

# Christ and the Early Church

*Building a Christian Mind*

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To begin our time tonight, I ask you to turn to Psalm 2, which is not really the text for this evening, but it will give us a starting point for our thoughts tonight in a message I've titled "Christ and the Early Church." Christ and the early church. We're going to read from Psalm 2 as we begin.

1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." 10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Now Psalm 2 is one of the opening pillars of the Psalms. We said years ago that Psalms 1 and 2 function kind of like pillars that introduce you into all of the following 148 Psalms. The first two Psalms set a tone of the godly man in Psalm 1, and then in Psalm 2 an expectation of the coming Messiah which is borne out in the subsequent Psalms as you see the life and the thoughts and the prayer and the praise of a godly man unfolded, and then you have an abundance of Psalms that create an expectation of the coming Messiah in accordance with Psalm 2. And that little recognition and introduction is helpful for us this evening because we're going to be talking about how Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of a coming Messiah, and all of this is wrapped around the theme that we started just on Sunday, a brief series titled, "Is Christianity True?" Is Christianity true? And tonight's message, "Christ in the Early Church," is an advance on that brief series, which is an advance on our bigger series called "Building a Christian Mind."

Now, before I go any further, I just want to say something to help you kind of appreciate, and what I mean by appreciate is understand, and see the significance of the different aspects that a well-rounded pulpit must give to you over the course of time, a broad number of responsibilities that a pulpit is to fulfill to the people of God for that they would grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're most familiar with the idea of a biblical exposition and teaching through texts on a verse by verse basis, and that is fundamental and foundational to everything that a Bible teaching church should do over the course of time, and along the way, a pulpit should provide comfort to the people of God in their afflictions and in their sorrows, a pulpit should almost, it seems almost conversely, provide elements of rebuke for people in sin, warnings about rejecting the gospel. There's an evangelistic thrust to preaching. A rounded pulpit must teach you theology and help you to see how the teaching of Scripture presents a unified and systematic development of truth. There's instruction, there's information that's provided, there's just a broad range of themes and approaches that are necessary to teach the full counsel of God and the temptation is for a pulpit to focus on one thread, to always be a comforting pulpit, but that's not healthy. Sometimes people just need to be flat out rebuked, "You are sinning, you are thinking wrongly, you are teaching things that are not true, and you need to stop that," you know? And so there's just a broad range of things that go into a pulpit that teaches the full counsel of God. Here tonight, we want to focus on some of the historical aspects of Christianity and show you from Scripture where you find these things and what the implications of them are. So that's where we're going here this evening and I'm delighted to have this opportunity. To open the word of God is a privilege that I try never to take for granted because we don't know what our lives are like tomorrow and what tomorrow may hold, so we enjoy the moment, we take advantage of the moment, we take advantage of every opportunity, at least we should, we should take advantage of every opportunity to improve our minds through the teaching of the word of God and to avail ourselves of it because we never know when things might change that would not make it possible for us to enjoy the benefits like we have this evening.

So, last time we saw that our faith is rooted in undeniable history, as we considered what we looked at on Sunday, and what we saw is that there is no time in which Christianity could have been invented as a fiction. There's no way that that ever could have worked. We saw that in AD 200 there was already such a widespread Christian community that they needed large public places in order to bury all of these Christians, which tells us that Christianity had existed a long time before then. And the point of this is that there was never a time, it was utterly impossible to create a fiction like Jesus Christ that would explain the subsequent course of the early church. There was never a time for that. As we worked our way back in time, we saw that in AD 112 there are historical writings that refer to Christ and secular sources that refer to it as a pernicious superstition, but the reality was that whether it's a superstition or not, there were a lot of people that believed it; it was recognized at that time as having widespread influence. You go back even further in time, you go to AD 64 and the burning of Rome, and you see that there was a body of Christians there that Nero could blame for the burning of Rome. It wasn't true, it was a false accusation, but there was a large enough segment, far from Jerusalem of

Christians, that the emperor saw them as a convenient scapegoat to cover up his own crimes.

Now, that tells us that just going by those standpoints, those little historical markers, that you could not have invented it in 200 AD and just created a fiction whole cloth in 200 AD because there were too many people there that already believed it. Same thing in 112, same thing in 64. And so as you go further and further back in uncontested historical sources, you realize that there was no time, there was no place for this to be made up. There was no time in which the story of Christ could ever have been invented as an utter complete fiction and the reason that it couldn't have been presented as an utter fiction is because it was true and it was rooted in historical time and space, reality and events witnessed by tens of thousands of people with hundreds and hundreds of witnesses to the resurrection, you know, and we just need to know these things, and if a pulpit doesn't give you these things, I don't know, you may not ever see them, but it is an easy refutation of the ignorant, and I use that as a descriptive, not a pejorative term, the ignorant idea that there's no basis for what we believe. That's foolish and completely easily refutable falsehoods that are alleged against our most precious faith.

Now, that's just a brief look back at what we said on Sunday. Now we pivot this evening to new material. There is another reality historically rooted that reinforces that Christianity must be true, that there is no alternative but to acknowledge that Christianity must be true. When we say Christianity, we're talking about the biblical gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. We're not talking about some social gospel. We're not talking in terms of liberal Christianity that reduces the biblical message to just a series of ethics or the social justice gospel or whatever modern perversions are laid upon it in our day. No, we're talking about the biblical gospel that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, he was raised on the third day. and that therefore, in light of that, the call upon all men is to repent and believe in him for the forgiveness of their sins, upon pain of eternal judgment, if you reject him. That's true. That is the gospel. That is Christianity, and it is true, and we can reach no other conclusion than to assert that. Now, tonight what we're going to look at is how the Old Testament expectation of a coming Messiah shows us the unavoidable necessity of the conclusion that Christianity is true. The Old Testament created an expectation of a coming Messiah, and in light of subsequent events in the New Testament era and the history that we've already seen on Sunday, we see that there is no possible conclusion except that everything that we find in Scripture is true and that the message of the gospel is an unavoidable reality with which men must come to terms with.

So for our first point this evening, let's just review briefly that Old Testament expectation. The Old Testament expectation, and we really saw it laid out there in Psalm 2 as the Lord speaks about, as Yahweh speaks about, the installation of his Son as King on Zion, his holy hill. There was this coming King, and in verses 10 through 12 there in Psalm 2, you see this expectation of something that was still future from the standpoint of the writer of the Psalm. In verse 10 we read, "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him." This Psalm speaks in terms of someone who had not yet arrived on the scene, and it creates this expectation that there is one coming that you must recognize and bow down before, and so there is this expectation of a coming King, one of great significance who would come that had not yet appeared on the scene.

And in other places, the Psalm speaks about this coming future ruler and I'm just going to give you verse references. We won't take the time to turn there. But in Psalm 72:11, Psalm 72:11, we read let all the kings bow down before him. Let all nations serve him. In verse 17 of Psalm 72, it says his name will endure forever. In Psalm 89:27, we read that he would be highest of the kings of the earth. And in Daniel 2:44, we read that his kingdom will endure forever. And that's just a sampling, that's just a sampling to give you the sense of the theme that I'm laying out before you that that the Old Testament Scriptures called men to look for a king who was coming, a king exalted above all other kings, above all other dominions, a king who would have an everlasting kingdom.

Well, as you read through Old Testament history, you read about David and how he fell, Solomon, and he fell, then the kingdom divided, and things really spiraled out of control, you realize that none of those kings were a king like that. After the exile, they came back, they were a small remnant under the domination of, at that time, the Persians and then the Greeks and then the Romans. There was never this transcendent king as a historical figure that satisfied what the expectation was and so for a full millennium, just starting at the point of the Psalms and going forward, going back 1,500 years to the time of Moses up to the time of Christ, there's this expectation that someone is coming, and there is this longing for this one to come. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said, "The LORD will raise up a prophet like me. Listen to him." But who was this prophet that was like Moses? Where is the king that has this transcendent effect? And while Psalm 2 called nations to have no other gods before Yahweh, they were commanded to do homage to this coming Son. Psalm 2:12, "Kiss the Son." In other words, "Give your affection to him. Give your allegiance to him. Bow to him. This coming one is the one to whom you are to give all of your allegiance."

And so understand, and it helps maybe to have a little bit of historical perspective here, the United States of America has not even been a country for even 250 years yet. It's coming up, I guess, in what, 2026, the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country? That's a very long time for all of us and we look back at our history and 46 presidents, 45 men who were president, and just that long, rich history of our country, and you look back at the ebbs and flow and the Civil War and the Great War, the First World War and the Second World War and all of those things, and there's just a whole lot of history there that we kind of know and assimilate a little bit as common knowledge. Well, beloved, think about it this way, at the time that Christ arrived, going back to Moses, is about 1,500 years, six times the length of the history of America, as we're speaking here today, and over 1,500 years, not 250, six times as long, there were these prophetic pictures, there were these hints, these drawings, these shadows of one who was to come with such great authority and come in the name of God. That's the depth, the historical depth of the expectation amongst the Jewish people when Christ arrived. They'd been waiting for this Messiah for over 1500 years. And even before that, you know, as you go back to, you

know, 2,000 years before the time of Christ and consider Abraham and how God promised him that in him, in his seed, all the nations would be blessed, thousands of years of expectation. And, you know, kings would rise up, prosper for a time, "Is this the one? No, he's not the one." He fell. He died. But there's this burning, there's this churning, there's this yearning for this promised leader to come, okay? Very, very important to recognize that Old Testament expectation.

Now along with that sense of this conquering king, we read that this Messiah of God would be someone who is even more than a national leader. This coming Messiah was one who would provide spiritual deliverance to his people, not simply political deliverance. He was going to provide spiritual deliverance. He was going to undo what Satan did to man at the fall in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:15, you know, the first statement of the gospel that there would be one who would come and bruise Satan's head after Satan had tempted man into the fall that ruined all of us. And as you read through the Old Testament, the family line, the ancestral line of this one who would come would be traced through Abraham and through the tribe of Judah and then through David and the Davidic covenant. He would be born in Bethlehem, Micah 5:2. And we've looked at all of this in the pretty recent past, and so I'm not going to go over and have you look up all of these things except for this one text in Isaiah 53. Turn to Isaiah 53 with me. What the Old Testament picture is creating a sense and an anticipation of one who is unspeakably great, who is high and lofty and powerful. In Isaiah 53:5 and 6, we read something else about this coming deliverer. In verse 5, we read that he would be "wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Someone who would come not only and deliver the people, but would be a sin-bearing Messiah, and then you read in Scripture, as I alluded earlier, these are promises that were not just for Israel. God promised Abraham that through him all the nations would be blessed in Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 22. And in that little brief outline that I've given you here, we just see that rising from the pages of the Old Testament is this great one who would be identified with Yahweh and deliver his people both politically and spiritually, not necessarily at the same time. And so this Messiah was considered to be the anointed one, meaning that he was set apart for the divine call on the office to fulfill all that God had promised to his people over the course, many promises given over 1,500-2,000 years. And now, you know, I just don't want you to lose sight of the historical magnitude of what we're talking about. Here we are talking about it 2,000 years after the time of Christ. We're considering things that have been in place and in writing for 4,000 years. The historical timeframe here is just incalculable.

Now, here's the question for tonight. This is a serious part of building a Christian mind and you need to have this installment, you need to have this brick in the wall that serves to guard your mind and circle around and give you the appropriate realm of Christian thinking. You need to know these things and that brings us to our second point here tonight: the New Testament fulfillment. The New Testament fulfillment. The question is, how does that Old Testament expectation carry over into the New Testament. All right, you've got this massive Old Testament expectation of one unspeakably great who was to

come in the name of God, now what does the New Testament and how does the New Testament relate to that? Well, let's start here. The Greek word for "anointed one" is Christ. The Christ was, and here's what the sense of the term is, the Christ is the one who was the expected fulfiller of the hopes of Israel for an end-time deliverer. Whoever the Christ was, and that's really, really critical for your thinking and understanding what we're saying here this evening, whoever the Christ was, was the one that they were expecting to come and fulfill all of these New Old Testament hopes that had been laid down over the course of 2,000 years of prophecy. That's who the Christ was, the anointed one, the expected deliverer, and "the expected" is just so important there, generation after generation after generation longing for this one to come in their lifetimes and not seeing it and there's just this accumulated growing over time expectation and hope longing for him to come. And you see it in the New Testament when men like Simon in the temple at the birth of Jesus and Anna, she served night and day in the temple, longing for this Christ to come. All of that is rooted in this long history of the Old Testament, beloved.

Now, you and I, we are so used to the term, the name Jesus Christ, that we miss the full significance of it. In New Testament times, without a very good grounding in the Old Testament, without an explanation of what terms mean and what the historical roots of those terms are, you know, there are many people who would just think Jesus Christ, like, you know, like I'm Don Green, Don is my first name, Green is my last name, Jesus first name, Christ the last name. That ain't it. That ain't it. That, to say Jesus Christ, to join the name of the man Jesus of Nazareth with the loaded theological biblical term of Christ, the anointed one, is to link those two things together in an inseparable way with far-reaching consequences. For the Jews in the first century to join the name of the man Jesus to the title of Christ was absolutely earth-shaking. This was a magnitude 10.0 earthquake on the Richter scale for their thought and for their expectations. To say that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ meant nothing less than this, it meant that the Son of God had come to earth and if the Son of God had come, then there is a sense in which the Messianic age had arrived.

Now with all of that in mind, turn to Matthew 16 and we're building a case here, beloved. We haven't even gotten to the substance of things yet. We've just been laying groundwork for now. And in Matthew 16:13, Jesus is going to bring out a confession out of the mouth of Peter to clarify who he was for the sake of the circle of disciples. In verse 13, we read this, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'" That's a self-referential term. Jesus is asking them, in other words, "Who do people say that I am?" "And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" There was a fog in the mind of the people. They saw that there was something special about Jesus, and they tried to associate him with significant figures of the Old Testament, prophets, maybe another coming of John the Baptist. There's something significant about them, but the common theme of all of those is that he was a man and that's not the full answer to it. And so Jesus in verse 15 said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And look at what Simon Peter says. He replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." You're more than a prophet. You're more than a man. You are the Christ. He's saying, "Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of thousands of years of Old Testament expectation. You

are the one that God said he would send." "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" Peter, you have just spoken out words of divine revelation. God gave that understanding to you. You are blessed because God has opened your mind to see the truth about who Christ is. "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." And notice that the passage opens, verse 13, "when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi," and it has a climax where it says Jesus is the Christ.

Now, Peter's confession is stunning in the magnitude of its importance. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, affirmed by Christ as having been given to him by revelation from God, that confession meant nothing less than this, it meant that the turning point of history had arrived. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In other words, there is no one else to look for. Everything that our nation has been longing for for 2,000 years through the Torah, the first five books of Moses, through the historical books, through the development of the prophets, through the Psalms, everything. that they had been pointing toward found its fulfillment in Christ. Now, that's earth-shattering to a Jew. To a Jew, it meant all of their national hope was fulfilled in this one who had walked on earth known as Jesus of Nazareth.

Now beloved, here's what we need to do next as we recognize the magnitude of that confession. If it was only what Peter said here, I could understand if you thought maybe I was making too much of one text in Scripture. That's not the case. When you read the book of Acts, beloved, you see the apostles stressing this theme everywhere in their preaching. As they preached to the Jews in different localities, they were saying this, they were saying, "The man Jesus, so recently with us, and walking amongst humanity, the man Jesus is the Christ of God. He is the anointed one." And I want to take you through six different passages in the book of Acts now so that you could see this theme, and sometimes it's only through an overview message like this that you can see the overarching themes that are woven into all of the book of the Bible that you might miss if you're not looking at things in a global perspective.

Look at Acts 2. Let's start in verse 32. Acts 2:32. Peter is preaching to Jews. He had told them about Jesus, and he said, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." They were seeing people speak in other languages and there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Peter is explaining what they were seeing. God had raised Jesus from the dead, he was exalted on high, he sent the Spirit, and the Spirit is the explanation for the miraculous things that you are seeing happen. Now in verse 34, he says, "For David did not ascend into the heavens," you see, David was not the expected one because David didn't ascend into heaven. He is buried in his tomb, speaking in the first century; his tomb is still with us today. David, as great as he was, was not the anointed one. He was not the Christ. And David's own words, he says in verse 34, shows that that's true because David said that, "'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" David says, "I have a Lord and he said to my Lord," God the Father speaking to God the Son. David's own words acknowledge that there was

someone beyond him, that there was a greater Son that would come, a greater David to come said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool," verse 35. Now look at verse 36 in light of everything that we've seen here this evening so far. Peter says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." This man Jesus of whom I have been telling you, this man Jesus whom you crucified, let everyone in Israel know and understand for certain that this is true. Christianity is true, Peter says. Know for certain that this Jesus whom you crucified is the Christ. He's the expected one. He is the Messiah. That was in the city of Jerusalem.

Now look over at Acts 9:19, this taking place in Damascus, as we'll see, after the conversion of Saul. Let's start in verse 17 just to remind you of a portion of the context. "Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus." And watch this in verse 20, "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus," the historical man Jesus of Nazareth, "he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues," meaning he was preaching to the Jews that this Jesus was "the Son of God." He was the coming one. He was the fulfillment of God's promises. This man Jesus, was the Son of God.

Look at Acts 10 in verses 40 to 43. Well, actually let's go a little further back and in verse 37 of Acts 10, you see Peter appealing again to the knowledge of the very recent events that had happened in Jerusalem and in the surrounding areas concerning the man Jesus and he says to his audience, he says, "you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed." You know this. You all know this is a matter of public record what happened in this region. Verse 38, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth," he's pointing them back to a human being. He was more than a human, but they knew him in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth "with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree." Stop there, pause there for a moment, beloved, and realize that as we said on Sunday, what Peter's doing here is he's just rehearsing historical fact. He's reminding them of what occurred in time and space history. He is not giving them abstract speculations. He's not giving them philosophical discussions. He's talking to them about what really happened in real time on the real earth. And so in verse 39, "we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Multiplied witnesses, multiplied exposure. Not a passing wisp in the night, not a ghost-like figure that appeared as an apparition at the end of their bed for a brief time as they were still half asleep. No, nothing like that. These were repeated occurrences where they ate and drank with him and many people saw him over many periods of time. Verse 42, "And he commanded us



to preach to the people and to testify that he," meaning Christ, "is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." That's in the village of Caesarea. This Christ, who lived, died, rose again, this is the one appointed by God.

Look at Acts 17 and notice what I'm wanting you to see is the many, many times in Scripture where this argument is made, Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Christ of God, the anointed, the appointed one of God, and this argument being made to the Jews, that's crucial for what we're going to say in a moment. Acts 17:1, "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" In other words, he's teaching them about the Lord Jesus. He's teaching them and reminding them of what Jesus did during his earthly ministry. Alongside that, he's teaching them and expounding the Old Testament Scriptures that painted a picture of who the Christ was, what he would do, and the purpose of his death and his sufferings so the human Jesus being proclaimed alongside the Old Testament Scriptures that painted the expectation of the coming Messiah. And then the climax of it, Paul says this Jesus that I am proclaiming to you, he is the Christ. This historical figure in our very recent past is the Christ that's been expected for some 2,000 years now.

Look at Acts 18 and we take time to go through each of these Scriptures to let the cumulative weight of it bear on your minds and show what a central feature of apostolic preaching the theme we're considering here tonight was to them. In Acts 18:5, "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus." The anointed one of God was Jesus of Nazareth. Those two are to be joined together in their minds. And in verse 28, you see it yet again, yet again, this time in the city of Ephesus, "he powerfully refuted the Jews in public," now speaking of Apollos, "he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus." The same theme.

And beloved one more. Beloved, one more in Acts 28. Again, we're building a case here. In Acts 28:23, Paul is in the city of Rome. He's under house arrest. People came to him to see him. Verse 23, "When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets." There you have it, the law of Moses, the prophets pointing to this Jesus.

And let me just remind you, if you'll turn to the book of Romans, just a page further, in the opening of Romans 1:1, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures." The prophets, this is what they promised in chapter 3, verse 21. Chapter 3 verse 21, "now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,

although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ," and on it goes.

Beloved, here's the point, in light of this massive expectation created in the Old Testament that there was a coming one from God, the fact that the apostles preached and said, "Jesus is this one that we have been expecting. He is the Christ. The fulfillment of thousands of years of promise are found in this man, Jesus." This is a stunning, stunning assertion to make. They were saying that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. Now, beloved, here's what I want you to see, and now we're pivoting into what is actually the heart of tonight's message. How do we know that Christianity is true? How does the nature of apostolic preaching show that it is true? Beloved, here's what I want you to see. The very fact that the apostles boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ to Jews shows irreversibly and irrefutably that Christianity is true.

Now that's not immediately apparent why that's the case, so let me explain to you why we say that, why we say that that kind of preaching to the Jews is demonstrable, tangible proof that Christianity is true. So that brings us to our third section here this evening, our third and final section for this evening. We've seen the Old Testament expectation of a coming Messiah. We see the New Testament fulfillment of it as shown in the New Testament apostolic preaching to the Jews. Now thirdly, we're going to explore the implications of that apostolic preaching. The implications of that apostolic preaching and, beloved, you kind of have to stay with me here and see the significance of everything that's being said here, and as I said last time, a serious portion of my thinking here is influenced by the book I mentioned by Iain Murray that I alluded to on Sunday called "The Underground Revolution." So I just want to give credit where credit's due.

What are the implications of this apostolic preaching and why does this matter, and what does it have to do with building a Christian mind? Why can't we just look at a small text of Scripture and be satisfied with that? It's because there are transcendent themes that you miss if you don't view Scripture in the totality like we're doing in this long extended series. Understand this, beloved. The apostles appealed to the Old Testament to verify their claim about the preaching of Christ. The Old Testament had been completed 400 years before Christ came. The book of Malachi was the end of the Old Testament revelation, and then there was a period of 400 silent years. The revelation to that point had created this expectation. Then God goes silent, as it were, for 400 years, which would put us back about the time of the arrival of the Mayflower on American shores. That's a long time to have this pulsating tension of an expectation and waiting for another word from God and he's not there. The point is that because the Old Testament had been completed, there was a fixed picture of what the Messiah would be, and now the apostles come immediately on the heels of the life of Jesus and say Jesus is the Messiah. That means one of two things, or if you were gonna falsify this, if you were going to show it wrong, there's a couple of ways that you could do it. We could ask the question this way. Could the Christians who were preaching this way have edited the Old Testament manuscripts to add details that only happened in their lifetimes to make the record conform to the life of Jesus? In other words, let's say that there were these dishonest, overly zealous disciples of Jesus who wanted to exalt him falsely by making it look like

he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation, and let's assume for a moment that that wasn't true. How could they have done that then? Well, one way would have been to go back to the Old Testament and kind of rewrite it, erase it, and fill in some things from the details of Jesus' life to make it look like that had happened. Could they have changed the Old Testament to conform it after the fact to the life of Jesus? Is that possible? Is that even possible? The answer is no. That's not possible at all. The Old Testament Scriptures were jealously guarded by the Jews who never became Christians. The oracles of God, you see this in Romans 3:1 for example, the oracles of God were committed to the Jews and not all of those Jews became Christians. They would not allow their Scriptures to be falsified by New Testament apostles or New Testament disciples so that after the fact the Old Testament could conform to the life of Jesus. That's not possible. The Jews who were in custody of the Old Testament Scriptures would quickly have repudiated any edit to the text and so the Christians could not have, what's the word I'm looking for? They could not have manipulated the Old Testament in order to achieve their objectives because the Jews would never cooperate in a fiction that would overthrow their own approach to Scriptures. The Jews had many objections to Christianity, beloved, but accusing Christians of rewriting the Old Testament, that wasn't one of them. Christians could not have edited the Old Testament to conform it to the life of Jesus.

So let's flip the question. What are the implications of this apostolic preaching? Let's flip the question. Could the disciples, okay, so we say the Old Testament was fixed. There wasn't anything you could do about that to create a false picture of Jesus and so let's ask this question. Could the disciples have composed a fictitious life of Jesus so that it harmonized with the prophetic records? You've got a fixed prophetic record, Jesus lived, died, and did all that he did, could the disciples have made things up, created a fiction that wasn't true but would match the Old Testament story so that people would believe in their Master as Lord and God? Is that possible? The answer to that question is no. That's utterly impossible also. Follow me here. Scholars debate the precise dates of the life of Christ. The best sources seem to indicate that Christ died in about AD 30. Now stay with me here because that date is very significant in light of what we showed you on Sunday. Remember 200 AD, catacombs. 112, reference to Christ and his many disciples. AD 64, Nero, burning of Rome, blames the Christians. You know, you're back within a generation of Christ by this time and now here are the apostles preaching within a few years after the life and death and resurrection of Christ. See, the whole question we're asking, is it possible for this to have been made up? Is it possible for the things that we read in the New Testament that conform to the Old Testament Scriptures, is it possible that somebody as a joke, somebody to commit a fraud on humanity, sat down and made this up in a way that conforms with what we read in the New Testament? And the answer is no. It's not possible. If the message was fiction, beloved, it would have needed to have been established many years prior to the time of the apostolic preaching. The very nature of fiction cannot be reconciled with the public record of Christ. If someone's going to believe a lie and accept it as true, the story about which they are asked to believe has to be said in things that are outside of their experience, said in remote places or distant times that are inaccessible for fact-checking. What the apostles did in their preaching was they were not talking about things that were remote and distant, saying, "Take my word for it."

They didn't say, "Oh, I found these gold plates. Take my word for what they say and what they mean," in a way that cannot be verified. That's not what the New Testament apostles did. Stay with me, beloved. This is crucial for having a Christian mind. As we've seen in everything that I've said here tonight, the events of which the apostles spoke and wrote belonged to a period that was familiar to many, many thousands of people in their audience. They were describing things that happened that were a matter of public record to their audience and they could say, "You know this. You know that these events happened." They appealed to recent public events to many eyewitnesses. Large crowds had seen what had happened in Judea and in Galilee. And here's the point, a make-believe life of Christ was impossible. The audience would have rejected something that they knew to be false, that they knew to be untrue. The apostles say, "You know this," and that is so extremely powerful because they could not deny it and they would not have said, "You know this," if they knew the audience was unaware of it and that it was a fiction.

On a human level, not even bringing into consideration now the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, on a human level, the apostolic message was persuasive because they appealed to contemporary events. There was no room to make this up. There was no window of time to make that happen. There were too many witnesses of too many events in too short of a time period to be able to make anything up like this, so that, if you'll go back to Acts 26, Acts 26:26, when Paul is making his defense to King Agrippa and the man Festus in verse 24 tried to discredit Paul, as people try to discredit Christians today, biblical Christians. Festus said, "'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.'" And then he appeals to the presiding king and he says, "For the king," he's going over Festus' head at this point. He says, "Festus, the king who is in the room with us now, the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner." "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." In other words, "King Agrippa, you know what the prophets say. You know what they say. Do you believe it? Because if you believe it, then there is no other conclusion but that Jesus is the Christ and the fulfillment of everything they said over the course of 2,000 years." Agrippa did his weakling best to deflect the question. Verse 28, he said, "'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, a slave of Christ in spiritual chains to Christ, willing spiritual chains. I just wish that these physical chains were not part of it.'"

Beloved, let me pull all of this together about Christ and the early church and how we know that Christianity is true. The knowledge of Christ was so publicly widespread at that time that Paul was sure that King Agrippa had heard about it, and the audience that heard the apostles preach did not dispute the facts about Jesus. Jesus was nationally prominent. He was known in surrounding lands. And here's the point, beloved, all of that to say this one sentence to you here on a wet September evening in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2023: a fabricated life and crucifixion designed to fit the Old Testament prophecies is completely impossible. They couldn't have changed, they couldn't have messed with the Old Testament. It was fixed and the Jews protected them. They couldn't make things up

about Jesus and preach them to a contemporary audience because there were too many facts that were known. If Jesus hadn't really existed, no one would have listened to them. If they had made things up about his crucifixion or his resurrection, no one would have believed it because it was a matter of public knowledge. They did not make it up, they could not have made it up, and therefore we know that Christianity is true.

What can we conclude from this historical survey? The only credible explanation of the existence of Christianity is that there is a perfect confluence, a perfect match between the Messiah expectation of the Old Testament and the fulfillment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth that shows us that this expectation of the coming Christ is fulfilled in the man Jesus. Meaning that he is more than a man, he is God in human flesh and the explanation that the Scriptures give about the life of Jesus of Nazareth is the truth and that he is the only Savior of mankind. Stated a different way, the only explanation of the things that we've seen on Sunday and here tonight is that God, according to his divine eternal decree which he began and instituted the start at creation and has been operating by his providence ever since, God planned a way of salvation, he announced it beforehand, and then in perfect control of everything, he sent his Son into the world who took on human flesh, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, was raised again on the third day and ascended into heaven. And God had planned it all.

Christ fulfilled all of that Scripture. He is the long-awaited Messiah. He's going to come again in a time still future to us and whether you're watching this later on video, whether you're here in the room now watching on the live stream, hearing it on subsequent media, beloved, every one of you without exception is responsible and accountable for how you answer the question that Paul put to Agrippa. The truth is a matter of public record. The question is, do you believe the prophets? Do you believe the apostles? And the exhortation to you in light of all these things is this, as we saw in Psalm 2:12, Jesus Christ is the Son of God and what you must do is kiss the Son, pledge your allegiance to him, give your complete, wholehearted, unreserved, affectionate submission to him, and beloved, as a pastoral exhortation, encouragement, and warning to you, I can only beg you, urge you, call you, and in the name of Christ command you, based on his word, to bow before this proven Christ, bow before him in love before one day he makes you bow before him by force. You can come to him at his gracious invitation to receive salvation. You can reject him and face the consequences later. Beloved, there is no third door. What will it be for you?

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you for the amazing person of your Son, the amazing plan of salvation, the amazing way that you fulfilled these things in time and space history, recorded them for us in Scripture, and now by your Spirit you give us understanding to see these things and to understand them. May your Spirit lead those who resist, those who harden their hearts and stiffen their necks against the preaching of Christ, Father, may your Spirit be gracious to them, Father. May you be gracious to those with hard, rebellious hearts. May your Spirit soften them to the truth. May you lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ. For those of us in whom you have already done that work, may you sink these things*

*deep into our minds, deep into our hearts, deep into our convictions so that our affections would respond to you and be shaped by that which you have made irrefutably true. And so, Father, do a work by your Spirit in accordance with your word, to the glory of your name, to the glory of your Son, by the power of your Spirit. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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