

Wisdom of the Prayer Book: Jesus Christ at the Center

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[0 : 0 0] Our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, our Lord and our Savior, we come to you, we lift our hearts to you, we acknowledge our own wisdom to you, and we pray that your Holy Spirit will be with us now to guide us in our thinking and show us more of the glory of Jesus than ever we have seen before.

Grant it, we pray, in his name. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, you know the title.

If this is one of the series of talks that I've given on the wisdom of the prayer book, Christ at the Center is the focus for today.

Perhaps I may begin autobiographically and just tell you that I remember vividly that on the Saturday night before the Lord broke into my life, I listened to a Bible exposition from Colossians chapter 1 on the theme, the theme title, Christ Supreme.

And I remember also that 20 years after that, the man who had given the Bible reading and had counseled me when I was converted met up with me, I met up with him on my first trip to Los Angeles where he was prostoring at that time.

[2 : 0 1] And he asked me a question which I don't think I'd ever been asked before. He said, is God giving you any particular emphasis in your ministry?

And I remember saying to him, as one who was on the spot, you know, because I'd never thought in these terms before, but yet he'd asked me the question and deserved an immediate answer.

I remember saying to him, because it focused in my mind on the instant, yes, stressing the centrality of Christ. And that focused what I had been trying to do without getting it focused in the years before that. And it still expresses what I have been trying to do consciously now for the last 40 years. Yes, 40 years since that conversation took place.

And still, what I want to teach, to leave behind me, whenever I have a chance to open my mouth in the Christian context, is the supremacy of the Lord Jesus and the glory that goes with it.

So, you can see how I get to the focus of my talk this morning. My title, Christ at the Center, is actually, as you can see, an image. Indeed, when you look at it, you realize it's three images.

[4 : 0 4] Christ at the center of what? Well, first of all, of a process, a process of God working out his will for salvation after his will for creation had been apparently thwarted by Satan and the fall.

Something being at the center is a picture of other things revolving around it. I have an old-fashioned turntable at home with a symbol in the middle, around which my CDs revolve as I play them.

And the Lord Jesus is at the center of God's redeeming process, just as he was at the center of the Father's creating process.

And that's the first aspect of the image of Christ at the center. And then the second aspect is that that which is at the center of anything has significance.

Now, think of how you arrange people for a photograph. If there is a particularly distinguished person to go in the photograph, well, you put him in the middle and arrange the other people on either side of him.

[5 : 45] And the Lord Jesus is at the middle of things. And that gives him a significance greater than any other person in the process.

And the third thought that the image of Christ at the center evokes is simply the thought of our attention being centered on him just because he is at the center of things.

Again, think of the photograph. When you look at it, your eye naturally goes to the person at the center.

All right. That's just an introduction to the way that things are in the Bible as the Lord Jesus is there presented to us in his glory.

The New Testament, as you know, is Trinitarian from start to finish, although it has no technical vocabulary in which to express the truth that God is three in one.

[7 : 05] But what you see from Matthew's Gospel to Revelation is three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, working together for the salvation of sins.

And their togetherness is total. They are working out the details of a single plan of salvation. And right at the center of that story of salvation, first to last, is Jesus, God incarnate, the Word, the Son, the mediator between God and man, the means of salvation for us in our guilt and hopelessness.

When you get to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, well, the Lord Jesus, I won't say romps through every chapter, but he's there very prominently.

And, you know, the book of the Revelation is simply overflowing with imagery, and there Jesus is the Lamb, the Lamb as it had been slain, the Lamb who suffers for our sins.

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who goes out conquering and to conquer. He is, in short, the Lord.

[8 : 43] The Father has made him Lord. He is the one who is in charge of everything that goes on in the cosmos, and he is the one who is finally going to terminate the history of this cosmos and bring in the history of the renewed cosmos, the renewed world order, with which, in vision, the book of Revelation ends.

Yes, he is right at the center of things. And that's the thought, which I'd like to elaborate a bit further before I come to the prayer book, because it is our thought, which takes a lot of unpacking, since there is a great deal contained in it.

As I have said, though not with the rhyme which enters now into the way that I'm putting it, what you have in the New Testament is his story, beginning to end, and it's told for his glory, beginning to end.

The Father has made his Son central. And that's the truth that I want us to get clear, not only in our heads, but in our hearts.

That's the truth from which I want us to be sucking sweetness, all through the rest of what I'm saying, just as it's a truth from which I suck sweetness constantly, as I seek to highlight the centrality and the glory of the Lord Jesus in all my ministry these days.

[10 : 40] I sometimes put it this way, that increasingly the Lord Jesus fills my horizon. You know what a horizon is?

We can survey the horizon of the Pacific Ocean from Vancouver. Well, there's a lot of horizon.

And when I say that the Lord Jesus increasingly fills my horizon, I am saying that I am increasingly becoming aware, by the grace of God, of his greatness, his majesty, his supremacy, and his glory.

And increasingly, am I being drawn out in praise and adoration, a kind of praise and adoration that you have in the book of Revelation, and let me hark back to that.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory, power, honor, dominion, every form of the, praise and acknowledgement of worth that you can think of.

[11 : 59] Christ at the center, yes. And let me now detail the thought under force of headings. Jesus Christ, as I have said, is at the center of God's plan, the host of redemption.

In the New Testament, with Paul, this is regularly called the mystery, not meaning the puzzle, of course, but meaning God's secret, now revealed.

Paul talks of it as mystery to proclaim the fact that it's mystery no longer. It is, as I say, something that God has made known, and it's the distinctive focus of the New Testament all the way through.

Paul loves this word mystery. Let me just read you one or two of the places where he throws the gun. Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 3.

Paul has just said, I'm assuming that you've heard it was stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. And in verse 3, he elaborates that by saying, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

[13 : 23] As I've written briefly, that's a reference to the first two chapters of Ephesians. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles, which means really everyone in the world, over and above the Jews, the mystery is that the Gentiles, our fellow heirs, at least invited, to be fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Well, Paul was thrilled by that all through his ministry and he says it over and over again. Here, for instance, in Colossians, chapter 2, verse 3, you go to something quite similar.

Oh, well, it's quite similar, it's misleading really because, first of all, he says that he is striving in prayer, that's the struggle that he says he has in verse 1 for you and for those of Laodicea and all who have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, be met together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of, here it is, God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

and two verses further on, we find him saying, in effect, now focus on the centrality of Christ and never get away from it.

[15 : 27] As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Keep Christ at the center. The mystery now revealed. Christ as the center of the process, which is the saving plan of God.

Then second, Christ is at the center of the gospel message, which proclaims what God has done in the process of his saving work.

In Romans, you have Paul beginning with a formal statement about Jesus Christ so that everyone will know who he's talking about in the expository chapters of the letter.

He says that he's an apostle set apart for the gospel of God, which God promised beforehand through his prophets and the Holy Scripture, concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[16 : 53] So it goes on. through whom we've received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Well, when you get to the end of the letter, you find Paul doing as good communicators learn to do, picking up the first note that he struck and striking it again as he signs off.

When a speaker does that, of course, it gives a great sense of completeness to what he's saying. So you have this wonderful doxology at the end of chapter 16.

Now, to him who's able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God the glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. As you remember, I'm sure, the note that Paul strikes right at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians where he insists that his proclamation to them is precisely the word of the cross, the preaching of the cross, which, of course, didn't, how can I say, didn't tie in at all with the expectation of the Corinthians that any travelling teacher, lecturer who came to town would have things to say which, one way or another, would exalt him.

[19 : 00] Nothing of the sorts of call, I came to tell you about a saviour who actually, how do we say it in modern language to get the shock of it, Paul said a saviour who was crucified, the shock value of that corresponds to the shock value that would there would be, if we nowadays said, we proclaim the saviour who went to the electric chair.

And Paul, having said it, insists on it, hammers away in it. The word of the cross is the power of God to salvation.

God has made Jesus Christ who was crucified there, our wisdom and our righteousness and our sanctification and redemption. And I, when I came to you, he says, didn't come to you proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

I didn't say anything that was intended to exalt me or my resources or my understanding of things or anything like that. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, of whom, Paul implies, I spoke in the simplest and most straightforward terms, and I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling.

my speech and my preaching were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and the power. That is, I trusted God to make an impact on your hearts through the simple words that I used, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

[21 : 01] well, this is familiar stuff, of course, but it comes in here because it confirms what I'm saying, that for Paul, Jesus Christ, the center of God's whole plan of salvation, is the center of the gospel message, and indeed his judicial execution on the cross, is the center of that gospel very precisely and exactly.

And then thirdly, Paul says that Jesus Christ, now risen, glorified, and reigning, he is the center of church life, this is his significance now, church life is body life, we are the body of Christ, we are together in him, and we are to live as a community that's together in him, and that takes us into Ephesians chapter 4, where you've got this very elaborate declaration that the risen Lord gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers to equip the saints, that's you and me of course, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of

God, to mature manhood, better translated actually, to become a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we're no longer children tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every word of wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness, in deceitful schemes, so on.

Rather, speaking the truth, better translation would be living the truth, in love, were to grow up in every way into him who is the head, head of the body, even Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Well, that's a terrific statement, and as you see, it makes the point that Christ is the center of church life, most fully and most emphatically.

[23 : 59] Let me just add to it Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 through 27 where, on a side way, as a matter of fact, to enforce the direction to husbands to love their wives, Paul gives us this, husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

What an admonition to husbands, you and me, gentlemen. And what a celebration of the work of Christ, the work that he has done, offering himself for us on the cross to put away our sins, and that he is doing, sanctifying us, having cleansed us with the washing of water through the word, so that he may present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, so that she is holy and without blemish.

That's how it will be when the work of grace is done, when Christ comes again, but that's what he's working up to the whole time. That's what he's working for in your life and mine this very morning.

Well, this is Christ at the center of church life, and one is reminded again of his significance as the head of the church in the letters, the report cards, as we might call them, sent to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where the Lord, takes account of how the churches are doing and tells them, as report cards do.

And then finally, we've thought of Christ at the center of God's plan, at the center of the gospel, at the center of the church's life, and finally, at the center of Christian existence.

[26 : 28] Jesus. So, now we realize, we see Christ's significance, and we must pay attention to it.

Well, Paul, again, modifies this for us, when he says in Philippians 1.21, to me, to live is Christ. Wow, could you say that?

Could I say that? Paul could say that, and he did. To me, to live, is Christ. He unpacks it a bit in chapter 3 of Philippians, when he says that whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

I counted everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but having that which comes through faith in Christ, a righteousness from God that depends on faith, the gift of righteousness, as it's called in Romans chapter 5, given by virtue of Christ's obedience on the cross, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and share his sufferings, becoming like him and his death, that by any means possible, the term there means somehow or other, it's an expression of amazement, not of doubt, just imagine me, me, that by any means possible, that somehow or other, by the grace of the

Lord, even to me, I may attain the resurrection from the dead, that's so called. Well, that's sufficient, isn't it, to make the point that Jesus Christ is and ever must be at the centre of Christian existence.

[28 : 40] We could buttress that by drawing on John 15, where the saviour himself uses the instrument of the vine, we are branches in the vine, abide in me, stay put where you're planted, or, how should I say it, stay put where you're engrafted, that's the word I want to hear, isn't it?

And we can buttress it further from Hebrews chapter 4, where we are reminded that our Lord Jesus is our High Priest, we have a great High Priest who's passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, so let's hold fast our confession of faith in him, for we don't have a High Priest who's unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, one who's limited, in other words, on what he can do for us, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin, he's been there, he's triumphed, and he can strengthen us so that we can triumph over sin also.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace. This is prayer now. Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace. We know who sits on it.

It's our great High Priest who reigns. So we draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And then in chapter 7 and verse 25 of Hebrews, we're reminded that Jesus, our great High Priest, ever lives to make intercession for us.

[30 : 38] And friends, we often know that though the English Bible always says intercession, the Greek word actually would, well, it expresses a bigger thing than the word intercession normally carries for us, and its sense would be better expressed if make intervention for us was the translation that was used.

You mustn't think of the Lord Jesus as a suppliant before the Father's throne. You must think of him as the reigning Lord of the universe who takes action when his people need that he should and cry to him for the help without which they're going to go.

He always lives to make intervention for us. well, that from the scriptures is how I understand the theme, my theme, of Christ at the center.

And my announced topic has to do with the prayer book, and the theme that I've pursued in a whole series of talks about the prayer book, to which some of you have listened.

The prayer book echoes the New Testament. The prayer book, in its sober, restrained way, is a reflection of the whole range of the New Testament reality of grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 28] Christ. The Christ himself, to whom the prayer book bears witness, is the Christ, who is described for us in article 2 of the 39.

Let me read that article. I'd like you to have in mind the range, depth, strength, and weight of what the articles say about the Lord Jesus.

And article 2 is, I think, a very striking statement indeed. Its title is, Of the Word, or Son of God, who was made very man, and it reads thus, The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting, of the Father, the very, that is the true and eternal God, and of one's substance with the Father.

Substance means common life, I may say. The Son took man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, her substance, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, true God, and very man, true man, 100% divine, 100% human, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

Modern theology tends to shrink back from the thought that Christ died to reconcile his Father to us.

[34 : 34] It seems to me, however, that that thought is there in the New Testament, and ought not to be evaded. The wrath of the Father against us was real, and the Father sent the Son to absorb that judicial wrath, so that in righteousness the Father might forgive us our sins, accept us in the Savior, grant us the gift of righteousness, and make us his children by adoption in the way that in fact he has done.

well, you'll agree, I think, that there is a very strong and full statement about the glory and the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in the process of redemption, which is what the New Testament is all about.

Now, the prayer book services, which have Article 2 as their background and to be interpreted in Article 2 terms, said before us, the Lord Jesus, unobtrusively you might say, in the sense that there's a flow in the prayer book services and when the Lord Jesus comes into it, well, there's no exclamation point, no shifting of gears, he is part of the flow.

But when you look at the things that you've said about him, well, they have the weight and the strength of this article and the weight and the strength of the New Testament, which stands behind this article.

Let me just give you perhaps the most striking instances of this. In the Holy Communion service, we pray the general intercession in the name of Christ, our only mediator and advocate.

[36 : 54] When you think, that phrase is saying a very great deal, only mediator with God, and advocate the one who stands to plead for us in rigor to the sinfulness of which we need to be forgiven.

God and then very shortly, as the service goes on, we hear that thought of the Savior as our advocate restated in the comfortable words, remember, 1 John 2, the fourth of the comfortable words, if anyone sinned, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, who is the propitiation for our sins, and you remember that the first two of the comfortable words are from the lips of the Savior himself, come to me all who labor, heavy laden, and all of you rest, God so loved the world that he gave his only begot himself.

Well, that's, you will agree, the full biblical strength of the testimony for the Lord Jesus, and that is maintained again, unobtrusively but powerfully throughout the prayer book.

All the prayers, the collects and the prayers and the set services, they are offered through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, weighty friends, Jesus, that's his human name and his human identity. Christ, that's his office title, that's the official role that he fulfills in the saving plan of God, he is the Messiah.

[38 : 58] He is Lord, Lord of all, and he is our Lord, we are praying, as those who live under his Lordship.

every now and then, the form of words is varied, and we ask in prayer, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, or through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, or for the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, or for the honour of Jesus Christ our Lord, or in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, but ordinarily it's simply through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The reference is of course to what the Saviour himself said to his disciples in that last discourse, John 14-16, pray in my name, said Jesus, and your prayers will be answered.

What did he mean when he said pray in my name? Clearly he meant make prayers, ask, ask your petitions, asking for things that you know I will back, asking for things that I want you to have.

asking for things which I will back as the father takes account of them, ask for things which honor me, and further my will as you know it.

[40 : 53] again, it's a tremendous privilege, tremendous truth, a tremendously weighty reality, and an awesome state of affairs that we can do this, that we can, and we're told to, and in the prayer book soon says we're doing it.

we focus requests which we can make in the name of the Lord Jesus, and then we make them, and offer them through him, meaning in the confidence that he backs our requests.

And then, when you get to the Bible services, or the prayer, there are canticles which we sing, and in the canticles there's a good deal of praise to Christ.

Think, for instance, oh yes, we may, of course, not know this very well, because we don't have evening prayer on a regular basis, but in the evening prayer service, we have the Nank Dimittis, that's Simeon's song, when he celebrated the baby Jesus in the temple, my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, to be a light, to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel.

Salvation, light, glory. This is heavy-duty celebration of the significance of the Lord Jesus, the baby, whom, at that moment, Simeon was holding in his arms.

[42 : 54] And then, in morning prayer, which we are more familiar with, I guess, we use, well, I hope, we use on a regular basis, the te diem, which has been, it's a hymn, actually, it's been described as the creed set in song, and right at the center of the te diem, there is praise and prayer, addressed directly to the Lord Jesus, and again, it's very weighty utterance, saying glorious things about our glorious Lord.

Thou art the King of glory, O Christ, thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb, came down very low.

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers, thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father, raised up very high.

We believe that thou shall come to be our judge. We, therefore, pray thee, help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood, make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting.

sin. That's Christ at the center of the tedium, and Christ at the center of the plan of redemption, the process of salvation which the Father undertook in order to wipe out eventually the effects of sin.

[44 : 48] and then in the litany, which we don't use very often and I think frankly that's a pity, the litany you know was the very first bit of the prayer book to be written.

Cranmer wrote it as a separate item while Henry VIII was still alive. It was published on its own in 1544 before any other part of Cranmer's prayer book was written and it's a stunning prayer document.

It's very, very powerful in its expression as it seems to me. It is Trinitarian to the core. It starts by celebrating holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God have mercy on us and in the petitions it moves to and fro between the Father and the Son.

It's very striking the way it does this. The very first petition you see is offered to the Lord Jesus. Remember not Lord our offenses nor the offenses of our forefathers to the Lord.

Spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood. Yes, we're talking to Jesus Christ and the congregation identifies with that and says spare us good Lord.

[46 : 30] And this goes on until the whole series of sins and spiritual pitfalls are listed and we ask to be delivered from them.

And then it's by the mystery of thy holy incarnation, by thy holy nativity, by thy baptism, fasting, and temptation, by thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, by thy precious death and burial, by thy glorious resurrection and ascension, by the sending of the Holy Spirit, by thy heavenly intercession, and by thy coming again in glory, good Lord, deliver us.

So it goes on. We are still praying to the Lord Jesus, central in the plan which the Trinity executes for salvation, central, therefore, in the petitionary prayers of God's people.

Then there's two or three pages of prayers to the Father, but we are back at the end of the litany with specific prayer to the Lord Jesus again.

Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us. Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Grant us thy peace, O Christ, hear us, Lord, have mercy upon us, Christ, have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy upon us.

[48 : 08] This is Cranmer producing a form of prayer, which is intended to, amongst other things, to get English worshippers honoring and adoring and petitioning the Son, quite specifically the Son, the Lord Jesus, as Cranmer believed, on the basis of the New Testament, that Christians should do.

The question sometimes gets asked, and it's been asked of me at this podium in the past, should we pray to Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as to the Father?

Well, the answer is, surely, when there's specific reason to pray to Christ and to the Holy Spirit, they are divine and it's proper to do so, and praying to Christ, I could have said, I don't think I have said, but I'm saying now, is modeled for us on the grand scale in the litany.

The very first bit of the prayer book to be written. And so, I might go on, but time is running out, and so I must draw to a close.

You have heard me and others say about the prayer book, that as it exists for public worship, in fellowship together, prayer, so it exists to be a personal aid to devotion, a resource for our own meditations and prayers, and I want to leave you with the thought that the prayer book does help, and help very weightily, and very considerably, in keeping Christ at the center, in our own personal devotion, and dependence on him.

[50 : 29] And having said that, I've shot my word, I'm happy now that we should move from monologue into dialogue, I'd like to know what you think of this.

I have tried to testify to Christ at the center of everything, Christ as increasingly filling the Christian's horizon, as we Christians mature spiritually, when we get to glory, Christ most certainly will fill the horizon, and we shall be praising and adoring him constantly.

Whatever else we are doing, that will be our foremost activity. And the Father wants it like that. Let me quote right my last Bible quote to you, let me quote what the Savior himself says in John's Gospels recorded in chapter 5 and verse 32, sorry, 22 and 23.

The Father has given all judgment to the Son, 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.

It's the Father's will that we should honor him as Lord. It's the Father's will that we should focus on him in prayer.

[52 : 24] It's the Father's will that he should fill our horizon so that increasingly we relate all life to him and his will and seek to live all our life under his dominion that is in a way that will please him.

Christ at the center more and more and more as we move along in our Christian pilgrimage. Well, that, as I say, is what I wanted to share with you.

And now, I would be very glad to know how you react to the things that I've said. So let's move straight into dialogue.

Could you say a little more about the central role of Christ in the atonement?

In other words, how may we best describe, even if we can't fully understand it, how that took place? I'm thinking that the pressure is not a few theologians have good difficulty in understanding how God could punish his son for the sins of the world.

[53 : 45] It is true that theologians stretch their heads over that. The first thing to say is that in the New Testament it's very emphatic and very clear.

Galatians 3.13, for instance, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. I'll pause there.

Everyone is clear, I hope, that the law is the expression of God's holiness, the expression of God's standards, and we are told the whole Old Testament is constantly saying that if one falls short of God's standards, as set forth in the law, one becomes liable to judgment and penal retribution.

That is, God will reward with punishment those who transgress his commands. But now, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

There's a participle there in the Greek which is explanatory, and that's why by becoming is the right translation. The participle, becoming, is explaining how it is that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

[55 : 19] when, back to the comfortable words, when John at the beginning of the second chapter of his first letter, and when Paul in chapter 3 of Romans refers to Jesus on the cross as the propitiation for our sins, the very word propitiation is pointing to the reality of wrath, that is hostility, that is judicial rejection and inflection of penalty on those who transgress, and the declaration that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, is the defilement, that in our place he has absorbed all of that, so that it's no longer a reality facing us.

The 53rd chapter of the book of Isaiah pictures the suffering servant on whom God lays the iniquity of us all, and that's the picture, that's the picture, that's being picked up by these New Testament references, that's the prophecy that is being fulfilled, so these New Testament statements say, was fulfilled in the death of Jesus.

You need words in order to express this, and the mainstream of Christian theology down the centuries has come up with the two words, representative and substitute.

Substitute is the key word for it means in our place, taking our obligation upon what's himself.

If you were first nominated to play in a team, and then somebody else play is appointed to play as your substitute, because for some reason or other you can't do it, when you are free from obligation.

[57 : 53] And when Jesus Christ died on the cross, on our behalf, representing each individual, Christian and all Christians together, representing millions, Christians, this is God's mathematics, it's beyond me, that he represented us all, he loved me and gave himself for me, says Paul in Galatians 2.20, he loved you, gave himself for you, loved each of us, specifically, personally.

That's the meaning of substitution, and that's the reality of substitution that the New Testament complains. Christ died in our place.

In a couple of months' time, there will be a book out on the atonement, a small book, containing some writing on the atonement, I've contributed to it, and the title of the book is taken from a 19th century hymn, which says it perfectly, I think, in my place condemned he stood.

That's what the cross was all about, and that's how each Christian is to understand it. There are more scripture passages that I could quote, but perhaps I've said enough to start off the response to theologians who don't accept this.

The reason they don't accept it is that they think fit to shut their eyes to it. There isn't any answer to it. It's there in the New Testament.

[59 : 50] These liberal theologians can only say, well, I know it's there in the New Testament, but we don't believe it. it's a primitive idea which ought not to be there in the New Testament, to which we may respond, and properly respond, by saying, look, my estimate of the New Testament is clearly higher than yours, just as I think my estimate of Christ himself is higher than humans.

you can carry on the discussion from there. Is that sufficient for the moment? Very good, thank you. Okay. Any other comments?

Thoughts? Bill? You clearly said that Jesus is the one and only mediator. how careful, even in the best of evangelical churches, do they avoid leaving an impression in some of the things they do that gives you the idea that some mediating is going on outside of Christ.

I sign you with a cross marking you as his forever, that type of thing. Confirmations, the bishop laying his hands on and transferring the Holy Spirit into the people, this type of thing.

And other things like consecrating the wine and the bread during the communion service seems to leave or suggest a flavor of mediatorship going on there, which might dupe people.

[61 : 30] Frankly, I wouldn't have thought that that's the way it works in people's minds. What I think you're getting at, Bill, is the reality of what I call formalism in many of our African churches.

That is, we go through the motions without checking, without insisting, that people understand what we are doing and don't entertain superstitious thoughts about it.

There is a lot of formalism in Western Anglicanism. I don't think that you have that problem in African and Southeast Asian Anglicanism, but you have it in what I call the Old West.

Britain, yes, North America, including Canada, Australasia, too, if you want to look that far away. the Middle Ages, of course, did not envisage any teaching at all about the meaning of Christian faith and worship being given to ordinary members of the parish.

They were just to come and be present while the Mass was celebrated. And we know full well that in the Middle Ages the idea of priestly mediation was a big deal.

[63 : 17] Everybody took it for granted as a reality. But sober and sober teaching, such as the prayer book gives and we as such as we clergy are charged to give, they explain that Christ is the one of our mediator and we are simply serving and expressing the truth that he has taught.

So the answer, I think, to the problem, however you analyze it, Bill, is teaching, teaching, teaching. Teaching in which priestly prerogative is renounced by ministers of the gospel in order to exalt the unique high priestly ministry of Jesus the Savior.

You have a question? Yes, I was wondering, I think it's Paul that says that Christ died not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world. What does that mean exactly?

Well, in fact, it's 1 John that you're quoting. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the whole world.

That's what John writes. One thing certainly that it means is that there is a gospel offer of salvation.

[64 : 56] That's to be proclaimed to the whole world and that one may truly say to everyone without exception, this invitation is for you.

Beyond that, I think there have been various discussions of this in print. I'm just giving you my opinion.

It is the opinion of the majority of those who've gone into the question. I think that the form of words is conditioned by the fact that in the churches to which John was writing his circular letter, which is what 1 John is, he detected a certain amount of the here's to us, and who's like us attitude, the attitude of unconcern about people outside, and consequent term, unconcern about evangelizing and reaching out.

And what he's seeking to do, he says, not for ours only, but also for the whole world, is trying to sweep that aside and say, look, we are called to have a global outlook.

The cross of Christ warrants a gospel offer to everybody, and it's our business to use every opportunity we can to deliver that offer, present that offer.

[66 : 41] that's what I'm certain of, confident about, is the meaning of the phrase.

Are you happy with what I've said? I tend to agree with you, but the words take at face value seem to indicate more, something more to it.

If you come to interpret those words with your mind already clear on the fact that Christ died for, Christ's death may properly be viewed as for, in a personal sense, every individual who is called to faith, to benefits from the cross, then you may, and many have, they've read into for the whole world the implication of something like universalism, and then they've scratched their heads and not know what to do with it.

I, putting it to you the way that I did put it to you, I was trying to avoid that, frankly, because I don't think it has to be brought in. I mean, it's a question that's raised from outside 1 John.

I don't think it belongs to the world of John's thinking at all. So, I would counsel discretion and avoidance of the new TI, of the particular redemption discussion at this point.

[68 : 38] As I said, I don't think that it belongs to the world of 1 John. well, yes, I don't think so, although in reporting Jesus' words, I grant you, John did report a number of words which imply particular redemption.

Christ died for his sheep and so on. But you don't have to bring the question up in order to get out of those words in 1 John 2 a valid and important meaning.

Don't be parochial, don't be inward-looking. This gospel is a message for everybody. Reach out and deliver it.

See? See? See? See? See? See? See? See? See? See? I think that's all that John was concerned to say. Yes, Bill, you're going to make a speech and we're all waiting on what you're going to say.

Thank you.