

the centrality of



CHRIST



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### WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF KINGDOM PROCLAMATION

Isaiah 52:7 says "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings the good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God Reigns!" We have chosen this medium to communicate this very message, "Our God Reigns." There is too much bickering in the body of Christ, too much majoring on minors. We have decided to publish peace, to bring good news and to declare our God reigns. People are so jaded, they do not know how to respond to good news anymore; we will help you to respond to good news through this publication. Our aim is to bring good news of redemption through Kingdom Proclamation. Throughout our future publications you will read good news, learn the Bible and be challenged in your faith and witness. Covenant Family Churches are built on a strong apostolic foundation. There are three concepts upon which we build that will be repeated in Kingdom Proclamation: (1) Kingdom, (2) Covenant and (3) Restoration.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Psalms 103:19 says, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." To understand the Bible we must understand the concept of the Kingdom of God which holds truth together as part of God's golden cable through the Scriptures. Today's common pulpits ring with an incomplete message of "Jesus Saves" without the mention that Jesus Reigns. Christ saves in order to bring idolaters into kingdom obedience to his rule. In this publication you will be awakened to the reality of the Kingdom of God that has and will continue to invade this world until the glory of God covers the earth like the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). Our goal, as a ministry team, is to bring the reader into a Kingdom consciousness that is bigger than church.

### THE COVENANT OF GOD

Another strand in the golden cable of the Bible is Covenant. God relates to His people through means of covenant; first through the Old Covenant, then, and still now, through the New Covenant. Some believe God acts arbitrarily, yet God is a covenant God and cannot be separated from his word. Covenant is not casual or comfortable; it is intense and demanding. Covenant includes death and life, promises and sanctions, vows and commitment. Most churches today only periodically officiate the Lord's supper and even then only blessings are communicated. Yet one cannot fully relate to God until you understand covenant, and this is the purpose of the table, furthermore, Christians cannot fully relate to one another until they understand covenant. No matter how many times one is touched by the Spirit, until Christians embrace covenant we will not advance one millimeter.

### RESTORATION

In considering the purpose of God such questions come to mind as: What is God doing in the earth? What is His plan? How do we fit into it? Whenever one's thoughts turn to God's purpose in the earth the word Restoration should come to mind. Restoration is the third strand of the golden cable of redemption that runs through the Bible, reinforcing it with unbreakable strength. When someone restores a piece of art, or a classic car, for example, they want to bring such an item back to its original condition and beauty. When God created the heavens and the earth He saw "it was good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21 & 24). Indeed, after God created mankind, He saw that it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). Original creation was full of glory and beauty and mankind had a pure relationship with the creator, this was lost through sin and now God is restoring His original purpose through the power of the Holy Spirit. God uses his covenant people as agents of restoration in the earth. Isaiah prophecies regarding those whom God grants His favor: "They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall rise up the former devastations; they shall restore the ruined cities; the devastations of many cities." Again, welcome to Kingdom Proclamation, a publication of Covenant Family Churches, where we see the king and the kingdom, we practice covenant and are agents of God's program of restoration. Our prayer is you will say with us after reading these articles, "Our God Reigns!"

**Steven J. Ottolini**  
President, CLTI



Here it is, the first edition of Kingdom Proclamation, the quarterly magazine of Covenant Family Churches, what a great collection of articles there is for you. The collective theme of this first copy is on the Centrality of Christ. Through reading the contributions here you will meet the ministry team from the international network of Covenant Family Churches. The purpose of this magazine is twofold, to equip and encourage the Christian reader to a greater understanding of the Scriptures and the Christian faith and second to illustrate a unified ministry team who write together to the same goal. Dr. Steve Ottolini has written an introduction to Covenant Family Churches and the central themes of Kingdom, Covenant and Restoration, he has also written to leaders on the devotional life of the Christian and how this is important in discipling others in the faith. You can meet Robert Haynes, Pastor in Olive Branch MS, he writes on the centrality of Christ in evangelism, keeping Christ in the gospel. Steven Ottolini II, pastor in Troy MO, has a piece on the life of Calvin and the centrality of Christ being the core of Calvin's theology. David Ottolini, youth pastor at New Covenant Church, St Louis, expresses his heart for young people and encourages us in developing Christ centered church families. We are very pleased to introduce Carlos Velasquez, pastor in Guatemala city, Guatemala. He was once a senator in the Guatemalan government and he is now returning to full time ministry. He writes of his journey to where he is today through keeping Christ at the center. I was able to sit down with Mike Hayden, senior pastor at New Covenant Church, to talk with him about faith and ministry, catching up on our international friends in Zambia and India and their labor for the gospel, and Mike's experiences in the ministry and what it is like being a grandpa. You can also read my separate piece on the centrality of Christ throughout the scriptures, tying the message of the Bible together in the person of Christ. Thank you for visiting today, we pray that you might be encouraged as you read through. Remember, Christ is the central figure for all the believer should think say and do. The second issue of Kingdom Proclamation, covering the theme of the Kingdom of God, should be out late spring.

**Jon Bennett**  
**Editor, Kingdom Proclamation**



Someone once said "Example is not the only thing in leadership, it is the only thing." The objective of government and leadership in the church is to "present everyman complete in Christ" (Col 1:28). In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary for the leader to equip the Christian with every Biblical tool he has been given by the chief shepherd. In this column I will address leaders in the local church, how can you continue to inspire, serve and disciple those in the church family? An obvious place to begin is by teaching Christians in your care how to have a productive and effective devotional with the Lord to always deepen the Christian's source of relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. You can only give as much Jesus as you have; therefore, a leaders' devotional life must be disciplined and focused in order to pass on this aspect of Christian living to others.

**The Leader is a Worshiper** Devotion is not a quick couple of verses; "Our Father" and a couple of donuts on the way to work. There is a reason evangelicals have named the devotional a quiet time. God desires our praise and worship. Attention to devotion in worship keeps the relationship straight; we are the creatures, he is the creator, we are the redeemed, he is the redeemer.

**Start with the Psalms** As a suggestion for each quiet time, read a Psalm out loud, turn each phrase into a devotional prayer or a declaration of praise. For example, reading Psalm 84; "How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of hosts, my soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord ..." Then one could elaborate thus, "Father, deep down, I am only satisfied with your presence and being in your house. You are my shepherd, I shall not want." And so on. One could read the entire Psalm in a worshipful, prayerful way, out loud, regularly interjecting praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

**Declare yourself Dead** This might seem an odd thing to articulate concerning devotion. If you want to know real resurrection life, you must be fully dead with Christ. My favorite verse declaring my death with Christ is Galatians 2, Paul says "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me." Paul exhorts us to identify by faith with Christ's death in order to know resurrection life. Many today want the life part of Christ without fully embracing his death as their death by faith. Another idea is to read Romans 6 every day emphasizing verses 6, 11, and 13; know, recon and yield from the older versions.

the leader is a worshiper  
start with the psalms  
declare yourself dead  
rise unto newness of life

**Rise Unto Newness of Life** After you are fully dead, declare yourself fully alive in Christ because of the resurrection from the dead (Rom 6:5 & 11). Now turn to Ephesians 2 and read the entire chapter out loud. Underscore verse 6, "[the Father has] Raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Now we are no longer on terra firma in our devotions. By faith you have received the work of Christ in your life which includes being seated with him in heavenly places. Thank him and praise him, receive it new every morning. Your quiet time will quickly become loud-time with revelation such as this.

**Some final thoughts** Leaders must have a devotional life. It is useless to teach others to have a devotional life if you are not practicing one. Our life is hid with Christ in God; devotional time declares we are indeed new creations and we glorify the Father. Have your own style. I have given you a few ideas from my own devotional life. Consider these suggestions and build on them. Make them your own with your own unique personality woven in. Freely you receive, freely give. Take one, two or three disciples aside and show them how to have a strong devotional life. A strong devotional life builds a strong foundational relationship with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. This same strong devotional life will only grow deeper and more powerful day by day and year after year. As you do this with others you will find a deeper sense of unity and togetherness with other believers around you.

For Christ and Covenant,  
Steven J Ottolini



The background of the entire image is a brick wall. The wall is composed of reddish-brown bricks with visible mortar. A diagonal line runs from the bottom right corner towards the center, dividing the image into two main sections: a black upper-left section and a white lower-right section. The text is overlaid on this background.

# 1CHURCH 1CHRIST

a conversation  
concerning us





I was given the opportunity to sit down with Mike Hayden, senior pastor of New Covenant Church, he has nearly 30 years ministry experience. As well as pastoring in the local church he regularly travels to Africa and India to minister to the churches and leaders we are networked with. This was our conversation.

**JB:** Can you give us an update on the work in Katuta, Zambi

**MH:** Sure, Always glad to talk about Africa! A couple of years ago, we gave Pastor Peter Chanda some money to buy some Bibles written in the local language. They were given to the leaders of the churches in the Katuta area and we bought enough for placing three to four in every church that structure. The program they began was for people to come at a designated time for Bible reading. As a result of this effort, many people have received Christ. It is going so well that the Chief of Katuta is now a believer! The Chief gave Pastor Peter permission to open up a Church right in his palace grounds! He is requesting Adam and I to come. Very exciting! Adam told me recently “the Bibles we left there are achieving their intended purpose of instructing the people,” he said “Katuta is a Word hungry Lion!” It’s a beautiful testimony of the transforming power of the Word of God.



**JB:** What is currently happening in Linda School? how many students are there and what age groups? Are they doing well?

**MH:** In Africa they run their school year beginning in January through December with one month break between 3 semesters. They just began a new school year January 13th 2014. Gilford tells me the school continues to grow in number. We began supporting Linda School with 250 Children, this year we have registered 309. We have 39 new first graders, they are very excited to be going to school. Linda School educates children from first grade to seventh grade. The children are drawn from poor surrounding villages and towns. The students furthest away walk a full hour to attend school. Sadly they recently experienced two weeks of heavy rains and it washed out an important bridge the students use to get to school. In addition it is a very dangerous time of the year for crocodiles so they must be careful.



**JB:** Where are some of our CLTI graduates now?

**MH:** Well I can tell you that those who have gone through the program in India and Africa are busy serving in the Church or part of a church planting. Take India for example, Rajib Arohan has seen over 160 students go through the program over the years. Every year the CLTI Program provides training and equipping of leaders to strengthen the existing Churches and new Church plantings. They often hold the CLTI training at Prabir Narjinary Church



building in Samuktala. The success of the program has enabled us to plant underground churches in the hostile areas in the state of Orissa and new church plantings in New Alipur, Jaigaon on the Bhutan boarder, and just outside Rajib and Subi's home town of Purulya. The dollar a day program, and the annual Thanksgiving offering, funds the CLTI training programs. Rajib begins a new CLTI training program next month, February 2014.

**JB:** When you visit our international partners in Africa and India what do you enjoy most about being with them?

**MH:** When Jesus called his disciples the Bible says that "He called those whom He wanted that they might be with Him and that He might send them out" (Mark 3:13). I like the family tone of this. Wanted, being together and sent out from that strength. It is beautiful. My greatest joy when I see our brothers is to be with them, sitting together, fellowshiping together, sharing a meal together, praying together, traveling into the churches to minister together. This is a joy of my life.

**JB:** What do you think is the biggest challenge facing our related churches overseas?

**MH:** Without a doubt the heart cry from Adam and Rajib and all the pastors and leaders is for help with the training and disciplining of existing and future leaders. The opportunities are many, the need of the hour is raising up leaders, to be sent out, to reach the harvest.

**JB:** When you think of your 28 years plus in the ministry what is the most reoccurring challenge you have encountered?

**MH:** Men and women remaining loyal and committed to one another for the mission. One of the marks of the early Church is that they were "devoted to one another." Romans 12 is a great chapter on Christian character and behavior. Romans 12:10 says "Be devoted to one another in love, honor one another above yourselves". We live in a divorce, break-up culture, meaning if you don't like something just walk away from it, no strings attached. You don't have to do the painstaking humbling work of restoration, just leave. The killer is there is always another Church to receive someone and the cycle perpetuates. It's a cross-less Christianity. We need the spirit of the people in Nehemiah's time to be restored in Churches today. In Nehemiah's time the families worked and built together side by side with sword and trowel in hand. They had each other's back. They labored for the honor and purposes of God. Family next to family, even in the midst of enemies and naysayers, the wall was re-built. They heard the Word of God and repented of their sin, and renewed their commitment to God, one another, and the mission, they even put it in writing – see Nehemiah 9:38! They didn't focus on what many in the Church do today about personal complaints – no-one called me, I don't have any friends, so and so hurt me, I don't like the music – you know. We have a lot of consumerism in today's







Church. When the joy of the Lord is our strength, then we can get past anything and stay focused on the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Without a doubt the heart cry of Adam and Rajib, and all the pastors and leaders, is help with the training of existing and future leaders. [...] We need the spirit of the people in Nehemiah's time to be restored. They labored together with sword and trowel. They had each other's back.

**JB:** In what way would you encourage readers here to keep Christ as the center of their life?

**MH:** Moses told the people "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

These verses anticipate the new covenant where the word of God is written in our heart and mind. To keep Christ centered in our lives we must read His Word, meditate on His word and talk about Him everywhere we go. People talk about those they love and admire. Talk about His works, His goodness, His faithfulness, Remember Him. Be mindful of Him. Learn to look to Jesus in every circumstance. If you want to know how to handle something look to Jesus, "in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". If you want to know what serving is, look at Jesus, if you want to know what loyalty is, look to Jesus. If you want to understand forgiveness look to Jesus.

**JB:** You are a husband, daddy and paw-paw, how does the message of the gospel bring life to your family?

**MH:** Very often in life we are driven by "ought to," the "how to," rather than focusing on what makes us "want to." It is the grace of God shown to us in the gospel that makes us "want to" serve God and one another, to love God and one another. The focus of scripture is like this; we are guilty sinners, the grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ has forgiven us, and as result we are grateful children of God. Now, as a forgiven family, we live by the power of the new birth.

I remember reading a statement from Jerry Bridges "As crazy as it may seem, Christians need the gospel as much as non-believers do." You see, we don't need the gospel just to be saved, we need the gospel to keep us from lapsing into a performance mind-set in our day to day relationship with God. We need the gospel to remind us that we still sin, and our only hope for both eternal life and today's blessings from God are "Jesus' blood and righteousness."

I believe my first charge from the Lord is to my family, like every husband, father and grandfather. A wise man once said our home is our first Church! So the beauty and the power of the Gospel is most visible in the home. Freely I have received such grace and mercy so I give it. In the home is who we truly are, where we see the drama of life, the home is the drama of sin and grace live on the stage of daily life. Often we deny our own sin but point out the sin in others. By denying our own sin, we devalue grace. In the home with the family, is where we first live out the gospel, I believe if we can live it in the home with those we know so well it becomes easier to live it out in the world before us.

**JB:** Your most recent sermon message was about the implanted word. How would you summarize that in regards to this idea of the centrality of Christ?

**MH:** I am reminded of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. As they walked along the seven mile journey, Jesus joined them as they walked the road but the men were kept from recognizing Him. Jesus asked them what they were talking about, so they told him they were talking about the events of Jesus, the great prophet, mighty in deed and the Word



of God, how they thought he was going to deliver Israel, they spoke of his arrest, suffering, crucifixion and death. Now three days later, they heard that some ladies from their company saw angels in the empty tomb, Jesus was not there, they don't know where he is. Jesus then fills out their understanding, opening the scripture to them, showing them all the things concerning Himself. Later they were at the home of one of them, Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and Jesus vanished! But notice what they said to each other "Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road, while he opened the Scriptures." The Word of God reveals the Son. John 5:39 "Jesus says the scriptures testify about Me" Jesus said "Moses wrote about me." The implanted Word centers upon Christ and the gospel and as we receive with meekness the implanted Word, it burns in our hearts, it gives life, it reveals the Christ, it saves the soul.

# SUPPORT Covenant Family Churches Around the World

*We currently have*  
***Covenant Leadership Training Institute***  
*in India and Africa*

*As well as supporting those who are  
covenantally with us we also have faith for:*

Jesus Commands the Church to disciple the nations and teach them his ways. This strategy to extend the dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ to the entire earth requires more than evangelism to transform the nations. Leaders must be trained.

1. Training new Christian leaders around the world.
2. Build new CLTI facilities around the world.
3. Help support the travel and expenses of the apostolic company.
4. Bring the message of Christ's dominion to the ends of the earth.

*"He shall reign from the river to the ends of the earth." Psalm 72*

*Mail checks to: New Covenant Church, 300 Siedentop Rd, Weldon Spring, MO 63304  
or contact us concerning your donation at 636-300-9200 x100 or email at [Admin@nccstl.org](mailto:Admin@nccstl.org)*



An aerial night photograph of a city, likely Quito, Ecuador, showing a dense urban area with many lights. In the background, several large, dark mountain peaks are visible against a twilight sky with some clouds. A vertical white bar is positioned in the upper center of the image.

# The Christ of Restoration

by CARLOS VELASQUEZ



## THE CHRIST OF RESTORATION

Allow me to begin my story two years prior to today. After forty years of ministry and four years of serving congress in Guatemala I suddenly found myself without a church and voted out of political office. My wife Lili and I had to search our hearts and come before the Lord for His grace.

During my time in political office the Lord helped me to achieve two main things. The first was I had helped to re-establish traditional marriage between one man and one woman, thus preventing same sex marriage. The second was to do with university graduates being involved in a commission of technical support I was presiding over. This commission was to look into the viability of any law which might be proposed. But I was voted out, and I was not able to see this project through.

So I found myself in a predicament; I had no church and no position in government. I did what I always do when facing a difficult circumstance, I asked myself if the condition I was in could perhaps be the reaping of any past sowing on my part. In other words, had I done any wrong and was I now suffering the consequences.

After resting before the Lord I had a quiet assurance my experience was unjust; this experience was a direct consequence of standing firm on the word of God and not accepting the corruption of my political party. After this assurance I was then enabled to focus on what the Lord would want me to do next, and this is the conclusion to which I arrived and shared with Lili, my wife.

**\*\***We have been serving the Lord for forty years, just like Joshua and Caleb served to Moses; so it was time to decide if I were to cling to my experience, which to me was a type of dying in the desert with the old generation; or to start afresh with the new Generation, which to me meant to sit down in a congregation where I wasn't recognized and start as a new believer waiting on the Lord before taking a next step.

I also reminded Lili that in our life we have always been blessed with much. Even though I preached Paul's words "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger,

abundance and need" (Philippians 4:12), we had not experienced any time of hunger or a real need. Therefore, I said, God will not allow us to graduate unto maturity until we pass the test of hardship.

For two years we were in that condition. God fulfilled His promise, we were provided for. After that time, God put a message in my heart "Moses is dead" and I knew it was time to start again, but with a new understanding and more light regarding the Kingdom of God.

We began a new Church and after one year of functioning, we felt lead to join efforts with a fellow elder who also was starting a church, and they agreed to work with us and to recognize me as the leader of the group, but we work in counsel.

It has been more than two years since that experience and the Lord has blessed our work, not in numbers but in influence, and once again our counsel is recognized and asked for. At this moment we are working with a group of citizens who long for a change in our government. This group came to one of our seminars on principles of government and were inspired to form their own political party. This new party has been convened to implement Biblical principles of the word of God in government for the betterment of the nation. I continue to help and advise them, and a new hope is beginning to spread among the people with whom we are sharing the principles of government and the founding of a new party.

I'm experiencing a new joy and fulfillment in preaching and teaching the principles of the word of God; I have an expectation that things will change for our nation. I'm asking the Lord to grant me the opportunity to be one of His instruments in awakening His Church to the reality of His Kingdom and His Lordship.

If I were asked to name what was the element that produced this change, I would have to say it was just a renewing of the commitment to recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ and waiting until He released me to do His work again.

Some well meaning brothers told me that it was a waste of my gift and experience to sit and wait before the Lord. They even compared it to hiding my talent. But as I have already mentioned, recognizing



the Lordship of Jesus has been the basic principle in maintaining the centrality of Christ in my life and in His church, for He is the one that edifies His Church.

Therefore, to learn to wait on Him rather than trust and rely in my years of experience to do His will, was a hard thing to do in the flesh. But what a joy, what a release, when my soul surrendered its questions and insecurities. I simply bowed down and declared “It's Your church, You alone know what is good for it, and I'm also Yours, so not my will but Yours be done.”

Looking back, I can see that I was acting similar to John the Baptist, I was decreasing in order that the Lord could increase in my life (John 3:30). He was ordering my steps to return me to that simple faith (Proverbs 16:9). For it is He who works in me, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). So not only I was refreshed and blessed, but by the word of God and coupled now with our testimony, the church itself turned its attention back to the centrality of Jesus in any and every thing, regardless of the circumstances.

To Him be all the glory.

**by Carlos Velasquez**  
**Guatemala**



LORD  
GOD  
MAN  
DIED  
ROSE  
PERSON  
JUDGE



the centrality of  
the Christ of the Gospel  
Robert Haynes



## THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL

One of the best ways to learn how to do something is to learn from someone who already knows how to do whatever it is you want to do. If you wanted to learn how to play guitar, you might want to take lessons from a really good guitar player. If you wanted to become a Great Commission Christian and learn how to evangelize, you want to sit at the feet of a person who is an evangelist. Philip (Acts 21:8) is one such person.

Once, when Philip was evangelizing the multitudes with great success in Samaria (Acts 8:4-13), he was sent to share the gospel with one person in the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza. He arrived to find a man from Ethiopia sitting in his chariot reading chapter 53 of Isaiah. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35). The gospel that Philip preached to the Ethiopian was Jesus; the Jesus of the Scriptures. The phrase the gospel of Christ occurs ten times in the New Testament. Let's consider just exactly who this Jesus of the Scriptures and this Christ of the gospel really is.

### 1. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL IS LORD

The overwhelming emphasis about Jesus in our culture is Jesus as Savior. However, the overwhelming emphasis about Jesus in the scriptures Jesus is Lord. Steve Murrell points out “Jesus is referred to as 'Lord' 92 times in the book of Acts and 747 times in the whole New Testament, while being referred to as 'Savior' only twice in the book of Acts and 24 times in the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup> Peter said “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Paul, in response to the question, “what must I do to be saved” replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

### 2. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL IS GOD

A young man who was both rich and powerful came to Jesus with a question about eternal life and addressed Him as, “Good Teacher”. Jesus asked the rich young ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Luke 18:18-19). There is a huge difference between being good and being God. While Jesus is good, He is more than good; Jesus is

God. People need to come to the same revelation of Thomas when he came to see Jesus for who He really was calling Him “My Lord and My God!” after seeing the nail prints in his hands (John 20:28).

### 3. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL IS MAN

John wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus never ceased being God but He became a real man. He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He did what He did on earth as a man who was anointed “with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). The Jesus of the Bible is “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him” (Acts 2:22). Paul put it this way, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

### 4. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL DIED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). “For He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus]” (2 Corinthians 5:21). To deny the death of Christ for sinners on the cross is to deny the gospel. Jesus died a real death, to pay for real sins, for real sinners, like you and me, to secure eternal life for a great multitude that no man can number.

### 5. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Paul taught us a person must believe in the resurrection of Christ in order to be a Christian. Romans 10:9-10, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The essence of the gospel is “Christ died for our sins



according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The resurrection is "God's 'Amen to Jesus,' It is finished"<sup>2</sup> We love and serve the only One whom "God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:24).

## 6. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL IS A PERSON

Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:35). He didn't preach about Jesus and the gospel, Philip preached Jesus and the gospel. John said, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). When we turn to Jesus in true repentance and trust Him, receiving Him as Lord and Savior, He receives us. He welcomes us into His family and kingdom.

## 7. THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL IS THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH

Jesus is the judge before whom every person must one day stand. "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). There is one appointment that everyone will keep; whether we believe it or not, like it or not, are ready or not. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). There are only two possible outcomes on that Day. "Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:23) or "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). The best time to come to Jesus is now. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Don't wait until you are delivered to the judge and peace with God is no longer an option for you (Matthew 5:25).

Through an amazing series of events, a man named Keith, visited our Sunday Morning Worship Celebration several years ago. Just a few weeks earlier he would have proudly described himself as an atheist. Keith was very successful but his personal life was a wreck. Yet he came to our church

and he heard me preach Jesus. As I preached Jesus of the gospel Keith was confronted and he got up to leave. Josh Abbot, a young man in our church went to look for Keith. He found him sitting in the back of his SUV weeping. Josh stood there for a moment before this man who was 20 years his senior. Keith finally composed himself, looked up and said, "Isn't this about the time you're supposed to tell me something to make me feel better?" Josh, like Philip, preached Jesus to Keith who turned from his sins and trusted Christ in our parking lot. May the Lord Jesus Himself grant that you may have many such experiences in parking lots, in homes, at work, at school, in your neighborhood, and even when the church comes together for worship.

We have the awesome privilege of being ambassadors for Christ, obeying the Great Commission, being co-workers with God in the advancement of His kingdom, and pointing people to the Christ of the gospel. So whatever you do in life, make sure that you "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5).

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**All Scripture quotations from the New King James Version**





*John Calvin*

The Centrality of Christ In Suffering:  
Thoughts From John Calvin  
by STEVEN OTTOLINI II



## THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN SUFFERING: THOUGHTS FROM JOHN CALVIN

I have a toddler at home who is convinced that if he only walks faster than normal he will somehow descend the staircase unscathed. Since he has only just begun to walk, he does not understand why I discipline him every time he runs toward the stairs and instead questions my motives in correcting him. Though he cannot grasp that I am trying to protect him, his sour attitude reveals that he already questions my authority in his life. Similarly, though we know that God's will is supreme, many of us undergo debates with God rather than submitting to Him in obedience. Even mature Christians sometimes question God, demanding answers that He is not required to provide in order that we might understand the circumstances of our own lives. We feel that if we just know why something is happening we will be able to trust God's sovereignty over our lives. However, we have a duty to respond in obedience. This can be difficult when we do not understand why God has allowed suffering in our lives; and yet we are still bound to obey.

During a particularly difficult time of loss in my life I dove in to the writings of John Calvin, a famous Reformer. I had been studying God's Word, looking for answers for my pain. But, as I read Calvin's writings, I found that Calvin had focused himself upon the centrality of Christ and exhibited a clear pastoral plea to adhere ourselves to Scripture through self-denial. Far from self-denial, I wanted answers for my suffering. Yet Calvin's pastoral purpose began to cultivate a tender heart in me toward Christ. Calvin's most famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, revealed that his ministerial aim was to equip and motivate the Church to embrace a heart-attitude of love for Christ above all things. This is especially evident within chapters 6-10 of the third book of the *Institutes*, which are often referred to as the Golden Booklet. Here Calvin poignantly expressed his pastoral concern for his congregations by imploring them to devote themselves completely to Christ through self-denial. This exhortation impacted me by focusing my attention upon the Savior's sovereign hand rather than upon my own circumstances. We

should likewise respond to Calvin's pastoral plea today by cultivating in ourselves a heart-attitude of humility, obedience, and love for the Savior, expressed through self-denial.

Jesus said in Jn 14:15, Christians demonstrate their love for Him through obedience to His commandments. In discipling my children, I often have them repeat a short phrase. I ask, "What is obedience?" They respond, "Doing what you are told, right away, with a good attitude." I teach my little ones this because I want them to respond rightly to the Lord upon hearing His commands. Likewise Calvin's pastoral concern for his congregations was to disciple believers toward living out an attitude of submission to God's Kingdom rule. Calvin knew the Christian's love for Jesus is evidenced by obedience to Christ, so his application in teaching self-denial was prompt, sincere, and willing action.

Calvin's pastoral heart is so tied to self-denial he describes it as the "sum of the Christian life" (3.7.1). Furthermore Calvin is clear that this concept is to be understood only in relationship to Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit along with the hope of our identity in Christ are essentials upon which we obey God. Calvin explains the Christian's relationship with Christ as the means by which we please God through obedience (3.6.2). This is important to Calvin so that we might avoid legalism or empty religion, yet remain rooted in Christ Himself. We see this clearly through Calvin's teaching of self-denial which has everything to do with the emptying of ourselves to do God's will rather than our own.

This, Calvin teaches, requires that we fix our gaze upon Christ. Calvin realized man's proclivity toward pride and to question God, he addressed this in such a way; the cross "strikes at our confidence in the flesh and teaches us to rest on God alone" (3.8.3). Our pride often revolts against this call to obedience as our flesh attempts to throw off suffering. Therefore, the cross acts as a purifying agent to help us experience God's faithfulness through suffering and to be content with the testimony of Christ rather than a false estimation of ourselves (3.8.7). In his Preface to the *Commentary on the Psalms* Calvin says of the Psalms shaping our life,



“Still especially does it instruct us to bear the cross. Here is the true proof of obedience, where, bidding farewell to our own affections, we subject ourselves to God, and low our life to be so governed by his will that things most bitter and harsh to us – because they come from him – become sweet to us.”

This requires Christ to have first place in our lives, that we look to Him as our motivation, and that we ever establish His pre-eminence in all things.



seal depicts a ready hand offering a heart to God for service. In some versions it is surrounded by the words, “My heart I offer to you Lord, Promptly and sincerely.”

Sinful people question God, which is not a trait that needs to be learned. And yet, Calvin encourages us to look to Christ, to put the flesh with its pride, to death on the cross, and to demonstrate love for Christ with sincere faith. Calvin’s goal and the practical application of his pastoral heart is obedience rooted in love for Christ and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. We are duty bound, therefore, by our love for King Jesus, to cultivate a heart-attitude of self-denial in order to honor Christ by our every thought, word, and deed. Seeing Christ have first place in every area of our lives requires us to stop questioning God and instead to willingly offer our hearts for His service.

**by S.J. Ottolini II**  
**Saint Louis, Missouri**

Calvin knew what it meant to be persecuted and abandoned by men. Though he had dedicated his life to preaching in Geneva, he was driven from his pastorate by the congregation and forced to leave the city. Years later, the people changed and asked Calvin to return to Geneva to again lead the church. Considering this, Calvin wrote, in a letter to his friend, “I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord ... And for myself, I protest that I have no other desire than that, setting aside all consideration of me, they may look only to what is most for the glory of God and the advantage of the church.” As shown in this letter, Calvin made it his mission to put aside his own desires in order to serve the Lord in piety. In this way, Calvin sought to live out his own preaching. One could say Calvin’s own adherence to self-denial was always before him in his personal emblem, which he regularly used as a seal in correspondence. The



EXIT

Recovering Christ-Centered Youth Ministry  
by DAVID OTTOLINI



## RECOVERING CHRIST-CENTERED YOUTH MINISTRY

Being a new father, I spent the New Year's Eve "partying" at home; changing diapers and cleaning up my son's spit up. I love the responsibility of parenthood! It gave me time to watch the ball drop on television and see what others think this New Year may bring. As I watched the United States celebrate one year coming to a close and the other just beginning I was saddened. I reflected on the state of our society and was hit with the bleakness of what it offers. The television programs gave a snapshot of 2013 as a muddle of the ups and downs of celebrity life and gossip; what was shown was a year of sex, scandal and breakup. My sadness came because the year was encapsulated in this way to show people choosing to do whatever makes them feel good, which resulted in loneliness. However, on TV it is pitched as entertainment and glorified because it is lived through those that set the standard for "cool". The very thing missing in the review of 2013 was true life; the glorification of Jesus over self – the message of the gospel. This article will look at Christ-centered youth ministry that is founded upon Scriptural standards opposed to programs and media.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE?

True Christ-centered ministry is about entering into situations which are dead in order to bring life. It is about giving hope where there is despair, joy where sadness reigns supreme, and community in Christ that pervades a culture of loneliness. This means that Christ is the most important part of your life. Every fabric of your being is inclined first towards Jesus. Simply put it is being the hands and feet of Jesus in every situation. For most that have grown up in the church this is an easy answer but the challenge comes when we are pressed to live it out.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOUTH MINISTRY?

In ministry the implications are holistic. Everything must be done for Jesus. The ethos behind programs and the vision of the group should be on

a trajectory of maturity towards Christ. Sadly, this is not the case across the church worldwide. I came across some statistics that speak into the current adolescent culture in the church:

88% of children raised in Christian families leave church at the age of 18, never to return (SBC).

A majority of adults no longer consider Christianity America's default faith (Barna).

64% of decisions for Christ are made before the age of 18, and 77% are made before the age of 21 (Barna).

An estimated 4% of the "bridger" generation, or Gen Y, will be Bible-believing Christians when they reach adulthood. Their grandparents' generation: 65%. Their parents' generation: 35%. (Bridger Generation by Thom S. Rainer).

These statistics portray a gloomy future for the message of the body of Christ. What is the disconnect between the message heard within the family context of church life not being able to mature into faith that takes action?

The strength of youth ministry is the ease of making biblical truths fun and attractive, but if these biblical principles do not produce fruit then what is the emphasis? The foundation of youth ministry must be Jesus Christ and his Word. What must be done is not more programs, flashing lights, hotter music, or games, but true discipleship in the Word of God that produces vision resulting in action. The way in which Jesus ministered changed within his context but the message he proclaimed did not. As we build our lives, ministries, and families upon the solid rock that is Jesus and his Word, we are delivering a message of consistency and sustainability.

Today's youth live in sub-communities of clusters, waiting for the next best option. So, if their friends aren't doing it or it is not accepted to be "cool" or "epic" by others they are disinterested. The problem is the things that were "cool" or "rad" when I was a teen are boring to the adolescent today of 2014. Everything changes; if you spend all your time and energy trying to stay relevant the foundations of your life and ministry will fall secondary to culture. The focus becomes staying alluring to keep the churchd in church rather than sending them out to show

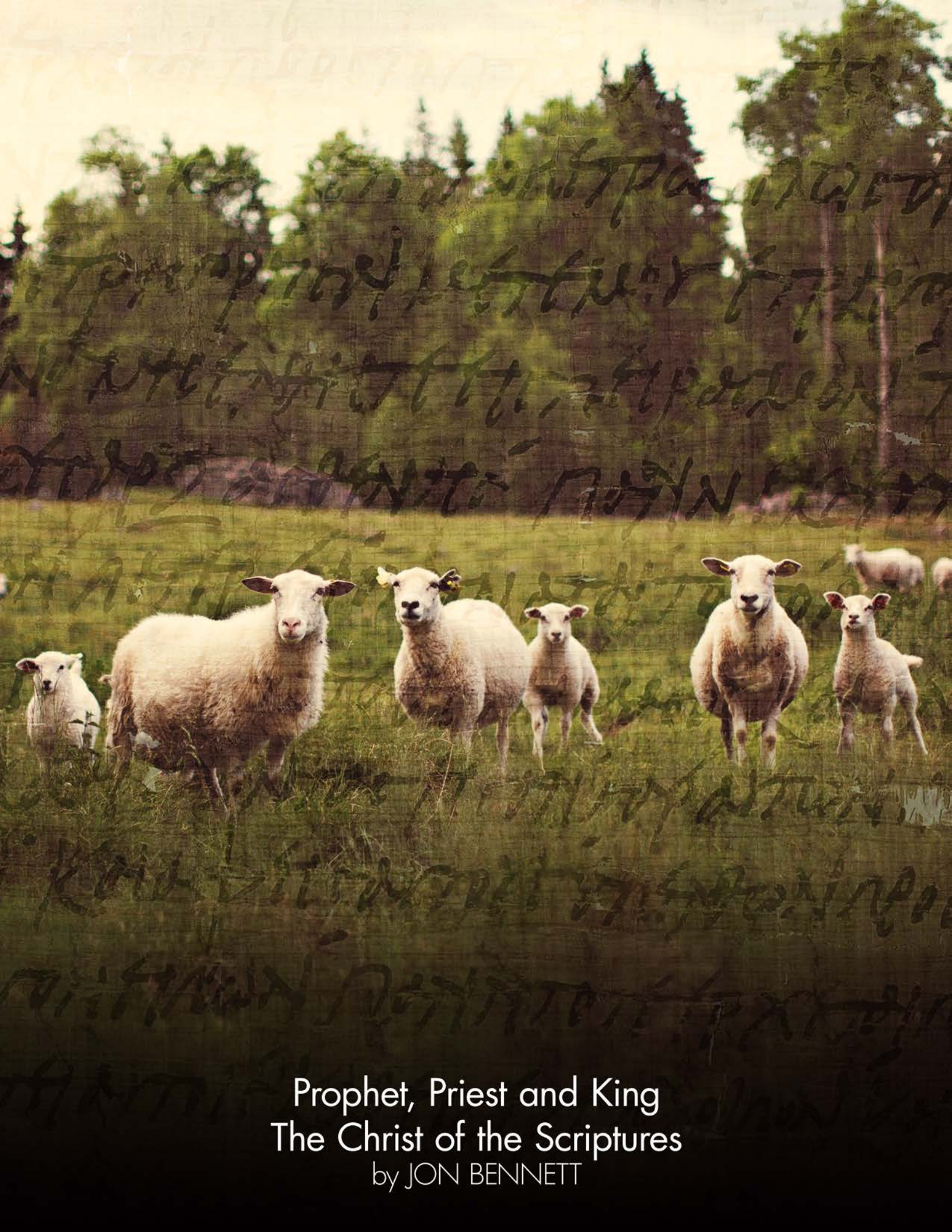


and live the consistency of Jesus. Just as 2013 came to a close and people around the world reevaluate their lives; I appeal to you to reevaluate your life and ministry before Christ. Are you keeping him and his Word central to everything you do? Are you showing Jesus as you live your life before men?

The world needs a church (by that I mean the people of God) that reveals Jesus. We need fathers that lead families in accordance to Scripture and youth ministries that walk alongside the parents to strengthen them and reinforce the biblical principles that are being taught in the home. As we show Jesus to others in word and deed we declare that there is more to life than what culture allures as “cool”. As Christ’s body lives a life centered on Jesus and his Word, we bring restoration to a hurting and broken world. We have been given the right through Jesus Christ to become children of God (John 1:12). Recognize the honor in this right to be a child of God. Make sure Jesus is the center of your life first and foremost and then the center of your ministry. We all know what it means to live for Christ, but I encourage you to back it up with your actions that the next generations may see Jesus in all you do. The result can be the effectual change in a young person’s life to receive the stability of Christ amidst a changing world.

**by David Ottolini**





Prophet, Priest and King  
The Christ of the Scriptures  
by JON BENNETT





## ENCOUNTERING CHRIST AS WE READ OUR BIBLES

Of the twenty six New Testament books twenty four begin with the mention of Jesus Christ, right at the beginning. The diversity of New Testament authors and the varying situations to which they wrote still led them to have Christ Jesus at the front and center of what they were communicating to their readers. The exceptions are Luke, who waits only until verse 21 and 3 John, a very short and occasional letter addressing dissension, which omits the name Jesus Christ or John's usual "word of life" title present elsewhere. These authors, writing to the early church, did all they could to impress upon those to whom they wrote the centrality of Jesus Christ in the ordinary Christian life.

The Gospel accounts center around the person of Christ, the book of Acts begins with His address to the disciples and ends with Paul's mission to take the gospel to the edge of the Empire. All of Paul's epistolary greetings mention Jesus Christ as Lord and his message focuses on the believers' union with the risen Christ. The general epistles and Revelation maintain Christ as the head of the Church, the victor over sin and death and ruler of the nations, to return again to finally realize the purpose of the Father in the renewal of all things. It can be easy for us as Christians to gravitate toward the authors of the NT and their clear message of the centrality of Christ, but what about the Old Testament? What about the narrative storyline of God's redeeming hand of grace to save and preserve the covenant people? How does that fit into the idea of a priest-king who receives all the adoration and praise of the Christian faith?

Christ is still at the center of the Old Testament storyline, if subtly shaded in the narrative types and prophetic anticipations of the pages. The promise of the OT was for the hope of the people of God, looking toward a future realization; Yahweh would send a deliverer, one to defeat their enemies and restore the redeemed community to their rightful place amongst the other nations.

## THE NATURE OF THE PROMISE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

The story begins with a promise of deliverance, "the seed of the woman will rise up and crush the

head of the serpent" (Gen 3:15), to Abraham is given the promise his offspring will become so great they will be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3). The nation Israel is told "you will know that I am the Lord your God" (Ex 6:7). To the line of king David there is a promise one of his descendants will rule over the kingdom of God forever (2 Sam 7:13).

The period of the prophets and exile is marked by announcements of great deliverance through one to come, a redeemer and servant who will lead Yahweh's covenant people to salvation. This one to come is to be anointed of the Lord "Messiah" (or Christos in Greek), the chosen one, sent for a special task. He will be of the line of David and will fulfill the promises of the Scriptures.

## THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING

The characters that fill out the storyline of the Old Testament become literary types of the one who is to come. From their roles as leaders, mediators and spokesmen we can build an image of this one greater individual anticipated through the Scriptures. We can learn more about Him through the lives and callings of others. There are three key duties, or offices, that fall to the leaders in Israel throughout the Old Testament; Prophet, spokesperson, Priest, intercessor and mediator, and King, God's representative ruling over the people.

In the very best of the Old Testament figures two of these would be combined, occasionally all three yet incomplete. Take Moses, a leader who delivers the people from Pharaoh, he acts as king in leading the people in battle, he is a prophet who speaks the word of the Lord to the community in the giving of the law. Moses was of the tribe of Levi and fulfilled priestly duties on behalf of the people.

David was a king, he led the army in victory of other nations, bringing peace to the land. He also wrote and sang Psalms and spoke to the people on behalf of the Lord – telling the people of the heart of Yahweh, in this sense he was prophet. On one occasion he donned the garb of the priest in order to bring sacrifice. We see all three roles together in David. Perhaps you can think of other figures, how do they fill out these three important roles?



## LORD AND SERVANT

Isaiah has a passage that is one of the richest Messianic sections in all of the Old Testament. In the section of the servant songs (from 42-53), the fourth song (52:13-53:12) focuses in on the Servant of the Lord, and the path of humility, ridicule and even death that this servant must walk. Through servanthood he will be enabled to rise up as a true victor as He is vindicated by Yahweh and His enemies are defeated. This chosen one is to bear the suffering of others, to take on their sicknesses and diseases, to be whipped and beaten in order that they might be healed. In the end this one is to be exalted by Yahweh because of His obedience. As the exalted one he is now given the title “Lord.” There are many New Testament themes right here in this passage, but the combination of the apparent opposites Lord-and-Servant is the most striking.

## FULFILLMENT IN THE NEW COVENANT

In the fullness of time God sent His son (Gal 4:4). These OT anticipations find their end-goal in the person of Jesus Christ. Matthew starts his gospel on the genealogy of Christ, son of David, son of Abraham, this is Messianic, to do with promise. Mark embellishes the servant motif from Isaiah (see Mark 8-10). In Luke – Acts there is an emphasis of OT fulfillment in the work of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. John starts with Christ as the eternal and divine word, the source of creative authority in the Godhead.

Paul uses the resurrection of the Lord to express the power of the gospel in the supremacy of Christ. In the Pauline epistles the message of the believers union with Christ becomes the central aspect of the Christian faith. The believer is now united in the death – burial – resurrection – ascension and ruling session of the Lord. This is the fulfillment of the OT promise of Yahweh with His covenant people. For the believer today we can say with Paul, “in all things Christ preeminent” (Col 1:18).

The writer to the Hebrews brings combinations of the offices of Prophet Priest and King in the person of Jesus Christ, for he is superior to all of the OT and is the greater High Priest (1:1-3). Christ has accomplished a final salvation such that there is no need for any more sacrifices and, as such, there is no

more need for any other sacrifices in the old covenant model. The letter ends with the strength of God given to the believer through the eternal blood of Christ (13:20-21).

The scriptures end with the Revelation of John, or better, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The letter to the seven churches starts with the vision of the risen Lord, it is in this way the Biblical storyline will end – as it begins in a garden and the promise of the seed of the woman the story ends focused in on the person of Christ and His risen glory. The promise for every believer is to the return of Christ and the bringing together of all things once and for all in Christ Jesus. John anticipates this fullness in the new heavens and the new earth, realized now through the gospel and received in glorious completion in the final return of Christ Jesus (21:1-8).

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