

Christ's All-Sufficient Merit

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[0 : 00] Would you pray with me? Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your word, and give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom.

Through Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, Athanasius sat looking out a small window over that busy Egyptian marketplace on the port city, the Mediterranean coast called Alexandria in Egypt. And I picture Athanasius unrolling this letter that a messenger had delivered to him. On this letter was the seal of the emperor of the entire Roman Empire.

At the time it was Constantine stamped onto the wax. And there's Athanasius. Every line of this letter that his eyes are scanning tightens the knot inside his stomach.

[1 : 13] I urge you, Emperor Constantine wrote, receive this priest Arius back into the church. His writings have been misrepresented.

Well, as we saw with the Nicene Creed, Arius had refused to agree with those statements. He had refused to sign the Nicene Creed because he wanted to bring Jesus Christ down just a notch. Christ, he said, was created by God. He taught this wrongly. He was saying, therefore, that Christ was not of the same substance, not the same essence of God, therefore not the same degree of divinity.

God is divine. Jesus Christ was not the same degree of divinity. That's what Arius was teaching.

And Athanasius said, you have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

You're bringing Christ down a notch. So what should Arius do? He's got the pressure of the entire Roman Empire, Constantine with a handwritten letter to him, commanding him to let this priest back in who won't sign the Nicene Creed.

[2 : 23] What should Athanasius do? What should you do when you feel that pressure? Spring Christ down a notch. Make it a little bit more palatable to sinful man.

Well, in today's text, Christ calls out those who were also perverting his word. Look in John chapter 5, verse 39. Jesus tells these Judaizers, these masters of the law, he says, you search the scriptures.

You have master's degrees, PhDs, and the word of God, because you think that in them, you have eternal life. You think you love Moses, because by keeping the law of Moses, you can earn your own salvation.

Jesus calls them out on that. They were trying to live their life under the principle of works. Well, they were right about one thing. They are responsible to obey God's law.

Every single person who is made by God the creator is responsible to keep God's law perfectly. He is your creator. You are his creature. So they got that part right.

[3 : 35] But look at the rest of verse 39. They were using the law for a purpose that was incomplete. Yes, the law exposes their sin.

But look what Jesus says. He says, the scriptures bear witness about me. Jesus came to reveal the gospel to them. The point in searching all of the word of God is so that you will find the one these scriptures are intending to reveal.

As you're reading your Bible, keep that in mind. If you're back in Nehemiah, or if you're in the Psalms, the purpose of the scriptures, according to Christ himself, is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ.

So all of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are given to reveal to you, church, Jesus Christ. That's how we rightly use God's word. And we sang just a moment ago of this same gospel.

We said, By thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne. Love that. What a wonderful line. What a great lyric. What is the all-sufficient merit of Christ that can do that?

[4 : 43] How can Christ, how can it be so meritorious to raise sinners like us all the way to his glorious throne? How? My sermon text for today is Christ's all-sufficient merit.

Merit. What is merit, you might be thinking. So children, merit are the qualities and actions that determine whether or not you get what you deserve.

So to merit something means that your character or conduct is deserving of that great reward, high esteem, or honor. And that's the purpose of this entire gospel.

John 20, 31. I'll remind you, this was written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

That's why we have this gospel. So my proposition for you this morning is simple. It's this. The merit of Christ is all-sufficient for you.

[5 : 44] God saves all and only those who trust fully in Christ. I want to try to argue this with two main points.

Number one, why is Christ's merit all-sufficient for you? And number two, why you must trust Christ fully? So number one, why is Jesus Christ's merit all-sufficient for you?

I want to show you three reasons why. Number one, because Jesus is equal with God. Jesus, we read in verse 18, he spoke of God as his own father.

Look at verse 18. This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath. See, isn't it interesting how most of Christ's miracles, he loved to perform them on his day.

He said, this is the Lord's day. This is the day where I love to be at work. And God can regenerate a sinner any day of the week. But isn't it interesting? He loves to heal the lame, to give sight to the blind, to bring the dead to life spiritually on the Lord's day.

[6 : 52] And he's working in that same way now. But that was according to the law of Moses.

They're trying to use that against him. In verse 18, we read that they wanted to kill him, not for breaking the Sabbath.

That happened. They wanted to kill him because he was even calling God, his own father, making himself equal with God. Now, in verse 44, how can you believe, Jesus said, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from God?

How can you believe if you're seeking glory of man, where Jesus Christ is in your midst? If you're truly seeking the glory of the creator, the lawgiver, you would recognize this is God, very God of very God, equal with God.

So that's why you can trust Christ's all sufficient merit is because he is equal with God. That's number one. Now, I just want to warn you. We're going to be wading out in the ocean into some really deep waters here.

And I'm just going to do my best to proclaim what is in the scripture, no more, no less. So please pray for me. Pray for clarity. I'm reminded Augustine, he described this of this gospel of John.

[8 : 09] John's gospel is deep enough that an elephant can swim in it. Yet, it's also shallow enough for a child not to drown.

So no matter where you are in your walk with the Lord and the faith, I think it's going to feel like you're out with the elephants. And even the elephants can't touch the bottom. And yet, I hope that even if the Lord is regenerating you and there's that new seedling of a faith in you, I pray that even then you won't drown and that you'll instead be overwhelmed with wonder at God's glory.

So how can Jesus Christ, you can understand why the Pharisees were having a hard time with this. We know you grew up in Nazareth. We know you work construction. We know you need deodorant under your armpits just as much as the next guy.

We can see you. You're flesh. You took on flesh. You're a man. You're clearly fully a man. And yet you're claiming to be the son of God, claiming to be equal with God.

We need to kill such a man. And you can see why it would take the church, you know, the global invisible church, a few decades to work this out. We just read the Nicene Creed.

[9 : 18] We believe in one God, maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the son of God. That's who he claims to be. Begotten of the father, only begotten, that is, of the substance of God.

See, this is refuting Ares. He was not created by God. Jesus says, I was sent. I was eternally begotten. As you know, John 3, 16, we read that.

So Jesus was sent. He's proceeding from the father on the mission, the son accomplishing what father, son, and spirit have decreed from eternity past, taking on flesh in human time and space to fulfill that very mission to save sinners.

That's why we use the language of eternally begotten, but not created of the same substance of the father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made of one substance with the father.

Again, through whom all things were made, both those in heaven and those on earth. God is spirit. His worshipers will worship him in spirit and in truth.

[10:26] Those are the heavenly things, the spiritual realm. Yet God, who is spirit, took on flesh. He came to the earthly earth to save you and me out of this earth.

In his incarnation, he took on a body. And through that body, now he marries his church, his people for all eternity, preparing the heavens and the new earth for his glory and his rule.

These are deep waters. How did Athanasius handle it in his generation? Well, he refused to readmit Arius and his followers on the grounds that there could be no fellowship.

This is a quote. There could be no fellowship between the church and one who denies the divinity, the godness of Christ. What happened, though, within Athanasius' own lifetime, is that Arius and his powerful followers used their politics and took over the church.

And once they were now in power of the church, they had Athanasius arrested. And then they exiled him out of the Roman Empire. This happened in 335.

[11:38] But Athanasius continued to defend how the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God. And as such, God saves sinners. He insisted on this point, that in order for God to save sinners, it is necessary for our Savior to be both fully human.

Yes, so he can be your mediator and representative, the second and greater Adam, and that this Jesus Christ, he did so being fully God. One person, two natures.

Athanasius would not give this up. The scripture is too clear. And Athanasius was right, too, about the purity of God's true church. When those with whom we have fellowship depart from one of the fundamentals of the faith, they are the ones causing division within the true church.

Those are the ones who are perverting law and gospel. They are the ones causing division. And it's wrong to allow such false teaching to cause division in the body of Christ.

It is they who are destroying the true fellowship of believers. This is what Jude says in Jude 1-3. He says, I appeal to you, writing to the church, contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[12:58] You see how important it is that Christ is equal with God? God saves all and only those who fully trust in Christ. And his merit is all sufficient for you.

Reason number one, he's equal with God. Reason number two, why else is his merit all sufficient? Number two is because Jesus Christ was sent to accomplish God's work for you.

See, according to his human nature, Jesus Christ had to learn obedience on behalf of a sinful people, those he would ransom. Look at verse 19. So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing.

For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise. What this means is that the son who is equal with God was sent to take on flesh and to accomplish God's mission.

And the mission he was sent on required perfect obedience. This is what the people of Israel understood correctly. God requires of you, people of God, perfect obedience.

[14:10] In order to have life with God, you must not live in sin. But the principle under the old covenant was do this and live. What Christ was introducing to them is that I have done this for you.

You live in me. Live first. Live. I'm going to regenerate you. And as a result, I will put my love in your heart and you will do this. But first you live.

You get his life freely. You don't merit it. He merited it fully for you on your behalf. And Jesus tells us here that he had to learn obedience.

He had to, according to his human nature, see what his father, the heavenly father is doing on earth. And he, as, as God incarnate, according to his human nature, chose to limit his human nature to fulfill that mission, to learn faith.

Even you could say, to learn, to watch on earth, how the father is working. And that he did in perfect, perpetual, personal obedience. Remember 39, you search the scriptures because you think that in them, you have eternal life.

[15:22] Well, Paul calls this the law of works. He calls it that in Romans 3, 27. You are under the law of works when you are trying to work to fulfill God's law for yourself, because you cannot do it.

The law will expose your sin. You're under the law of works. You cannot merit righteousness by your own life. This is tricky.

We can err on so many, so many sides. I'm getting the law and the gospel to be biblical, to be what Christ taught. Martin Luther, this is so comforting to me. Martin Luther said, if any man is able to discern between law and gospel, let him thank God.

He is a master of theology. I myself often confuse the two. But we're told here that Jesus was sent to accomplish God's work for you.

According to his human nature, the Holy Spirit would show Jesus the father's work so that he would do look likewise. Look at verse 20. The father shows the son all that he himself is doing.

[16:27] Verse 30. Jesus said, I can do nothing of my own according to his human nature. As I hear, I judge and my judgment is just. I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Do you see at every turn, Christ is seeking that perfect, perpetual obedience to his father, according to his human nature. And he's doing this after he's already made it very clear that he is equal with God.

It's the Nicene Creed. He is very God, the same essence, not one degree less of divinity. And being very God, taking on flesh, perfect obedience on behalf of fallen humans, at every turn, trusting in his father.

He is the fullness of God's glory. God's triune love is Christ's motivation. Look at verse 41, just briefly. Why was Christ working to accomplish the work his father required?

Verse 41 says, I do not receive glory from people. There is nothing that creation can give him that God lacks. He lacks nothing.

[17:35] Yes, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord. The glory that is due him is coming to him, but he doesn't do it for that motivation. He lacks nothing.

His motivation is the love of God. He is love. That's why he is obeying to fulfill all love.

He who is God took on flesh and learned obedience. Look back at verse 21 again. As the father raises the dead and gives them life, he's trusting now by that same authority, will he accomplish this work?

So even the faith that Jesus had to have according to his human nature, that his father would raise the dead. Yes, his father will reward the man, the God man who fulfills his law perfectly.

And going to the cross, Jesus had to trust that according to his human nature. I laid down my life willingly in faith that my father raises the dead who have merited eternal life.

[18:40] What faith our Lord Jesus had to have according to his human nature. What faith and motivated by love. So not only was his life keeping the law perfectly, his heart was full of the love that God requires in the heart.

And his faith in the heavenly realm, the reality of the kingdom of God in heaven, his faith was perfect as well. So in all these ways, Jesus Christ fulfilled the requirements of God, the father.

This is called the active obedience of Christ. So when you picture Christ in his passion, you hear that same root word, the passion of God or the passive obedience, suffering, you know, taking it, enduring it.

Those are passive verbs. But before he gave his life passively on the cross, which he did, and even passively to humble himself, Philippians two, to take on flesh.

He also obeyed positively and actively on your behalf, the righteousness that you could never muster up on your own. He had perfect faith.

[19:46] Isn't that the very thing Adam and Eve lacked? Faith to trust God fully. I know I lack that faith every day, every hour, but Christ had the faith that you lack.

And it's not the strength of your faith now, it's the one in whom you put your faith. Jesus Christ, his faith is strong enough to carry you and all of his bride all the way home.

Why was this active obedience of Jesus necessary? I'm going to share an illustration in the lyrics of Shilin. Here's the thing that you must pay attention to.

He says, although you weren't there, Adam represented you. Think logically before you criticize. One player commits a foul. The whole team gets penalized. We need a substitute in our place to be killed.

Plus, we need the broken law to be obeyed and fulfilled. We need both. And Jeremiah prophesied of this, that the Lord himself would be our righteousness.

[20 : 48] Shilin's quoting Jeremiah 23, 6. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the righteous branch of David will reign over as king. And he will deal wisely and execute justice.

And his righteousness will prevail in the land. And his people will be saved. They will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called, Jehovah Sidkenu, the Lord, our righteousness.

So why is Jesus Christ's merit all sufficient? Because he is equal with God. Because he was sent to accomplish God's work. And number three, because he has all of God's authority.

He has authority to give life. Look at verse 21. The son gives life to whom he will. It is Jesus Christ, whose will regenerates a sinner.

Those who the father predestined, the Lord Jesus Christ wills that they be saved. And the spirit applies the salvation he accomplished.

[21 : 59] See, the decree of God, father, son, and spirit is one. The will of God is one. It's unified. Throughout every generation, this has been another way in which Jesus, Christ has tried to be brought down a notch.

Pelagius, in the time of Augustine, he was trying to bring Christ down to say, well, Christ didn't, didn't share in the eternal decree of God to save sinners. Now, Jesus Christ came later, more responding, you know, kind of a, a way to, to kind of fix up what man had broken.

And Jesus is very clear. Look at verse 21. Again, the son gives life to whom he wills. According to his divine nature, he shares in the will of God, the father outside of time and came on earth to fulfill this mission.

We're in these deep waters again, aren't we? Well, I want to comfort you and myself with the final paragraph from chapter three of the second London confession of faith.

It reads this, that the doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care that men attending to the will of God revealed in his word and yielding obedience there unto may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election.

[23 : 23] We have this high mystery, not to make you panic, but to find comfort, to find confidence that Christ gave his life for you. How do you know?

And are you one that is chosen unto life in Christ? Did Jesus will that you be saved? Well, then you repent, you repent of your sin. You believe fully in Christ and you confirm your assurance in him.

And in responding to Christ with faith and repentance, he will bear fruit in your life. You will work with him and you will have that comfort more and more and more as you walk with him.

God saves all and only those who trust fully in Christ and his merit is all sufficient for you.

Well, not only does he have authority to give eternal life, he also has authority to execute judgment on those who dishonor God. Think about that.

[24 : 24] If Christ's motivation is that God is love and God is holy and God, Christ lived every moment in obedience to please the father, how would it be obedient and how would it be pleasing to the father if he allowed those dishonoring his father's name to go unpunished when he has all authority?

Jesus is appointed by the father as the high king over all the earth. Wasn't that Adam's role? All of the earth was to be subdued and he was to name the animals rule over them, show God's governance over all creation.

Now Christ comes having received all authority. Look at verse 22. My father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the son. Then in verse 27, he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man.

He is the second Adam, the beginning of the new creation. He will rule and his kingdom will come on earth. That's why he took on flesh was to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

And his kingdom extends and it goes out through his word, through his church. As we proclaim the gospel, he has all authority.

[25 : 41] And this is, this is included in the Nicene confession. Because of who Jesus Christ is, our one Lord Jesus Christ, who came for us, for our salvation. He was made flesh and entered

humanity and suffered and rose on the third day.

The confession says he ascended to heaven and is coming. To judge the living and the dead. Christ has all authority as God's appointed king and the judge of the world. Look at verse 23. He's proclaiming this truth that all may honor the son just as they honor the father. Whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him.

So how is all of this relevant to you? How can this be a source of comfort? Well, in 1937, a pastor and theologian named J.

Gresham Machen on his deathbed, one of the few men in his time who had refuted liberalism within the church, similar to what Athanasius had done. He woke from a glorious dream about heaven in the comfort of being with Christ.

[26 : 57] And his lungs were tightening from pneumonia. And with his final breaths, he dictated a telegram that said, God saves all and only those who trust fully in Christ.

And his merit is all sufficient for you. You must fully trust in him. I think I'm going to have to do this one in part one, part two again.

What I want to, what I want you to think about, and for next week, it'll be this, why you must trust fully in Christ. What we saw today is who is Christ. His sermon does not stop here.

And you need to understand his promises, his warnings, and his invitation to you. It goes out as an invitation to put your trust fully in him.

By refusing Christ, you are dishonoring Christ. It also goes out as a command. He is the King of Kings. He is the Lord of Lords.

[28 : 17] Do you believe this is who he is? And if so, you must trust him fully. There is no hope of salvation apart from Christ.

Next week will part two, and I promise to not leave you hanging with Athanasius as well. But let's close with a word of prayer for today. From an Orthodox Catechism, questions 29 and 30.

We praise you, our three in one God. Salvation cannot be found in anyone else.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our high priest. It is he who has set us free by his one sacrifice of his body. Our Lord Jesus continually pleads our cause with the Father.

He came that we could have eternal life. He came that he would proclaim the gospel, that all would repent and believe in him, that none would dishonor him and refuse him in their heart any longer.

[29 : 24] Lord, we confess Jesus Christ is our eternal King, and he governs us by his word and by his spirit. And it's our Lord Jesus Christ who guards us and keeps us in the freedom from sin that he has won for us.

We praise you that his merit is all sufficient to save a sinner such as I and anyone who will believe in him. And now, Lord, to you be all glory, all honor, and all praise, both now and forevermore. Amen.