

Christ or THE Christ

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[0:00] 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verses 1 through 11, page 961.

! We're going to read from verse 1 to verse 11. This is the Word of God. Now, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me.

For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is within me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preached, and so you believed.

Heavenly Father, we bow in Your presence. May Your Word be our rule, Your Spirit our teacher, and Your greater glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[2:20] I don't know if you've noticed, but it's fairly easy to talk to people about God. People are naturally curious, and from my experience anyway, they're quite happy to talk about God, at least in the abstract anyway. They'll discuss topics with you like the existence of God and the problem of evil.

I've spent many, many hours listening to what people think about God. There's no real awkwardness in the conversation when people talk about God. They'll talk about Him as freely as they'll talk about their political view. In fact, when they learn I'm a Christian, they're often the ones who initiate the conversation about God because they're happy to speak about God. Any awkwardness in the conversation you may have with someone comes when you mention the name Jesus. Then there's a sudden silence, and the conversation quickly moves on to something else. People do God, but they don't do Christ. But for us as Christians, and hear me carefully, without Christ, there is no God.

If only we've spoken to a person about God, we've achieved very little because it's Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to God except through Him. No one ever became a Christian who believed only in God. They had to believe also in Christ. In our conversations with non-Christians, we must do whatever we can, having listened carefully to what they think about God, to ask them questions about what they think of Jesus. Then, if they're willing to keep on talking, and many are not, we can explore with them what the Bible says about Jesus and how Jesus has changed our lives.

For the Christian life is all about Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul says, for me to live as Christ. The New Testament letters are filled with Jesus. Paul's teaching is founded on Christ, and Paul makes this repeated call all the way through his letters to know Christ as Lord and Savior.

Now, the name Christ in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 15, for all that's introduced in the New Testament, is actually an Old Testament word. It's the Greek translation of a word we know as Messiah.

[5:08] We're familiar with someone who has a Messiah complex, right? By which we mean they think they're the answer to all the world's problems. The word Messiah is translated as such, it's not translated as such in the Old Testament, but it's used very often in the Old Testament, and it denotes two things. First of all, it means appointed, the appointed one. God appointed special people to do special tasks for him or to be in a special position for him. God appointed Samuel to be a prophet, and in so doing, Samuel became a type of Messiah, a type of Christ. Again, God

appointed David to be the king, and in so doing, David became a kind of Messiah, a kind of Christ. So, it means appointed, but also it means anointed, the anointed one. God didn't just appoint people to do special tasks for him, but he gave them special means to perform these tasks. If you remember, the prophet

Samuel poured oil onto the head of King David, signifying that God was appointing David to be king, but also anointing him with his Holy Spirit so that David would have the strength to do the things God was calling him to do. So, the Old Testament contains many Messiah-type figures like Samuel and David, who God called to do special things for him, and gave them special power to do these things for him. But above all this, there was an expectation in the Old Testament that God would send a greater Messiah to save his people from their sins and to liberate them from slavery. And we call this the messianic expectation. Every morning, righteous Jews would open the front door of their houses, look out upon the world, and say, today the Messiah might come.

Now, the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are written in part to prove that Jesus is God's ultimate Messiah. For example, in John 20 verse 31, the apostle John, reflecting on all that he had written in the Gospels, says, these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Again, in Mark chapter 8, Jesus asks his disciples who he is, to which Peter replies, you are the Christ, the Messiah. In the Gospels, our Lord is referred to not as Christ, but as the Christ, in order to confirm his identity as the Messiah, God's ultimate answer to the problems of our world, the problems of our sin, condemnation, and captivity. However, in my own reading of 1 Corinthians 15, I stumbled across verse 3, where the apostle Paul refers to Jesus not as the Christ, but as Christ.

Also, in 1 Peter 3.18, where the apostle Peter refers to Jesus not as the Christ, as he had in Mark 8.30, but as Christ. Now, Paul and Peter's letters were written 30 years after the events recorded in the four Gospels. In the space of those 30 years, those closest to Jesus had stopped referring to him as Christ, the Christ, and started calling him Christ instead. And the point is this, what had once began as a title was now a name. The Christ was a title. Christ is a name. Things had changed in the minds of those closest to Jesus. And it seems to me that what had changed over the course of a lifetime is that they'd stopped thinking of Jesus in terms of his position so much as they started thinking of him in terms of his person. They stopped thinking of Christ as a title and started thinking of him as a person with whom they could enjoy a life-giving, growing, joy-filled relationship. The loss of this definite article, the, makes all the difference in the world. You see, Jesus is far more than the Messiah, the Christ.

[10 : 17] Jesus is our Christ. He's not a title, some historical figure over which academics may argue. He is a person, a real person with whom we may have a life-giving, joyful, and growing relationship. And that's why Jesus is so important to us. And that's why for us as Christians, we want to do everything we can to point our non-Christian friends to Him. We want them to move from thinking of Jesus as the Christ to knowing Him as Christ.

From Christ being a title to being a person with whom they may also have a life-giving, growing, and satisfying relationship. And that's also why people in general are so unwilling to talk about Jesus.

To talk about God is to engage in the abstract, to engage in philosophical discourse.

It doesn't have to be particularly personal. But to talk about Jesus is to bring the discussion into the realms of the personal. It means becoming vulnerable. It means becoming opening ourselves out to the implications of why Christ came and who Christ is. It means admitting that we are not self-sufficient. It means admitting that no matter how hard we try to save ourselves, we cannot.

We need Jesus. So, we return this morning then to 1 Corinthians 15 verse 3 where the Apostle Paul writes, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Here we're told about a Christ who's no longer a title but a name. And we're told about what He did. He died according to the Scriptures. Within these few words is a world of historic theological personal truth, six words which change everything about us and call us to put Jesus at the center of our lives, to challenge us to put the death of Jesus rather at the center of our message to a lost world, a world that desperately needs to know Christ.

[12 : 39] I want us to consider three things briefly about Jesus as Christ this morning and not as the Christ. Jesus, first of all, as ultimate Christ. Jesus as saving Christ and Jesus as personal Christ.

Tell me, do you think of Jesus at all or is it all just about God? Or is Jesus still the Christ to you or is He Christ?

If Christ is not a title to you but a name, you're in a good place because it means the door is open for you to a life-giving, growing, and joy-filled relationship with the Jesus who died for our sins according to the Scripture.

So, first of all, to call Him Christ and not the Christ means that Jesus is the ultimate Christ. He is the ultimate Christ. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul is reminding the Christians in Corinth of the gospel he had preached to them and by which they are being saved.

These are the basic truths which form the content of what we call the gospel, and they all centered on Jesus Christ. It reminds us, does it not, that it's what we believe about Jesus Christ which makes us Christian.

[14 : 02] Talking about God is not enough. You can go to the synagogues of Glasgow today and the mosques of Glasgow today, and you can hear religious devotees talking about God, but they are not saved.

It also reminds us that sermons must be filled with Christ if they are to be merited with the title Christian. Believing in God is not enough.

The God in whom we believe as Christians is God-shaped, is Christ-shaped rather, and it's what we believe and proclaim about Christ which determines whether we are saved or not.

And to talk of Christ as the ultimate Christ is to say of Him that He is the Christ to whom all the figures of the Old Testament and all the prophecies of the Old Testament were pointing.

The prophet Samuel may have been a type of Christ in that he was appointed by God to be a prophet and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 09] King David may have been a type of Christ in that he was appointed by God to be king and anointed with the Holy Spirit, but neither Samuel nor David were the ultimate Christ.

This title was reserved only for Jesus. It was to Jesus these men pointed. And that's partly why Paul says, according to the Scriptures.

Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus. All these great figures in one way or another point to Jesus. Abraham and Isaac, Moses and Aaron, Samuel and David, all in their unique ways form sections of the portrait of the ultimate Christ.

Jesus is the ideal and ultimate prophet, priest, and king. There will never be a greater, more ideal Messiah than Jesus. He is the perfect fit for all the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

It has often been said of Isaiah 53, Isaiah's great song of the suffering servant, that it could have been written at the foot of the cross. He was bruised for our iniquities.

[16 : 22] Like a sheep before her, shearers are silent, so he opened not his mouth. By his wounds we are healed. However, as you go through the Old Testament, you're struck not just by how prominent figures point to Christ, but how far short they fall of Christ.

Think of Moses, the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. In so many ways, Moses pointed to Jesus as the speaker of truth and for how he spoke on behalf of God to his people.

But Moses the prophet was a deeply flawed man who on account of his sinful failures, his rage, his anger, was barred from entering the promised land.

And the point is, we need a better, more faithful prophet than Moses. We need Christ. And then think of Aaron, Moses' brother, the greatest priest in the Old Testament.

He interceded with God on behalf of the people. But Aaron was a man who had rebelled against God and set up a golden calf. We need a better, more effective priest than Aaron.

[17 : 36] We need Christ. And then think of David, the greatest king of the Old Testament. He pointed to Christ in his faithful reign over all the people of God.

But think of how David lied, murdered, and abused people. We need a better, more faithful king than David. We need Christ.

And what we have in Christ, the ultimate Christ, is the ultimate prophet, priest, and king. Never did a man speak more truly on behalf of God.

Never did a man intercede so earnestly on behalf of the people of God. Never did a man rule the people of God with so much love, wisdom, and power.

He is the exact model of Christhood, and that's why we call him not the Christ, but Christ. Love him or loathe him.

[18:34] Diego Maradona was one of the greatest footballers of all time. He played for the Italian club team Napoli, and for his own country of Argentina.

During his time in Napoli, some of us can remember this, Maradona wore the number 10 shirt. After he left Napoli, realizing that they would never have another number 10 like Maradona, Napoli retired his shirt number.

There will never again be a number 10 playing for Napoli, because Maradona was the ultimate, final, ideal number 10. When it comes to Jesus, we retire the shirt of what it means to be Christ. There never has been, nor will there ever be, another who comes close to who our Lord is, and what our Lord did by dying for our sin. According to Scripture, he is the ultimate Christ.

That's why we follow and worship him. That's why we love him and praise him. That's why we stake our eternal testimonies upon him. That's why we want to talk to our family and friends about him, because he is the ultimate Christ.

[19:50] To put our faith in him is to put it in the best place, both in life and in death. And that's why we want to share this gospel of Christ with a lost and needy world.

The second reason Paul calls him Christ and not the Christ is because Jesus is the saving Christ. He is the saving Christ.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. We cannot divide who Christ is from what Christ did.

We have a nasty habit of doing this in our society. We justify a murderer because actually he's quite a nice guy. We justify an immoral man because he's actually quite a good politician.

But what Christ did and who Christ is are inseparable. Christ the ultimate, Christ the Savior, and these two aspects of him as Christ are important to one another.

[20:50] We've already established from our discussions concerning our Lord as the ultimate Christ that he was the perfect prophet, priest, and king. The perfect man.

You know, at funerals, I've lost count of how many times I've heard it said, this man never did anything wrong. He was a really good man. He wouldn't hurt a fly.

He'd give you the shirt off his back. Well, we know in our heart of hearts, right, we're all imperfect. We all do things that are wrong. None of us are perfect, not even that dead man.

But Jesus was perfect. He was, as the apostle Peter would later say of him, the lamb without spot or blemish. Or in 2 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul would say, he knew no sin.

Yet we know that he died on a Roman cross. This is the best established fact in ancient history. No serious historian disagrees with the fact that Jesus died on a Roman cross.

[21:55] But Roman crosses were reserved for only guilty criminals. Christ died the death of the guilty, even though he had committed no sin.

The only man who did not deserve to die, died, and died in the most horrendous, terrifying manner known to a man. Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, Paul says in Galatians.

Christ died as a man, cursed by other men, and cursed by God. He who deserved the blessing of God on account of his sinless perfection was cursed instead.

And then we read these wonderful words, Christ died for our sins. For our sins.

On that cruel cross, Jesus was not being condemned for the wrong things he had done. He was being condemned for the wrong things I had done. Baring shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

[23:05] Hallelujah, what a Savior. He died in my place. It should have been me on that cross. Been in the weight of my sin and my guilt, but he bore it for me.

All our sins are gone, blotted out, erased, reckoned as they were to the account of Christ, not to mine. As John Owen, the great Puritan, famously titled his book, *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*.

Our Lord is the saving Christ. We place our trust in great leaders. Maybe you place your trust in Mr. Burnham, or Mr. Trump, or whoever it may be.

They all fail us, every single one of them. Old Testament Israel put its faith in Moses, in Aaron, in David, but they failed and fell short.

They were mortal, imperfect men. We do the same today, putting our faith in great sportsmen, great politicians, great scientists, but they too all fall short and fail because they are imperfect, mortal people.

[24:18] But Christ saves us to the uttermost because he is the perfect prophet who on the cross declared the righteousness and love of God. The perfect priest who on the cross offered himself as the sacrifice for our sin.

The perfect king who on the cross went to war and defeated death through his death. We call him Christ and not the Christ because there is no other Savior than Jesus.

We want to retire the shirt of what it means to be Savior for no other than Jesus has broken down the gates of hell and destroyed death. No other than Jesus has abolished our sin and opened the door of heaven for us.

People in our world are desperately looking for a Savior. But most haven't I heard a thing about Jesus. People in our world remain accountable before God for their sins and are terrified of death and what comes after.

That's why we want to tell them about Christ. For he alone is the Savior of sinners. The Jesus who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[25:38] No one comes to the Father except through me. The ultimate Christ, the saving Christ. And then, thirdly and briefly, we call him Christ and not the Christ because he is the personal Christ.

The personal Christ. As we said at the beginning, the ultimate reason that over the decades since the resurrection, the Christ had become Christ for the apostles is that for them, Christ had gone from being a title to being a person.

Over the years, their faith in Jesus had deepened, grown, and matured. And that through their faith, their love for Christ has deepened, grown, and matured.

They would never, ever have spoken of Christianity as a religion like other religions. They would have spoken of Christianity as a living relationship with Christ, the way.

They never considered their faith to be a list of rules and regulations. They considered it to be a loving relationship with a loving Christ.

[26:57] And there's the fundamental difference between the Christ and Christ. The whole Christian engages with the whole Christ in a deeply personal relationship.

The whole Christian engages with the whole Christ in a deeply personal relationship. The facts about Jesus and His cross become deeply seared into the heart of the Christian and her greatest desire becomes knowing Christ better.

And yes, of course, there are these great objective truths about Jesus as the ultimate Christ and the saving Christ and the great truths of justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

But ultimately, the greatest thing for the Christian is the subjective knowledge of Christ. To know Christ, to be known by Christ, that for the Christian is the fullness of eternal life.

Eternal life is not a thing. Eternal life is a person. Eternal life is knowing and being known by Christ. It is Christ who makes life worth living and sweetens the voice of death because what is death except a servant who ushers us into the closer presence of the Christ in whom we have lived and for whom we have lived.

[28:20] we pray as Christians not because it's our duty but because we delight in the company of Christ. We read the Word not because it's part of our religion but because we delight in hearing the voice of Christ through His Spirit.

And this is what I contend the missing element in the church today. a driving pattern for passion for Jesus among Christians.

A passion which shall prove so contagious that it shall turn our world upside down and win Glasgow for Jesus. It is when Jesus moves from being the Christ to Christ we shall maximize our potential as Christians and as a church.

You'll find out people are very happy to talk about God but they're distinctly uncomfortable about talking about Jesus.

For the Christian for whom Jesus is Christ and not just the Christ we're also happy to talk about God but we are deeply uncomfortable about not talking of Jesus and that's because Jesus is for us the beginning in the middle and the end of our lives.

[29:44] For us to live is Christ and to die is gain. The greatest thing in our lives is knowing Christ because Christ is the ultimate saving and most important for us personal Christ.

He is not the Christ He is Christ. Have we lost our zeal for Christ? Do we know Christ at all? perhaps it's time for us at the beginning of a new academic session to commit or to recommit ourselves to Christ to praying for a renewed passion for Christ and never ever stop searching for

Christ until we found Christ because it's Christ and Christ alone who can change our lives not just losing the as the definite article but in giving you eternal life and that eternal life consisting in the fullness of knowing Christ.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus we want to confess that so often we leave you out of social discourse we don't talk about you we're happy to talk about God as an abstract subject philosophical thing but Lord we're embarrassed and ashamed to name you as our Lord and Savior Jesus Lord Jesus we pray that you would help us not to think of you just as the Christ but as our Christ the ultimate Christ the saving Christ the personal Christ give us a passion once more for you we pray that our passion for you may revive not just ourselves and our churches but the whole of our city in your name we pray these things to

God the Father in whom is all glory Amen