basically bad? Why does this matter?

## **Bibliography**

Erickson, Millard J. (2001-04-01). *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (pp. 245 - 254). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.