

Who is Jesus? The Christ

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[0:00] We're continuing to think this morning about this vital question, who is Jesus?

! It is a vital question because Jesus himself says things like this, whoever is ashamed! in this sinful and adulterous generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them or of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. In other words, Jesus says at the end of the world, when he returns and separates humanity like the sheep from the goats, those who depart, those who are welcomed, he says it will depend exactly on whether you have been ashamed of Jesus. Whether you have been linked with him in friendship and faith or whether you have said, not for me, that exact decision will be reflected on that day and if you've been ashamed of him, he'll be ashamed of you. That's quite a serious thing for him to say. Our futures depend specifically on our relation to him. That's how important it is.

We looked at this in past weeks and we said things like this, he is a real historical person, an obscure person, a superb teacher, a miracle worker, a radical interpreter of Judaism, a man of colossal personal authority. We looked last week at the matter of his being Lord and we said that although people were polite to Jesus and probably didn't realize the full magnitude of who he was straight away, in the end we come to the place that Jesus Christ is Lord, is the confession of Christianity, that's what being a Christian is, somebody who says and means it and understands it, Jesus Christ is Lord in the fullest divine sense.

Now just as a little aside, I've asked the question, who is Jesus? That's to say his identity. Could also ask the question, what did he come to do? That is about his work and of course that's a very important thing and I mustn't allow myself to so focus on his identity that I forget to link that with his work and I hope I won't fail you in that this morning but let me just say that the Jesus whom we are speaking about is not a sort of static in philosophy or spirituality. He is somebody who came to this earth, who lived on this earth, who died on the cross, who rose from the dead, who is now enthroned in heaven, the one who sent the spirit at a particular point in the history of his church and how is now ruling in heaven and will one day come again and he will come finally into full recognition of who he is and he will make everything new. So there's a timeline of his work as well which I would like you just to be aware of. So we're going to look this morning at this question, who is Jesus? Answer, he is the Christ and I'll just for the sake of clarity say that the Bible, it's a book that covers many thousands of years, it's got an Old Testament part and a New Testament part. The Old Testament, the history before Jesus is written in Hebrew. The New Testament part, that's Jesus is life and following, is written in Greek. So in the Greek, in the New Testament part of the Bible, we have the word Christos in Greek, Christ in English and in the Old Testament part of the Bible, the Hebrew, we have Meshia, which in English becomes Messiah. These both mean the same thing, one is a translation of the other. So I'll flip between them. And this question of Jesus being the Christ turns out to be one of subtlety and complexity and mystery as we shall see because a lot of people got it wrong and pray that we will get it right. So the way I'd like to do it is in three stages and to say it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. So let's look at the pieces of the jigsaw. We go back into the Hebrew scriptures. Then let's come into the New Testament and try putting the jigsaw together and we'll see some of the ways people struggled with this and how I think we could really say the only person who really understood it was Jesus. So let's put some jigsaw pieces. And then I'm going to say that the picture that we come up with is a picture that presses on us for a response. It's not something you just get correct like totting up your accounts or doing an equation or something. That's it, done, finished. It shows us a person who, if he is that person, makes a demand and a challenge to each one of us to respond to. And I want to try and say something about that at the end. You can't remain neutral about the Jesus who is the Christ. So at the risk of

laboring this, Christ is not Jesus' surname. English people have typically, what we say, a Christian name. Mine is Philip. I have a middle name, John, and I have a family name,
[6:06] Philip John Wells. Philip John Wells. Jesus Christ. Christ is not Jesus' surname. Jesus the Christ, as he is sometimes referred to, is not his surname. So I invite you to compare with this character.

You know who that is? Winnie the Pooh. Winnie the Pooh. That's his proper name, Winnie the Pooh. The Pooh is his name. I don't know why he's called that. Winnie the Pooh is arguably one of the few people who has the as his middle name. Winnie the Pooh, or Pooh Bear, I think it probably gets called in the Disney-fied version. Compare it with this gentleman. Who is?

You're quite slow on this, aren't you? This is Bob the Builder. And in this case, the Builder is not his surname.

It's what he does, isn't it? Bob the Builder. That's what he comes to do. Oh, that purple thing was supposed to disappear, because it does say up there, Bob the Builder.

So, let's just get right. It's the Christ is not Jesus' surname. It's his job. Like Bob the Builder. When we think of Messiah and Christ, actually in English culture, English language culture, that word does get used.

[7:38] And our culture does have an understanding of the thought of the Messiah. And it is largely an understanding that comes from the Bible.

So, it's not miles off. It's certainly clear that people have some sort of idea. If you went out into the street and talked about Messiah, people would have some idea of what that meant.

And here's a person who has been linked with that nomenclature. Does anybody know who this is? Jeremy Corbyn.

Not Winnie the Pooh. Not Bob the Builder. This is Jeremy Corbyn. And there was an article in the International Business Times which, by this person, and the caption says, Corbyn has morphed into some sort of Messiah for the hard left.

So, whatever you think about that analysis, it's interesting that that word is used and the idea of it is understood. Here is a political leader who is or has been thought of, rightly or wrongly, as a messianic figure, a Messiah.

[8:50] And what is meant by that, I think, is this. This is someone who can sort out real life, the life that ordinary people live, by his personal influence and his political power.

I think that's what is understood by Messiah. Somebody who can sort out real life for ordinary people by his personal stature and character and the power, his political power, to make things happen.

And as it turns out, that's not a bad analogy. Okay, let's have those things in our thoughts and we'll turn now to these pieces of the jigsaw.

What are the pieces of the jigsaw? Well, I've said already we're looking at the word Christ and the word Messiah.

In the authorised version, which is a fairly standard English translation and has been for many hundreds of years, to my surprise, Messiah is only translated twice in the Old Testament.

[10:10] I was very surprised at that. But the statistic is very misleading because Messiah means anointed one and that's in lots of places.

And Messiah comes from the word mashach, which means to anoint. So the Messiah is the anointed one, the mashach is the verb, to anoint.

And to anoint means to smear with oil or to pour oil. So let's bring some oil in. Those two other pictures shouldn't be there yet, so something's gone squiffy. One of the first things that's anointed in the Bible is a stone, surprisingly.

Anybody who knows their Bible like to guess where that takes place? Who anoints something with a stone with oil? Jacob, that's right. He was sleeping on the stone and he realised that it was a special stone.

It was the gateway to heaven. And so he poured oil on it to say, this is a holy place and a holy thing. And he wanted to mark that by pouring oil on the stone.

[11:20] In Leviticus, bread gets smeared with oil for various purposes. So let's put some oil there too. priests get anointed with oil.

So the priest is somebody who belongs to us because he's human and he also belongs to God because he goes between us and God to bring us together.

And in recognition of the godliness or the holiness or the specialness of priests, they got anointed with oil, which is where that little picture of the man with the funny hat is supposed to come in because priests got anointed.

And the stuff that they used. So they used all sorts of apparatus. So I put an altar and that we could anoint that with oil.

And so the anointing is showing that this person or this thing is special. It's special in relation to God.

[12:22] It's something that perhaps comes close to him or is used by him or that he uses. And the oil shows that. It's a way of showing that. And for example, with the priests, they couldn't work until they'd been anointed.

And once they're anointed, then they're sort of activated. So the oil says, right, you can get into action now. The other people that were anointed with oil were prophets.

I could only find one example of that. There's lots of examples with the priests. And the other people are anointed are kings, which we'll now come to. So we're putting together the pieces of the jigsaw and let's look at the king's piece of the jigsaw.

So I'm going to find some texts. You don't have to find them if you're not very familiar. And I haven't put down where it is. It's 1 Samuel 2.10.

So this is way back in the history of Israel. Before they had any kings. But this is the beginning of the story of how they had kings.

[13:37] It's 1 Samuel 2.10. And a woman in a little village prays this interesting prayer. And she says, He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

Hannah's prayer. Those who oppose the Lord will be scattered. He will give strength. That's the Lord will give strength to his king and exalt the horn.

The horn was a symbol meaning power. Like a powerful animal has a horn. And exalt the horn of his anointed. So it's another very early reference.

This time linking this anointing specifically with a king. And a king who has power to shatter the people who oppose the Lord.

So we're building this picture up. Let's think of David who was the first, well let's say the second, the first successful king.

[14:47] And he was anointed. And you might remember the story of the prophet Samuel who was out looking for the right person to be king. And it took him where he didn't expect.

But in the end he found the right person. It was David. And what did Samuel do when he found David? It says in 1 Samuel 16, 13 it says, So Samuel took the horn of oil.

So in this case the horn is like the bottle that he carried it in. And anointed him in the presence of his brothers. And from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

So here's this young man. He's selected to be king. What do they do? They anoint him. Take oil and pour it over his head. Now I don't know about you but I would prefer not to have oil on my head.

I would find that rather sticky and unpleasant and I would go and get it washed off as quickly as possible. My dad and certainly Maria's dad used to use brill cream which was a sticky stuff that you put on your hair so you could get it to stay in a certain position and look like a teddy boy.

[16:05] Do guys do that now? No. A little bit. Okay. Yes. Product I think is what it's called. Isn't it? A little bit of product there sir for you? Yes. Anyway we have to think ourselves back into this ancient situation where it was a wonderful thing to have oil poured on your head because perhaps it made you a priest or perhaps it made you a king.

That was a very special and wonderful thing. And it wasn't always literal oil. It could be used as a picture as a metaphor and this why didn't I put the references at the beginning?

This is Isaiah 45 verse 1 and here's somebody rather unusual being spoken of as anointed. See if I can find it.

And in Isaiah 45 verse 1 this is a different part of history. This is when it's thinking of the people of Israel being prisoners and being captives in a foreign land and somebody is going to set them free and have international power to send them back home again and this person is the foreign king who comes to power in that foreign country.

His name is Cyrus or Kurush if you speak Farsi. And it says this quite remarkably, this is what the Lord says to his anointed.

[17:43] To Cyrus whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their armour open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.

I will go before you and will level the mountain. I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness riches stored in secret places that you may know that I am the Lord of the God of Israel who calls you by name for the sake of Jacob my servant and Israel my chosen.

Quite remarkable this one. Here is a foreign king who is not a Christian he's not a believer he doesn't know anything about the Lord in that sense but the Lord says I'm going to anoint you you're going to be my anointed.

Not with real oil but metaphorically and you're going to do the things that an anointed king does. I'm going to choose you so that's a thing that God does to his anointed he chooses and I'm going to work through you and that's what God does through his anointed and I'm going to have international power through you you're going to subdue nations and I'm going to do this redemptively I'm going to do this to save my people for the sake of Jacob my servant and Israel my chosen and I'm going to strengthen you for this task.

So it's a quite remarkable use of this idea of God's Christ his Messiah his anointed one his foreign king I'm going to particularly choose you you're going to be special I'm going to work through you I'm going to save my people through you and there's going to be a display of international power in doing so.

[19:40] And he comes quite near the sort of Jeremy Corbyn version of Messiah doesn't he? Someone who can sort out real life for general people by his personal influence and political power.

Let's put another piece of the jigsaw in and this is Psalm 2 that was read to us and as you heard it read you will have noticed what a powerful Psalm this is and let's look at it again together and remind ourselves of that.

Psalm 2 we could say is Messiah's manifesto it is like his job description if you're going to be God's Messiah this is what you need to do if you see somebody doing this this is God's Messiah this is the Christ so let's remind ourselves of what it says there's a problem and the problem is the nations the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain and the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and his anointed one let us break their chains they say and throw off their fetters and notice there's an anointed one in this so he's saying this is the picture the international scene of the nations totally saying to God we don't want you to rule us we don't want to know you we don't want to obey you we want to get rid of you and this is the picture of the nations a whole world in rebellion against God a whole world saying we don't want you and we're all members of one nation or another and the

Bible says that until Jesus does something in our lives that's exactly where we are maybe you can identify with that saying to God I don't want you I don't want to do what you say I don't want to think what you tell me to think I'm against you that's the problem and what's the solution well the one enthroned in heaven laughs and he says you silly little people do you think by taking up a stance against me you can get rid of me do you think you can fight me and beat me and the one enthroned in heaven laughs at that and he scoffs you silly silly people and he says not only do I find this sort of amusing but I am angry and the God in heaven says I've given you your nation I've given you your world I've given you the family that you have been brought in

I give you food I give you breath I give you every single thing and you have the temerity to turn to me and say don't want you and God says I'm angry with that and the psalm speaks about his wrath because the God of the Bible is a God who doesn't just shrug it off when he's insulted in that way he says how dare you he terrifies and he says this is my answer the answer is I will send somebody who will change things for real people on the ground by their powerful personality and political power I will put my king in Zion well Zion as I said is what we're to think of

[23:53] God's headquarters and in the old testament it was in a particular place it was in Jerusalem he says I'm going to set up my king in his in his operations place of operations he's going to be in charge I put my king there and then the king speaks he says I'll proclaim the decree of the lord let's put the king on Zion's hill this person says God said to me you are my son and God has become my father and God says to me ask and I will give you all the nations as your inheritance and I will rule over all the nations and God says and you will rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery and I suppose it's a time scale thing here that we would say that the fulfillment of this is not immediate but there will be a day in which the king says that's it you nations that don't want me you individuals that despise me and ignore me

I will dash you to pieces like pottery so the Messiah is the most frightening person in the world because he says if you are not going to submit to me and it comes to it one of us is going to get smashed and the Messiah says and it won't be me be dashed to pieces like pottery it's a fearsome thing this person is a fearsome person and it's God's settled decree that this would happen the nations are his to hold and rule so there's a therefore which is in verse 10 it says wise up therefore you kings be wise be warned you rulers of the earth serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling kiss the son lest he be angry says your one escape route is to get to this king before he goes into judgment mode and get and make friends with him it's your one hope is to kiss the son the very person who is threatening you to go direct to him and say Lord I can't go through life ignoring you I can't go through life just filling my life with something else you are at the center of everything and I need to get to you and sort this out with you kiss the son and I want to ask you whether you've done that maybe of the frightening nature of my situation but then to say to God please give me a sense of how brilliant it would be to be right with the son to kiss the son to be friends with the son and here's this blessing blessed are all who take refuge in him think of him in one sense with a sword ready to smash his enemies but in another sense with his arms open saying come on guys

I can put my arms round you you can take refuge in me now's the time to do it don't wait till it's the last day now's the time to come and take refuge in him it's a promise you will be blessed if you take refuge in him you will be blessed if this moment you say Lord Jesus that's what I want to do I want to take refuge in you I want to fly to you I want to hide myself in you I want to come to you not contesting things with you and arguing with you but kissing you and taking refuge in you the promise there well there's part of the jigsaw now we're going to go some of the pieces of the jigsaw let's now go to the time of Jesus and with these things in mind let's see what people made of these bits of jigsaw it's a very interesting study there are things that

I hadn't realized before when I looked at this when Jesus came what did the general population think well some of them certainly knew that the Christ was prophesied and was coming so here is the woman at the well and she says to Jesus hmm I know that Messiah called Christ is coming when he comes he will explain everything to us so she knows he's coming she seems to think that his main job is explaining things okay not too far off and remember Jesus says the one that's speaking to you is exactly that person you might not have quite got the hang of it but that's me some people in the time of Jesus expected multiple figures do you remember at the beginning of [29:45] John's gospel they say to John who are you are you the Christ no are you the prophet no are you Elijah no so they got different possible people coming so a bit confused about that some people expected multiple Christ actually Jesus specifically warned about this didn't he multiple Christ do you remember in Matthew 24 he said beware false Christs and false prophets will appear and would deceive the elect even if that were possible do you remember he said there's going to be multiple people who come along and say they're Christ but Jesus is always challenging and checking and saying now you really need to understand this okay so let's look at some people who are puzzled as they tried to put the pieces of the jigsaw together here's John the Baptist and it says in Matthew 11 2 it says he heard of the works of the

Christ and he said let me quote it to you properly and he sent a message when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing he sent his disciples to ask him are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else you see he's puzzled are you the one that's to come or is there going to be someone else as well or have we got it wrong are you the Christ so he was puzzled about that and Jesus replied in this way he said John the blind receive the sight the lame walk the lepers are cleansed the deaf hear the dead are raised the good news is preached to the poor that's enough don't don't stumble blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me and we might be thinking why was John finding this problematic well he might have been!

Messiah is going to smash people in pieces isn't he he's going to rule everything and Jesus hasn't done that or he hasn't done it yet and Jesus says to John you need to trust me you're not going to see all of this at once but what you have seen is enough for you to trust me maybe Jesus is saying that to you maybe you're thinking as bits I don't get a guys we've been going around for nearly three years now so tell me you've talked to people who do people say that

I am and of course the disciples say well people are mixed up because some of them say you're John the Baptist some of them say you're Elijah some say Jeremiah some one of the prophets and then Jesus says okay no but who do you think I am it's a well done it wasn't you who saw that it wasn't your human power that got you there God revealed that and that's a genuine thing and then Jesus goes on to say some more he says okay you've got the bit that

I'm the Christ and I know what you're thinking this is the king this is the powerful person this is the one with the political power that's right but but hold on hold on and then he says that he's got to go and suffer the Christ must suffer and thus enter his glory as it says in Luke but he says I'm going to go to Jerusalem yeah take power no I'm going to go to Jerusalem and suffer no you're not and I'm going to be opposed and contradicted and insulted and that I'll be killed and on the third day be raised to life and they think what's he going on about he's got that wrong and actually Peter says takes Jesus on one side oh chap come on this will never happen to you and Jesus says to Peter get behind me Satan you are not thinking

[35:10] God's thoughts you're thinking human thoughts because Jesus says you haven't understood this about the Christ yes he's the king you got that well done ten out of ten and he must suffer no yes so a Christ who reigns and rules but does not suffer is not the real Christ Jesus is the Christ but he's not quite the Christ that Peter is thinking of he hasn't got the hang of it yet the Christ rules and reigns but he also suffers who do you say that Jesus is have you got to a point where you can say I know the answer to this I can see this I've got it let's think of the last week in

Jerusalem so I'll just touch it the other time where Jesus debates with the theologians and the spiritual leaders and he quotes them the psalm that says the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet and Jesus says tell me about the Christ whose son is he and the clever Bible scholars say he's David's son right one piece of the jigsaw and then Jesus says if David calls him Lord how can he be his son and they've no idea how to answer that they can't fit that together how can he be son of David in other words less than David from David but how can he also be above David as his Lord we can't do it we can't get that about the Christ and they didn't get it the writer of the gospel gets it because he says I can see I know the answer because Jesus is the son of David he's human came as a man but he's high and exalted isn't he as the living God the son of God but they couldn't get that and at his trial this was the matter at his trial who are you and the high priest said to him I charge you under oath tell us are you the Christ the son of God see that's what it all hinged on is that really who you are and Jesus calmly says yes it's as you say meaning to say that's correct I don't know whether you've understood it properly but what you say is correct it's as you say but

I say to you in the future you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the mighty one and coming on the clouds of heaven and now Jesus has pulled on another thread from the Bible which we'll perhaps look at another time of a figure who is grand and great and rules everything and receives power from heaven that's enough for the high priest who says blasphemy!

If this Jesus says he's the Christ the son of God that just cannot be right he deserves to die and ironically because Jesus has already told us that part of the Christ's work is to die when the high priest condemns him to death he's actually not standing in the way of Christ being the Christ he's

helping him to be the Christ isn't he they thought Jesus couldn't be the Christ and their rejection actually moved him to the next stage of the plan the father had given to the Christ so I think that these pieces of the jigsaw they found it difficult to fit them together until Christ had died and was risen again and then it all fitted the disciples who had been puzzled and thought this was all going wrong suddenly said this is it it all fits and the apostle

[40:06] Paul could go into the various synagogues and prove from the scriptures this Jesus who was crucified and raised he's the Christ it's something that you can fit together after the resurrection and after the resurrection Peter says let all Israel be assured of this God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ that's really who he is no doubt about it all the pieces fit together and the crowd said oh we got this so terribly wrong what should we do and Peter says go to this Messiah that you crucified go to the one who in a sense who you would least like to get anywhere near because of what you've done to him but you go to him repent and be baptized in the name of

Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit there's a promise here for you it's an amazing promise isn't it because they almost hadn't finished washing the blood off their hands by the time this was said almost and they're cut to the heart we got this so badly wrong and Peter says and they say what should we do should we run away should we try and forget it should we go and try and drown our sorrows with alcohol or something like that and he says no you go right directly to the person that you've offended turn to him repent ask him for forgiveness take refuge in him show it through your baptism and all the good things that the Christ has will be poured out on you it's a wonderful promise isn't it so what would be the response so moving to the third point as you put all the pieces together as we can see from our point in history he is

Lord he is Christ he is the king plus plus plus he is the one who rules everything all authority in heaven on earth is given to him he is the son of David and this sort of kingship this son of David thing I think emphasizes the hands on nature of this king he is not just a king in the abstract it is a king who changes things in real life for ordinary people by his personal influence and political power he is the one who rules the world now he is the son the son of God who can call God his father and if we might add in that anointing as priest he is actually a priestly king who suffer his people and offers the sacrifice of himself and

I ask you is there a better Christ than this without wishing to denigrate any political leaders who I'm sure do their best and have gifts from God this is the real Christ isn't it this is the real Messiah this is the real one who has the whole world in his hands so what should we do well here's some thoughts on this try yourself to get the full picture some of those people in the Bible struggled with that didn't they try and get the full picture that he is king over all the world he's waiting to come back and finish his kingdom and stop working against him stop living and thinking and saying you know I don't want you ruling over me stop that repent turn from that stop thinking well I think the world is da da da da da da you know all people are good no they're not the king says they're not they're in rebellion against him

I think God is like this well you let him tell you what he's like the God that we would all like is the God is just slightly less moral than we are so we could claim moral superiority over him and God says no no no you let me be who I am and you fall into line with me I think his kingdom ought to be like this I think these people ought to be in his kingdom and he says you let me decide who's in my kingdom and it depends on their relationship with me submit to what he says and ask for his mercy people in the Bible said son of David have that's how they came to the Christ kiss the son lest he be angry that's what you need to do that's what you need to do that's what being a Christian is it's somebody who's gone to Jesus Christ and talked to him and maybe pleaded with him and prayed to him and maybe wrestled things out with him and been serious with him kiss!

[45:50] the son lest he be angry and look forward to his fulfilment because John the Baptist was thinking I can see this but surely there's more and of course there is Christian faith is also Christian hope and it isn't just for what we have now though we have much now it's almost more for the future what does he promise at his coming what does he promise to deliver us from when he comes to deliver us from wrath on that day to

bring us into a new heaven and a new earth that's what our hearts are set
on that's what the Christ does that's who the king is let's sing together