

Christ and the Early Church

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Well, as we come to celebrate the Lord's Table on this Good Friday occasion, I wanted to continue a series that I started last Tuesday titled "Is Christianity True?" That especially matters, the answer to that question, at a time like this. What are we celebrating? What are we remembering with the bread and the cup? Are we merely remembering something that someone made up at some time in the past that had no basis in historical fact, no basis in time and history? Or do we recall, do these elements point us to a literal crucifixion that took place some 2,000 years ago? The question and the answer matter profoundly and eternally because a true salvation from true sin requires a true sacrifice that was truly made. Real sin, of which we all bear by nature and by choice, real sin cannot be atoned by a fiction. If what we are celebrating here this evening never really happened, then we do not have salvation at all and we are wasting our time. So the question "Is Christianity true?" has great significance for the remembrance of the Lord's Table on Good Friday.

What we started last time on Tuesday, last Tuesday, was we saw that the Christian faith is rooted in undeniable history, and if you did not hear that message I encourage you to pick it up and listen to it. The record shows just by way of momentary review, the record shows that there is no time possible at which Christianity could have been made up apart from the actual facts of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was too widespread too early in order to have been a fiction that was made up in the mind of some religious zealot, that it was simply impossible, and we build on that theme tonight as we prepare our hearts for Communion. And to do so, I just want to make a general statement. The Old Testament created an expectation for the nation of Israel that one day a Messiah would come for them, a Messiah would come to deliver them, and that reality and the way that it plays out over the course of time and over the course of Scripture both in the Old and New Testament reinforce the certainty that Christianity must be true. There can be no other alternative. That's what we're going to see this evening. We're going to look, first of all, at that Old Testament expectation, and then consider the New Testament fulfillment and then, thirdly, the implications of the apostles' preaching of Christ. So we're just going to do this in a very much an overview fashion; each of these points could be the subject of multiple messages but that's not our purpose here this evening. It's just to acquaint you with and to set in your mind a basic structure of the undergirding historical reality that confirms to us as the Spirit works in our heart, that Christianity is true and that our hope in Christ is real and it is well-founded. We have not believed in silly fables. We have trusted in the true facts about the true Son of God and

his true death that results in a true salvation for everyone who repents and believes in him.

So last time we looked at the history and we just kind of reversed engineered it. We saw that by 200 AD Christianity was so widespread that the church needed public cemeteries, so to speak, underground cemeteries for the Christian disciples because there were so many of them that they needed a place to bury them, and if that was true by 200 AD, then obviously Christianity had existed prior to that. We saw that a Roman historian made reference to Christ in AD 112 and that in AD 64 the Roman Emperor Nero famously blamed Christians for the burning of the city of Rome in that year. Well, how could you blame a group of people for such a massive crime except for the fact that there were many of them who bore that label that could bear the guilt of the emperor's accusation? And so as you work your way back, you see that the mere facts of public history, uncontested facts of public history, show that this was not invented at some recent date, there's too much history, it's too well-established. And let me say this, beloved, the fact that people do not know history these days and the fact that they don't even care about history does absolutely nothing to undermine the force of this kind of argument. The facts are what the facts are and these are the facts. And so the fact that people are ignorant of them, the fact that people are indifferent to them do nothing to undermine the absolute force of the historical argument that we are making here first made by Iain Murray in his book titled "The Undercover Revolution," he and others but it's his material that prompted this series of messages for us here this evening. So this is very very compelling and we must take these things seriously. There is no alternative explanation that is even remotely plausible.

So first of all, I just want to speak about the Old Testament expectation of a coming Messiah. If you're taking notes this evening, that's the first point, the Old Testament expectation, and as you read throughout the Psalms and in the Old Testament prophets, you see that the Old Testament speaks about a coming future ruler for the nation of Israel and I'm just going to quote some verses for you, not necessarily familiar verses but you can jot these verses down and look them up later.

In Psalm 72:11 the Scripture says, "let all the kings bow down before him, let all nations serve him." There was a coming ruler to whom all nations and all kings would bow, one who was supreme above all others, one who was King of kings, in other words. Later in Psalm 72 it says of that coming ruler, "May his name endure forever," which obviously speaks beyond a human king. In Psalm 89:27 it says that this Messiah would be, "The highest of the kings of the earth." And in Daniel 2:44 it says his kingdom will "endure forever."

So as you read through those and as you read through the 12 shorter prophets sometimes called the Minor Prophets, you get this repeated picture developed over centuries of a future one who would reign, a future one who would come to the nation of Israel, who would deliver them. And so this Old Testament picture over the progress of revelation unfolding over the course of centuries created this burning expectation in the hearts of Jews, so much so that Jesus was asked, "Are You the coming One or should we look for

someone else?" As it was spoken to him and as they saw, they looked and they asked, "Are You the One that has been forecast for us by the prior prophecies of the preceding two millennia?"

Now with that said, turn to Psalm 2 in your Bibles. You'll remember from our study of the 10 Commandments that God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me," that there is no one other than the true God to whom worship was to be given. Well, when it comes to the Son, this predicted coming one, there's a distinction that is made. The nation and all peoples were to have no other god but Yahweh and yet they were commanded to give worship and to do homage to this Son who was coming. At verse 10 of Psalm 2, look at that with me, and again the greatest rulers of the earth are called to account, they're called to listen. In chapter 2, verse 10, or Psalm 2:10, I should say, we read, "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" And so we see in this Psalm that is critical, it's one of the two pillars of entrance into the entire psalter, we see in this Psalm that the Messiah would be more than merely a national leader, he would be one entitled to the worship that is reserved for God alone. He would rule over kings and he would also provide spiritual deliverance to his people as shown by the last sentence in verse 12 where it says, "How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!"

Now so there is this picture of a coming ruler who is entitled to worship that is addressed as the Messiah, the Anointed One. Scripture paints a picture of what this Messiah would do so that in Genesis 3, you can look back to Genesis 3 with me, in Genesis 3:15 after the fall of man and God is cursing the serpent through whom Satan spoke and deceived Eve, it says in Genesis 3:15, God says, "I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." This Messiah would deliver a crushing blow to Satan and reverse the curse ultimately that Satan brought upon the human race.

This Messiah, as you continue to read in the book of Genesis, is one who would come through a human genealogical line that would be traced through Abraham and then his son Judah, and ultimately through David. He is a King who would be born in the city of Bethlehem, we read in Micah 5:2. And so there is this great historical preparation that is taking place incrementally, slowly, invisibly but inexorably taking place as God unfolded history through his chosen people, and the beauty of the gospel and the beauty and the power of Scripture is that all along God who knows the end from the beginning, God was stating in advance what was going to happen and it is as though he painted this remarkable masterpiece on a canvas and just painted the outline in the early days of revelation, and then as centuries went on more and more details were put into place as the Master artist put the strokes of his eternal plan of redemption and painted it into place so that when Christ came there was an ultimate fulfillment and the picture became clear with a perfect resolution.

Well, one aspect of this Messiah is that he would suffer in order to achieve the forgiveness of the sins of his people. Look at Isaiah 53 with me. Isaiah 53:4-6, Isaiah writing centuries before the life of Christ says in verse 4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." And so there was this coming king who would reign, there was this coming servant who would suffer, and Israel was conditioned and Israel was taught and instructed by the prophets over centuries to expect such a one to arrive for them. Part of the beauty for us as Gentile people here today and for Gentiles throughout the centuries, is that ultimately these promises of a coming Deliverer were not simply for the nation of Israel alone. The Messiah would come through the Jewish line but God had promised that this coming one would be the one through whom all nations would be blessed. You see that stated repeatedly in Genesis in Genesis 12 and 15 and 17 and 22, that through Abraham and his seed all the nations would be blessed.

So this coming one was one who was often referred to or considered to be the Anointed One, the one who had been, in other words, set apart for the divine call of this great office that was being set forth over the centuries to the people of Israel, and so what we see is that this Old Testament created an expectation of a person, of one who would come, one who was utterly unique and unlike any other, that that one would be the fulfillment of all of these promises, of all of these promises, of all of these predictions, and this one would be the fulfillment of all of the hopes of Israelites who were looking for the kingdom of God. It's a great and massive theme to consider and so what we need to understand for tonight and what we need to draw out of that for this evening is this, is that when Christ came, you know, he came after 400 years of prophetic silence, the last prophet was Malachi and then there was no prophetic voice for 400 years which, for us, would be like going back to the day of the arrival of the Mayflower, that long of a sense of history having gone by since there was a word from a known prophet of the Lord. So there were 400 years of silence and the expectation and the tension and the need for this Deliverer continued to grow as they came under Roman domination, and so this was embedded in the mind of every Jew.

Now the question then becomes how does that Old Testament expectation carry over into the New Testament and what we read about Christ and the way that Christ was preached by the apostles after his death and resurrection. How did that Old Testament expectation impact the understanding of the apostles, and what does it tell us about the truth of Christianity which is our theme for this little series. And that brings us to our second point here this evening which we can simply refer to as the New Testament fulfillment. The Old Testament predicted the coming of this anointed one, there was an expectation created as a result, and as you read the pages of the New Testament you find historical fulfillment being accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. So point number 2: the New Testament fulfillment.

Now just a quick word about the term "Christ." You know, I don't want to be too crass and too common here, without the benefit of study you become accustomed to the name Jesus Christ and you think that Christ is simply his surname, as if it was Smith or Jones or something like that, you know, that you just join those two names together like you and I have a first name and a last name. But understand that that is not at all the significance of the term "Christ" at all. The term "Christ," the Greek term for Christ has this idea: the term "Christ" was a term that referred to the one who was expected to fulfill the hopes of Israel for an end-time Deliverer. The Christ was a term that summarized and referred to that Old Testament expectation that the Christ would be the one who fulfilled all of those expectations that we have just so recently been speaking about. And listen, this is really a pretty strategic point that I'm about to make here. Our familiarity 2,000 years later with the term "Jesus Christ" puts us at risk of missing the earthshaking significance that that term had in the first century. For Jews – let me back up. So the name Jesus is a reference to that man of Nazareth who was known to have walked on the face of the earth and by outward appearances was, you know, he had no appearance that we should be attracted to him. He was the man who walked on the earth. They knew him as Jesus of Nazareth. For the Jews now to understand with that expectation in mind and the meaning of the term "Christ" in mind, that the Christ was the one who was the fulfillment of all of those Old Testament hopes, to join the name of Jesus, the son of a carpenter, to the term "Christ" was utterly earthshaking. This was an explosive combination of terms to make because if Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was indeed the Christ promised in the Old Testament, then that meant nothing less than the eternal Son of God had come to earth. That meant nothing less than the fact that the messianic age had been inaugurated with his coming.

So when Peter made his famous confession, you remember, actually let's turn there. Matthew 16, this is worth taking a moment to linger over. Matthew 16. In Matthew 16 we read in verse 13, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'" Now look, Jesus wasn't asking for information that he did not have, he was drawing the disciples out and setting the stage for what was to come. So his disciples answered him there in verse 14, "Well, some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." The common opinion of Christ was that, you know, there was some kind of prophetic significance to him but they viewed him on a level with the Old Testament prophets that had gone before. Jesus said to them in verse 15, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Psalm 2:12, "Give homage to the Son. You are the Christ. You are the One that has been expected. You are the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel that the prophets have told us and cultivated in us for the past 2,000 years." This is a staggering claim. This is no minor statement. This is a statement by Peter prompted in his mind by the Spirit of God, as we'll see in a moment, that Jesus, this man in front of them, was the fulfillment, that he was the embodiment of every hope that had been cultivated by the Old Testament prophets for the nation of Israel. Peter said, "You're the One. You are the One we have been looking for. You're the One that our nation has been longing for for centuries and millennia. You are the One and You are right here in front of me in human flesh."

In verse 17 Jesus affirmed the statement. Jesus accepted the title that Peter ascribed to him. Verse 17, "And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" Peter, you have just been given divine revelation. Your lips have spoken divine truth of eternal significance. You are blessed that God let you be the instrument to say such profound truths.

Now Peter having recognized Jesus as the Christ and as events unfolded, Christ was crucified, Christ was raised, Christ was ascended into heaven, what we find is this when you read the book of Acts, that this theme about Jesus being the Christ, Jesus being the Messiah, the man Jesus being the one who was the Messiah himself, this theme is stressed everywhere in the book of Acts. It's stressed everywhere in the book of Acts and what I want you to do, I realize that we're kind of treading some deep water here with what we're saying, just stay with me and understand that we're building up to a climax that is going to be very very powerful. Jesus, the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. This man who walked the face of the earth 2,000 years ago who had no place to lay his head, who was despised and rejected by men, he was the Christ. The apostles emphasized this in multiple cities as they preached throughout the known world at that time.

So turn to the book of Acts, I want to show you a half dozen different passages along this line. In Acts 2:36 Peter is preaching after the resurrection of Christ and he says to hostile Jews at the time, Acts 2:36, he says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified." He tells the Jews in the city of Jerusalem, "The Jesus that you had so recently crucified was the Christ." In other words, he's telling the Jews, "You just crucified your own Messiah! You killed your own Messiah! What is wrong with you? How great is your guilt that you rejected and crucified the One that God Himself sent? Know it for certain, this is an undeniable fact." So understand that what he's doing is he's preaching to people who knew everything about the recent historical events of the crucifixion of Christ and Peter equates Jesus with the Christ.

Look over at Acts 9. Acts 9. Now they are in the city of Damascus and in verse 19 Paul, having been recently converted, for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue, so he's preaching to Jews and he says, this man Jesus is, what? He is the Son of God." So in Jerusalem and in Damascus the account of the human Jesus is tied to the titles of deity, tied to this expectation, this expectation of a coming Deliverer, this coming of the Messiah. This Jesus is the Christ. This Jesus is the Son of God.

You go on and you read in Acts 10 in the city of Caesarea, the geographical points are important for what we're saying here. In Acts 10:40 Peter preaching in the city of Caesarea. He says, actually let's go back to verse 38, in fact, let's go back to verse 37, okay? "You yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed." He's appealing to the knowledge of his contemporary audience of recent history and he says, "You all know this. This is a

matter of public record," he says, "You all know this." Verse 38, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead." Verse 43, "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Now think about what we just read in that extended text. He appeals to contemporary knowledge of immediately recent events and says, "You all know about this man who had just been living in your midst." And then he interprets for them the significance of his life, the significance of his death. He asserts his resurrection and shows what it means that this man who had just been in their midst was the Son of God appointed to judge the living and the dead. Can you imagine what that must have been like? The force of the power of that preaching? Irrefutable facts that you know to be true for yourself, as you are in that audience hearing the preaching, irrefutable facts being interpreted for you that this man who was so recently with you had cosmic God-significance as proven by subsequent events by his resurrection, by his ascension, by the power of the preaching that was now in front of them. This is greatly significant, greatly impactful. They're preaching the same message, "The man Jesus was the Christ." We've seen it in Jerusalem. We've seen it in Damascus. We've seen it in Caesarea.

Look at Acts 17:1-3. Now it's the Apostle Paul preaching. "Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead," let me read that again, "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead," he's explaining things from the Scripture, explaining the Old Testament expectation, "and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'" Same message. "This man Jesus that I am telling you about is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament expectation."

You see it in Acts 18, looking over just across the page at least in my Bible. Acts 18, we see in verse 4, they're in Corinth, we know that from verse 1, it says that "he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ."

One more at the end of the book of Acts, chapter 28, verse 23, Acts 28:23. Paul is now in Rome. "When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of

God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening." So he's telling them, he's speaking about Jesus and he is tying it to the Old Testament expectation.

Beloved, if you look at a map, you see how far spread and far flung this was just within the immediate apostolic era. In Jerusalem, in Damascus, in Caesarea, in Thessalonica, in Corinth, in Rome, and you see in each of those cities the same type of argument being made, the man Jesus was the Christ, the man Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophets, the prophecies and the expectation. This man so recently in your midst was the Messiah and is the Messiah, and it is only through him and belief in him that you can have the forgiveness of your sins. So over and over again we find apostolic preaching saying that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament expectation.

Now beloved, all of that was a long laying of a foundation to make this statement: that very message preached so many times recorded for us in the book of Acts, that very message to the Jews shows that Christianity is true. It shows that Christianity is true and that brings us to our third and final point for this evening. We want to talk about the implications of this apostolic preaching. The implications of this apostolic preaching.

Now you need to just remember some really basic simple things about the Jews. Scripture says in the book of Romans 3 that God gave his oracles to the Jews, God gave his revelation to the Jews, it was through Jewish prophets that his revelation was made to the Jewish people and so they had a great sense of ownership and a great knowledge of the Old Testament writings. And here's what's so significant, is that the apostles of Jesus Christ were appealing to their Old Testament Scriptures to verify their claims about the Lord Jesus Christ. Now as I said earlier, the Old Testament was completed 400 years before Christ and the Old Testament picture of the coming Messiah was an established fact. This was established in the Jewish mind, "We are going to have a Deliverer who will come for us."

Now there's one of two possibilities, well, there's three, I guess. You could suggest perhaps, well, maybe what the apostles did was that they somehow surreptitiously secretly edited the Old Testament after the fact so that the Old Testament would now conform to the life of Jesus Christ. And remember, they were trying to find a way, we're trying to find a way as a devil's advocate to say, "Is there any possibility that Christianity is just a made-up fiction? Did someone make this up? Did the apostles do something to make this up and they tricked the world by what they did?" Is it possible that those early Christians could have edited the Old Testament prophecies so that they conformed the record, the preexisting record to the life of Jesus which had occurred in the so immediate recent past. Could they have done that? Could they have tweaked the Old Testament so that it conformed to the life of Christ after the fact? Is that even possible? The answer is no. That's completely impossible. That cannot explain the existence of Christianity. The Old Testament Scriptures were jealously guarded by Jews who never became Christians at all. They would have immediately recognized any kind of edit to the established text and they would have quickly repudiated and refuted it. To appeal to the Old Testament to

hostile Jews was a remarkable strategy to prove their point, they're pointing to the Jews' own Scripture in order to show that Jesus was the Christ as we saw.

Now the Jews who did not want to receive Christ, they would never have cooperated in that kind of fiction. They would never have overthrown their own Scriptures for a Messiah that they themselves rejected. It's impossible. So there is no way that the apostles played with the Old Testament text after the fact in order to make the Old Testament text conform to the known facts of the life of Christ. Now listen, the Jews of the day, they had many objections to Christianity, they made up lies, you remember they paid off the soldiers to say that they fell asleep and the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus while they were asleep. They had many objections, they told lies in order to resist Christianity but the one thing that there is no record of is the Jews making the accusation that Christians had tampered with the Old Testament in order to conform it with the life of Christ. Let me say that again. The accusation that Christians had rewritten the Old Testament was not an accusation that hostile Jews made against them. If that's what they had done, believe me the Jews would have registered that objection loud and clear. They would have refuted the whole farce if, in fact, it had been a farce. The fact that the Jews didn't make that argument shows that that's not what happened.

So let's flip the question. Let's flip the question. Let's assume that the Old Testament Scriptures were held intact, nobody tampered with the Old Testament text whatsoever, but maybe what if this is possible, is it possible that the apostles fabricated, made up the life of Jesus, told aspects about it that were not true so that it would conform to, so that it would match the Old Testament record? So after the fact they go out preaching and they say things, they knew the Old Testament and they said that Jesus did these things when, in fact, he really didn't, is that possible? No. No, that's not possible.

Now let me just step back from the question for a moment and frame the factual matters for you. Scholars debate the precise dates of the life of Christ, some, for example, will date his crucifixion to AD 33. The best scholarship, in my opinion, believes that his death is dated to AD 30. Now stay with me, that date is significant and all of this is starting to come together now. Christ crucified AD 30. Nero in Rome, a long way from Jerusalem, accuses Christians of having burned the city down. From AD 30 to AD 64, 34 years. Again, just to give a sense of contemporary history, you know, to give us a sense of the timeframe here. For us 34 years ago goes back to about the start of the presidency of Bill Clinton. That's pretty recent history. It may not seem so to those of you that are, you know, in your early 20s, that may seem like old history to you but it's not. Those dates are significant. It frames such a narrow window of time in which the apostolic preaching after the resurrection takes place. That means, as we saw so often from those passages in the book of Acts, the apostles were preaching to people who were either direct eyewitnesses to the facts of which they spoke or they were speaking to an audience who knew by common knowledge, the common public knowledge that these facts of Jesus were established and could not be refuted. And listen, to an audience like that, they could not begin to preach things that were fiction in the midst of the momentous claims that they were making about Jesus. The facts that they preached had to correspond with the

facts that happened or the audience would have rejected them and they would have been repudiated for preaching such an obvious falsehood.

It would be like and this is a really really bad comparison but I just want to give you some kind of comparison. This would be like someone standing up to give a eulogy for Bob Dole and said that Bob Dole was President of the United States in the late 1990s. That would be immediately rejected by all of you. You'd say, "Bob Dole was never President! That's ridiculous!" Well, let me tell you about Al Gore and the presidency of Al Gore and the things that he did. "Now Gore was never President!" You immediately reject that. You just know that that's an obvious immediate falsehood not to be believed, right? There's just an immediate reaction against it.

Now look, Jesus was a public figure and the apostles were preaching publicly about facts about the life of Jesus Christ. If those facts, if what they were saying, the facts that they were asserting about the life of Jesus, his great and mighty miracles, his great and mighty words, his death on the cross and his resurrection, if that was not true, none of the audience would have received it. The reason that they listened on a human level was because the apostles were telling them facts that they knew were true, and then under the power of the Holy Spirit they were explaining the spiritual significance of the facts of this man and his life known as Jesus. "This man, you know what He did. You know what He said. This is established record, now let me tell you what it means. This Jesus is the Christ promised by the Old Testament." You see, the timeframe forces us into a window of contemporary witnesses and the very nature of humanity is that people don't embrace something that they know is not true, particularly when it is of such far-reaching consequence. I mean, people believe all kinds of lies today but it's not based on things of historical fact that they know the difference between what's right and what's wrong. No one's going to believe that Bob Dole was President. It's just impossible. Multiply that by infinity given the eternal consequence and significance of everything that the apostles were preaching and you realize how impossible their message was to have been something that they made up as a fiction. For an extended false narrative to be accepted as true, it has to be given to an audience that is remote from the time, remote from the events, that is not able to independently verify it, and you just come under a spirit of delusion and you believe something that's told to you about what happened 500 years ago because you don't know any better. But beloved, that is not what happened with the gospel message. That is not what happened with Christianity at all. The events of which the apostles spoke and about which they wrote belong to a period that was familiar to their audience, to thousands and thousands of people. They appealed to recent public events. They appealed to eyewitnesses.

You're in the book of Acts, go back to Acts 1:18 and 19. Dr. Luke writing his account of the acts of the apostles says in chapter 1, verse 18, referring to, he's quoting Peter as he spoke to the brethren. Peter, there's a parenthetical comment about what happened to Judas. Verse 18, "this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out," 19, "it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood." Everyone in Jerusalem knew about what

happened to Judas. Everyone knew it. This was public knowledge. In the same way that we know who our recent Presidents are, everybody knew the facts about what happened to Judas.

So in verse 21 and 22 Peter goes on to say it's necessary they had to replace Judas in the office of apostle, "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." There were men that were witnesses, that had gone about and had seen the ministry of Jesus. They called upon a witness who had seen it with his own eyes, heard it with his own ears, touched it with his own hands, smelled things with his own nose, a man who had flesh and blood contact. Had to be a witness to be able to speak to these things. Everyone knew about it. Under those circumstances, beloved, a make-believe life of Christ utterly impossible. It's ridiculous to suggest the thought. The audience would have rejected something that they had not seen.

So one of the reasons that the apostolic message was so powerful, was so persuasive to that contemporary audience was that they knew the things of which the apostles spoke and they were speaking things that were true to them. They knew. If I came to you and I say, "Bill Clinton was President and George W. Bush was President and Barack Obama was President," you know all of that to be true. I don't have to persuade you of the facts. The facts are uncontested, the significance of them interpreted by the preaching of the apostles.

One last thing here on this point. I'm, so to speak, I'm beating this horse to death but it's because there is so much to see and to understand and to grasp about this that God didn't give us just a sliver of understanding about this, this is so broad and so abundant that it cannot be refuted on grounds of truth. So that in Acts 26:26, I'll give you a moment to turn there and we'll wrap this up for this evening and continue the series on Sunday morning. You'll remember that Paul was called before King Agrippa to give his testimony and to give an account, to give his response to the accusations of crimes that had been made against him. In verse 25 Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner." So well-known was this, so much a matter of public record that Paul could appeal to the king's knowledge, to a man who had criticized him and said, "Festus the king knows what I'm saying is true. I'm not out of my mind. Your accusation that I am is ridiculous because even the king knows that what I'm saying is accurate."

Then for the interpretation of those facts about the life of the man Jesus, Paul looks at the king in verse 27 and says, "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." It's clear what the prophets told us to expect. It's clear what the life of Jesus was. So Agrippa, you know what the facts of Jesus are, let's talk about the prophets. Do you believe them? He brilliantly put the king in a corner and all the king can do is sidestep the

matter, deflect it. "Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'"

So beloved, Jesus was a public figure known in surrounding lands. A fabricated life, a false story, a fiction about the life and crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ designed to fit the Old Testament prophecies utterly impossible. And so what can we conclude from this review of history and this review of Scripture? What do we think as we approach the Lord's Table here this evening? Iain Murray puts it so well and so succinctly. He says the only credible explanation of all of this is that there is a perfect match between the Messiah of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It is a perfect match between the Old Testament expectation and the fulfillment in the man Jesus, and that is fully expressed in the two words "Jesus Christ." Jesus the Christ. Jesus is the Christ. Do you know what that means? You take all of this in, it tells us that God planned a way of salvation from before the beginning of time, God who knew the end from the beginning, who knows the end from the beginning, God greatly, sovereignly directing the course of human history, the course of every genealogical line, the course of every national leader, the course of every sin of his people against him, God directing all of that, taking that massive direction of the world and all the details within it sovereignly, perfectly, powerfully, masterfully directing it all to a fulfillment and conclusion in the man Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God.

This is true. This is affirmed by history. This is affirmed by Scripture. And this is affirmed, I trust, by the very witness of the Holy Spirit himself to your heart in what we've seen from the word of God today. Is Christianity true? You'd better believe it. You'd better believe it, I mean, that's a loaded statement. Yeah, you'd better believe it. God planned a way of salvation. He announced it beforehand in the Old Testament and then Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, brought it to pass, he brought it all to pass with signs and miracles to verify its authenticity. It was all undeniable at the time for those acquainted with the facts, it's undeniable now. The gospel spread like a wild fire in the first century because it was true and the fulfillment of all of these things, the climax of the price of redemption at the cross, the climax of redemption found in what we remember in these elements that we're about to partake of.

As the men come forward to serve, let's bow in prayer and prepare our hearts for Communion.

Our Father, we thank You for the power of Scripture, the power of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and we pray that You would seal these things to our hearts, that believers would be strengthened in them, that unbelievers would be confronted with the impossibility of continuing their rebellion against the truth, and that Your Spirit would awake them to new life.

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