

CHURCH HISTORY

Christianity Is Christ: 6 B.C. to A.D. 30

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Early Church History, part 3

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Christianity had its beginnings with the birth of Christ (ca. 6 B.C.) through the supernatural virgin birth whereby God became man, forming the God-Man Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the unique person of the universe in that he is both fully human and fully divine.
- B. Jesus Christ lived for approximately 36 years and was crucified, buried and rose again from the dead. He still lives today as the resurrected and ascended Christ.
- C. Christianity not only had its beginnings with Christ, but Christianity *is* Christ, and it is impossible to be a Christian without knowing Christ personally. W. H. Griffith Thomas said:

“Christianity is the only religion in the world which rests on the person of its founder. A man can be a faithful Mohammedan without in the least concerning himself with the person of Mohammed. So also a man can be a true and faithful Buddhist without knowing anything whatever about Buddha. It is quite different with Christianity. Christianity is so inextricably bound up with Christ that our view of the Person of Christ involves and determines our view of Christianity” (*Christianity is Christ*, p. 5).

II. THE HISTORICITY OF CHRIST

- A. *Introduction:* Jesus Christ was a real person. Many infidels and intellectuals have denied that Jesus was manifested in human history, but today this position is untenable.

B. *Pagan Testimony*

1. Tacitus, the dean of Roman historians, links the name and origin of Christians with “Christus” who in the reign of Tiberia “suffered death by the sentence of the Procurator, Pontius Pilate.”
2. Lucian described Christ as the one “who was crucified in Palestine” because he began “this new cult.”

C. *Jewish Testimony*: Josephus, a Jewish historian in the first century, said of James that he was “the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ.” In another place Josephus said that Christ was a “wise man” condemned to die on the cross by Pilate.

III. THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

- A. *Childhood*: We know very little about Christ’s childhood. A few references are made about his mother and half-brothers, and we can conclude that he came from a typical Jewish home. Probably, he received a biblical education at home and the synagogue, and he learned the trade of his father, carpentry. Nazareth was a main trade route, so Christ probably observed the life of the outside world as it passed through Nazareth. We know he went to Jerusalem with his parents at age twelve (Lk. 2:41-50), and that he developed physically, socially, mentally and spiritually in preparation for the great work ahead (Lk. 2:52).
- B. *Baptism*: Christ was baptized by John the Baptist, and this constituted his first public appearance and the beginning of his public ministry (ca. A.D. 26). Christ usually worked in Jewish centers, and this policy was in keeping with his own assertion that he came to help “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24).
- C. *Temptation*: The temptation of Christ by Satan proved that Christ was truly perfect, qualified him for his teaching ministry, and gave him the credentials to be the sinless Savior (Matt. 4).
- D. *Preaching*: Christ’s early ministry was in Judea (John 2:13–4:3), then he had an extended ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14–9:50). His last ministry was in Perea (Lk. 9:51–19:28). Right after the Galilean ministry, he went to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. There he met boldly the opposition from the religious leaders: Pharisees and Sadducees. He then withdrew to

Perea. During these ministries Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) and the discourse on the Kingdom (Matt. 13).

- E. *Passion Week*: Christ left the region of Perea and came to Jerusalem (Lk. 10:29–22:46). More is recorded on this last week in Christ’s life than any other period of his earthly sojourn. During this week Christ gave much instruction, including the Olivet Discourse which deals with his second coming. The rising antagonism of the Jewish national and ecclesiastical leaders was met head on by the Lord. Christ was betrayed by Judas (John 18:2-13). He was then involved in five trials: before Annas (John 18:12-24); before Caiaphas (Mark 13:53–15:1); before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5); before Herod (Luke 23:8-12); and then a second trial before Pilate (Mark 15:6-15). Christ on every account was proven innocent, but suffered physically at the hands of wicked men. Then Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead on the third day.
- F. *Post-resurrection*: After his resurrection, Christ appeared to various individuals and groups to confirm that he had risen from the dead. After 40 days, the culmination of his earthly ministry came with his ascension into heaven in the presence of his disciples. The ascension was prefaced by his promises to send the Holy Spirit in his place and to return again to this earth.

IV. THE MISSION OF CHRIST: The whole of Christ’s teaching and preaching ministry constituted preparation for his death for sin upon the Cross. This death was predicted in the Old Testament (Isa. 53) and by Christ himself (Matt. 16:21). His death was to bring about the final defeat of all the forces of evil and to release those who received him through faith. Christ’s primary purpose in coming to earth was to die as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of men.

V. THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST

- A. The message of Christ included his death for sin (Matt. 20:28) and the declaration that he would be resurrected (Mark 8:31).
- B. A second message which is given much emphasis by Christ concerns the kingdom. This kingdom is referred to by Christ as the “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God.” Most scholars equate these two terms, and this has led to some controversy among students of the Bible.
 - 1. *Postmillennialists*: They believe that the kingdom will come for a thousand years immediately before Christ’s return. Some of a more liberal persuasion do not hold that the kingdom will be a literal

thousand years, but see that a kingdom will be brought in through the Church before the Lord returns to earth (some do not believe in a literal second coming). Many liberals believe that the kingdom will be brought in through an evolutionary process, and thus social action to create a better environment for men is their plan. These liberals often interpret Christianity in ethical terms at the expense of the atoning work of the Cross. There are other evangelicals who hold to postmillennialism who see the kingdom brought in supernaturally for a thousand years, and who expect the literal, bodily return of Christ to receive the kingdom. Postmillennialism was very popular before World War I when men really thought the world would get better and better through scientific technology.

2. *Amillennialists*: They believe that the kingdom is a real but spiritual, and that it has already begun. That is, they believe Christ established his kingdom during his earthly ministry, and is now reigning even in his physical absence from earth. They believe there will never be a literal earthly kingdom manifested prior to the last judgment. While many liberals would hold this view and deny a literal second coming of Christ, there are many evangelical amillennialists who believe strongly in the second advent of Christ and a general judgment and resurrection of all men — those who have trusted Christ will go to heaven, and those who have rejected Christ will go into perdition.
3. *Premillennialists*: They believe that there is yet to be manifested a literal millennial kingdom on the earth after the return of Christ in his second advent. This will be the kingdom foretold by the prophets in which Israel was to be blessed in the land of Palestine. After a short rebellion, led by Satan, following his release from his imprisonment of one thousand years during the millennium, Christ will hand his authority over to God and the literal kingdom will be absorbed into the universal kingdom of God.

VI. CONCLUSION

“Here is a man who was born in a lowly manger, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in an obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never owned a house. He never had a family. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually

accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the power of his divine manhood. While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth while he was dying: his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed tomb through the pity of a friend. Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone. Today he is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, all together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life” (James Allan Francis).