

## “IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME...GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON”

Presented by

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On Sunday mornings from September 2009 through August 2011—a period of two years—I was engaged in a fascinating Bible class titled, “A Journey through the Old Testament.” Once that study was finished, I then began a new study titled “The Life of Christ.” And even though at this point I have been involved in that study for less than two months, I already have discovered that it is going to be every bit as exciting as the journey through the Old Testament turned out to be. You might wonder what has caused me to come to that conclusion. Actually, it was an extremely unusual event that occurred in the life of Jesus that captured my attention. Allow me to explain.

The event to which I am referring is found in Luke 4:14-30. To give you the background for the points I am about to make in this sermon, I would like to read to you the first eight verses of that account.

“Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’

“Then He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He then said to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

If you had grown up in Nazareth, were present in the synagogue on that day, and heard one of your fellow citizens state categorically that Isaiah’s prophecy applied to *him*—**thereby proving that he was the promised Messiah**—what probably would have been your reaction to such a claim? Is it possible that you very likely would have been intensely skeptical of the man’s assertion that He was **the Son of God**? Well, that is exactly the reaction that Christ’s contemporaries had when He made such a claim.

I can tell you with certainty how the people in the synagogue on that occasion reacted when Jesus made such a claim—because the Bible tells us in Luke 4:22 that those people asked skeptically, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” The intent of their question, of course, was to say, “Wait a minute! We grew up with this guy. He’s a ‘nobody’—the ne’er-do-well son of a little-known local carpenter! Who does he think he is—claiming to be the promised Messiah?!”

This would not be the last time that Jesus would endure such disrespectful treatment from the people of His hometown. On a later occasion, as Mark 6:1-4 explains, Jesus returned to the synagogue in Nazareth, and after He had spoken, the people who were present asked, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” The text then says simply, “**And they were offended at Him.**”

However, as I was studying the episode recorded in Luke 4:14-30 about Christ’s visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, I was utterly astonished at what happened after He read the passage from Isaiah 61 and applied it to Himself. Luke 4:28-29 records,

“So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, **that they might throw Him down over the cliff.**”

The people present in the synagogue that day were **so angry** at Jesus that they actually dragged Him outside the city in order to throw Him over a cliff **to kill Him!** But, as Luke 4:30 goes on to explain, they did **not** kill Him because, “passing through the midst of them, He went His way.” In other words, Jesus “simply disappeared”—leaving His attackers with no one to toss over the cliff! As I sat quietly in class on that Sunday morning and looked at the visual aid that my teacher had used to show me what had taken place on that terrible day in Nazareth, the silence of my thoughts was suddenly interrupted when the teacher looked at me and asked, “Blake, why **didn’t** Jesus die on that occasion?” It took me a few seconds to gather my wits and come up with what I thought might be a good answer. I then said, “Was it because it wasn’t the **right time** for Jesus to die, Nazareth wasn’t the **right place** where Jesus was supposed to die, and being tossed off a cliff wasn’t the **right way** in which Jesus was supposed to die?” The teacher looked at me and said, “**That’s it—exactly!**”

As the teacher then went on to explain, the apostle Paul had said in Galatians 4:4-5 of Jesus, “But **when the fullness of the time had come**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” In keeping with numerous Old Testament prophecies (Genesis 49:10; Daniel 2:24-45; Daniel 9:24-27; Micah 5:2; and others), **God sent Jesus to Earth at exactly the right time** in human history.

But Jesus also would **leave this Earth at exactly the right time** in human history! Jesus would not die until He had completed the task He came to accomplish—which was, as He Himself put it, to “fulfill the law and the prophets” (Matthew 5:17). Furthermore, Jesus would not die in Nazareth, but in Jerusalem (Matthew 26:17–27:66). And finally, Christ would not die by being tossed off a cliff, but by being crucified along with sinners (Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:35-38).

However, two questions practically beg to be asked, do they not? First, **why did Christ have to die in the first place?** And second, **what did His death accomplish?** Today, using God's Word, I would like to answer both of those questions.

Isaiah provided the prophetic answer to the first question—"Why did Christ have to die?"—when he wrote hundreds of years before Jesus arrived on Earth, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." Many years later the apostle Peter would remark that "Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle Paul said of Christ, "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is it in a nutshell. As passages such as 1 Kings 8:46, Isaiah 53:6, and Romans 3:23 make clear, every accountable human being has sinned against God. Fortunately, because Christ **did not sin** while living on Earth (1 Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15), He could serve as the "lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19) "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) in order to satisfy God's requirement for justice on behalf of those of us who **had** sinned. This was the very point that the apostle John made when he wrote, "He Himself is the propitiation [substitutionary sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.... You know that He was manifested to take away our sins because in Him there is no sin" (1 John 2:2; 3:5). God meted out to His perfect Son the divine justice that **should** have been meted out to **us!** As Paul told the Christians in Colossae,

"It pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" (Colossians 1:19-22)

The words of a popular old religious song state the matter well:

"I owed a debt I could not pay;  
He paid a debt He did not owe.  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.  
So now I sing a brand new song—amazing grace;  
Christ paid the debt I could never pay."

Christ had to die in order to take away our sins and to provide us with "the gift of God, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23)—which is why Paul could write of Jesus, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

But what is the answer to the second question: "What did Christ's death accomplish?" When Christ died and shed His blood on the cross at Calvary, He "purchased the church with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Because God is omniscient, He knew that humankind one day would stand in need of redemption. In fact, throughout the entire history of Israel, God had made both promises and prophecies concerning a

coming kingdom and its King. God's promise was that from David's seed He would build a "house" and a "kingdom" (2 Samuel 7:11-17). Daniel referred to that future kingdom as one that would be "everlasting" and that would "stand forever" (Daniel 2:44; 7:27). Seven hundred years prior to Christ's arrival, Isaiah had prophesied,

"Unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end**, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, **even forever**. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

It was via that kingdom—the church (a word that comes from the Greek term *ekklesia*, which means "the called out")—that God planned to provide sinners a way to escape what Jesus referred to as "the judgment of hell" (Matthew 23:33). Interestingly, Jesus promised the people of His generation, "There are some standing here **who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power**" (Mark 9:1). Additional revelation provided in Acts 2 informs us that, just as Jesus had pledged, the church—"the kingdom of God"—**did** come. As Acts 2:47 straightforwardly informs, "The Lord added to the church daily **those who were being saved.**"

Furthermore, there was to be **one and only one church**. As Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My **church**" (singular). Many years later, Paul wrote that Christ "is the head of **the body, the church**" (Colossians 1:18). In Ephesians 1:22, Paul stated concerning Christ that God "gave Him to be head over all things to the church, **which is His body.**" Thus, Paul clearly identified the body as the church. Three chapters later, in Ephesians 4:4, Paul stated, "There is **one body.**" Expressed logically, we can reason as follows:

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4).  
But Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).  
Thus, Christ is the Savior of **one** body.  
But the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18,24).  
Thus, Christ is the Savior of **one** church.

The teaching of Scripture is crystal clear: **If the church is *the body*, and if there is only *one body*, then there is only *one church*.** It definitely **does** matter what we decide regarding the religious group of which we choose to be a member. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 15:13 when He said, "Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted." The psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). We must be a member of **Christ's** church because 1 Corinthians 15:23-25 makes it clear that Jesus one day will return to claim **His** church—which is the home of the saved.

So how does a person become a member of Christ's church? Or, to put it another way, what must a person do to be saved so that God will add that person to Christ's church?

First, a person must **hear** God's Word. Romans 10:17 informs us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Obviously, one cannot follow and obey God's commands if he has not heard them, so God commanded that people hear what He said about salvation.

Second, one who is lost cannot be saved if he does not **believe** what he hears. So, God commanded that belief must ensue. Jesus Himself said in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Third, one who is lost cannot obtain salvation if he is unwilling to **repent** of his sins and seek forgiveness. Jesus told some of the people of His generation, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Without repentance a person will continue to be in sin; thus, God commanded repentance.

Fourth, since Christ is the basis of our salvation, God commanded the penitent sinner to **confess** Him before men as the Son of God. In Romans 10:10 Paul wrote, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

However, these four things are not **all** that God commanded. The truth of the matter is that as important as hearing, believing, repenting, and confessing Christ are, they cannot rid a person of his sin. The overriding question, then, is this: **How does a person get rid of his or her sin?** Numerous times within the pages of the New Testament, that question is asked and answered. The Jews who had murdered Christ, and to whom Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost when he ushered in the Christian age, asked that question. Peter's powerful sermon had convinced those Jews that they were sinners, and that they desperately were in need of salvation at the hand of almighty God. Their question then became, "...Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's response could not have been any clearer. He told them, "Repent and let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**" (Acts 2:38). Saul, who later would become the apostle Paul, needed an answer to that same question. While on a trip to Damascus for the explicit purpose of persecuting Christians, Saul was blinded (see Acts 22). Realizing his plight, he thus asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). When God's servant Ananias appeared before Saul in Damascus, he answered Saul's question when he told him, "Arise, and **be baptized, and wash away your sins**" (Acts 22:16).

What, then, is the correct biblical answer regarding how a person rids himself of soul-damning sin? The biblical solution is that the person who has heard the Gospel, believed its message, repented of past sins, and confessed Christ as Lord must then—in order to receive forgiveness of sins—**be baptized**. After all, as Paul told the first-century Christians in Rome, it is baptism that puts a person "in Christ." In Romans 6:3-4 Paul said,

"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Paul likewise told the Christians in Galatia, “As many of you as were **baptized into Christ** did put on Christ” (3:37). Since it is only “in Christ” that we receive “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3), and since it is baptism that puts us “in Christ,” it is little wonder that Peter spoke of baptism as that “which now **saves us**” (1 Peter 3:21).

Numerous New Testament writers made the point that it is only when we come into contact with the blood of Christ that our sins can be washed away (Ephesians 1:7-8; Revelation 5:9; Romans 5:8-9; Hebrews 9:12-14). The question arises: **When** did Jesus shed His blood? The answer, of course, is that He shed His blood on the Cross **at His death** (John 19:31-34). Where, and how, does one come into contact with Christ’s blood to obtain the forgiveness of sin that such contact ensures? Paul answered that question when he told the Christians in Rome that it is only at baptism that we make contact with the death, and thus with the blood, of Christ (Romans 6:3-11). Additionally, the ultimate hope of our resurrection—to live with Christ in heaven—also is linked to baptism. In Colossians 2:12 Paul wrote of “having been buried with Christ in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” If we are not baptized, we remain in our sins. And if we are not baptized, we have no hope of the resurrection that leads to heaven.

When a person hears, believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, that person becomes a Christian—nothing more, nothing less. God Himself then adds that Christian to His Son’s one true body—the church. According to Revelation 2:10, the child of God who then remains “faithful unto death” is promised a crown of life and eternal life in heaven as a result of his faithfulness and obedience. Imagine how wonderful it will be—if we have lived and died as faithful Christians—to one day hear God say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23).

Every person hearing me speak today needs to ask himself or herself, “Have I done exactly what God has told me to do, in exactly the way that God has told me to do it, to become a Christian?” You also need to ask yourselves if you are members of, not just *a* church, but *the right* church—**Christ’s church**. After all, since Acts 2:47 tells us that God adds only saved people to “**the church,**” and since Christ said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build **only one church** (His church!), if we are not members of that one church, then we are not saved, but are still lost in sin, and we will never have heaven as our home. So, ask yourself today, “Am I a **true New Testament Christian** who is a member of **Christ’s one church**?” If you are not, I hope you will take steps this very hour to become a Christian so that God can add you to His Son’s church—the home of the saved.