

Lesson: Monday

“Understanding the Messiah”

Mark 8:27–33; John 1:10–12

Objectives

- To further understand the contextual and historical Christ (Messiah) from the Israelite perspective
- To gain insight on the disciple’s misunderstanding on who Christ was
- To help deepen our current understanding on defining Christ (Messiah)
“It’s not only about the Messiah but it’s also about His Mission”

“You cannot follow someone if you don’t know who you’re looking for.”

Today’s Lesson

The Messiah—This must be the starting point. The name Christ is not a last name, nor is it strictly found in New Testament teachings. The idea came from somewhere. While New Testament writings have been written in Greek and use the term “Christos,” for the most part the Old Testament writings were written in Hebrew and use the term “Mashiach.” Both terms mean the same thing—the Anointed One.

- What/Who was called out to be anointed (Messiah) in the Old Testament?
- What did this term mean to the Children of Israel?
- What was the Anointed One’s (Messiah’s) purpose?
- What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and those who were anointed?
- What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ?

“Is this the Christ?”—Imagine for a moment being in New Testament biblical times from an Israelite perspective. The atmosphere, the setting, the culture, all under Roman reign. For over 400 years (Malachi, 430 BC) there has been no recognized Prophet of the LORD. There has also been a foreign domination not of Israel (Persians, Greeks, Romans) meaning a loss of a Davidic Kingship. All of this happening while the priesthood has been corrupted by the Roman King himself. But there are strange rumblings that this Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph’s son, is the Christ.

- Why were Zacharias, the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon, Anna, etc. so excited for Jesus of Nazareth? What did they know?
- Throughout Christ Jesus’ ministry, what did others think about him? (His own brethren, Jews, Galileans, Pharisees, etc.)
- What kind of Messiah were the people expecting?
- Throughout Christ Jesus’ ministry, what did the disciples think of Him?
- Why was Peter REBUKED by Christ Jesus? What did he not understand?

He is to me—They were expecting a throne, a crown, and a Kingdom now. The Father brought a cross, a tomb, and a Kingdom not of this world. They were expecting glory without suffering. The Father ordained suffering before glory. This was not something missed, but rather something overlooked. The full package of Christ cannot be overlooked, but rather embraced. While the Savior brings peace and joy not of this world, He calls us to follow His example in every way. He is the Suffering Savior. How did He do this? Through the Holy Spirit, not of His own will, but the will of our Father in Heaven.

- Are there aspects or characteristics of Christ that we tend to overlook?
- Are there aspects or characteristics of Christ that we don't like?
- How did Christ enter into His Father's glory?
- What does it mean that it was necessary for my Savior to have suffered? How did He suffer?
- Christ was FULL of the Holy Spirit, is there a correlation between being Spirit-filled and suffering?

Conclusion

They were waiting for the Messiah, but misunderstood His mission. Peter wasn't wrong about who Jesus was. He was wrong about what the Messiah must do. Our walk with Christ will greatly depend on our understanding of Him. All of Him.

"The Lord most surely bore the sorrow of our sinning; He chose to take our guilt in love, from the beginning. From all that flesh and soul must otherwise receive, His dying made us whole—This firmly I believe! He like a patient Lamb to slaughter there was driven, and silently He bore the pain and suffering given. He there without complaint bore scourge and rod and cross; He freed us with His blood from sin, disease, and loss."

—Zions' Harp #44, Verses 1, 4

Notes

Lesson: Tuesday

“Give and Go”

Matthew 16:25–26; Philippians 2:5–8

Objectives

- To recognize that an understanding of the Christ as Messiah brings one to an inflection point
- To review the biblical model of self-denial, how to become self-less instead of selfish and why
- To gain further understanding of how to live a life of abandonment

“True life begins where self finally ends.”

Today’s Lesson

Who’s in Charge?—If Christ really is who He says He is, what does that mean for me? Many of the Jews and Greeks were confronted by the Messiah. As noted in Monday’s lesson, they not only had an idea of the coming Messiah, but also saw His works, healings, and teachings. Yet imagine being someone like Nicodemus, the disciples, Pharisees, Mary Magdalene, His own countrymen, or even brethren. What was their response? If He really is who He says He is, we either follow or forsake. We either run to or run from. We either murder Him or love Him. Ultimately either we are in charge of our lives, or Christ is. This is the inflection point.

- List examples through the scripture of those who submitted to Christ and those who did not.
- What is an inflection point?
- When was this inflection point in your spiritual journey? Do you have these moments continuously or was it a one-time thing?

Denial of Self—“Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee...” (Matthew 26:35) Peter stated as he sat at meat with Christ Jesus the LORD. However not soon after when pressured by men, the cock crowed and he was reminded of his sin. He wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75). Could it be that our vows are not much different? If we are to count the cost of being His disciple, that means there is a cost. That cost is losing our life (Matthew 16:25).

- What does it mean to deny?
- What does it mean to deny someone, including yourself?
- How did Jesus deny Himself?
- Is it acceptable in the eyes of Christ to gain only a part of the world if it’s not the whole?
- Who gained the world in the New Testament? Who gained Christ?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, where would you rate yourself in regard to the denial of self? Do you like this answer? Does Christ Jesus like this answer?
- Can we have both self and Christ?

A Life of Abandonment—Men and women who lived for Christ had nothing to their own names. No major titles, no high-ranking positions, no authority of others. However, for many, it wasn't always like that. If we use the example of Paul, positionally, intellectually, and religiously, he had it all. He was a Jew by birth through the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), yet born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28). He was raised under strict Pharisaic Judaism (Acts 26:5) living in a major intellectual Greek-Roman metropolitan center, Tarsus. Paul was highly educated, having studied under the most respected rabbis of the day (Acts 22:3). He had all the religious accomplishments a Jew could ask for (Philippians 3:5-6), and socially had the wealth, honor, and standing a man greatly desired. But when he met the Messiah, things changed. Paul knew what it was like to have the “world” and knew what it was like to “lose it.” That lost life is actually the life that is most worth living for. For true life comes from death itself.

- What are some examples of Paul losing his previous life? (religiously, economically, socially, personal, prestige/reputation, etc.)
- Was Paul's life easier or lighter before or after his encounter with Christ?
- How did Paul use the experience of his old life, to help further Christ in his new life?
- What have we abandoned or denied?
- What have we picked back up along the road to our Heavenly homeland?
- Have you experienced a communal or collective life of abandonment with your congregation?
- If others would see you, would they see a life lost for self and found in Christ?

Conclusion

A life of abandonment is seen throughout the Old and New Testament. Faithful men and women who humbled themselves, gave up what they had and followed a new way. The only way. These Followers of The Way made a conscious decision every day to be obedient to the Master. There were failures at times, however the journey continued. We too have an opportunity each and every day to give up and go with Christ Jesus our LORD. This abandoned life for self is what the Savior is looking for in us.

“Lord, Thy example teaches me the way to holy living; Who comes to Thee, no more shall be his life to evil giving; Thou art the Way, and well dost show how we should sojourn here below. Who loves his life, Lord, more than Thee, Without Thee will he lose it; Who gives his life in service free, To God will introduce it! Who bears no cross, no suffering, Lord, Unworthy is of Thy reward.”

—Zions' Harp #57 Verses 2, 7

Notes

Lesson: Wednesday

“The Centrality of the Cross”

Luke 14:25–33; Hebrews 12:2

Objectives

- Historically review the meaning of the Cross
- To understand how Christ Jesus lives the fullness of the Cross
- To realize the necessity of living out the Cross of Christ personally

“The Cross—What other life could Christ had lived?”

Today’s Lesson

The Cross—The idea of the cross is not a New Testament practice, nor was it invented by the Romans, although the Romans did use it intentionally. Nonetheless, throughout the ages the message it brought had the same effect. It was ultimately a symbol of authority, consequence, and judgement. Whether the Assyrians, the Persians, or even the Romans, the message was simple—“you don’t mess with us.” At the time of Jesus, crucifixion was deliberately designed to be public, prolonged, shameful, and politically charged. To the first century observer, the Cross meant that the individual was defeated, cursed, and forgotten. Similarly, the Law taught that cursed is every man that hangs on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22–23; Galatians 3:13). This message brought a very different picture to the disciples’ minds regarding who the Christ really was, and what His mission would entail.

- Why were the thieves crucified?
- Why did the Jews ask the Romans to crucify Christ and not take care of the matter themselves?
- Would the disciples have understood what the Cross meant when Jesus spoke about the matter?

The Crux of the Matter—The message of the Cross that Jesus gave was deliberate, intentional, and shocking, not only to His followers, but to all men! In the Roman world, a man carrying his cross had no rights, no future plans, no escape, just death. In other words, he was a dead man walking. This was the nature of the true Messiah (Luke 24:7; Isaiah 53:5; Mark 10:45). A surrender of self-will, obedience even to the point of death itself, and trusting in the Father when the cost is everything (Matthew 26:42). While difficult to understand, the Messiah conquers through sacrifice and not force. The Kingdom of GOD advances through suffering-faithfulness. Finally, victory comes through self-giving love. The Cross was not an interruption of Christ’s mission, it was the visible expression of it. And the result of death itself brought new life—redemption, release, freedom, resurrection, and the hope of eternal life.

- If there was one idea the disciples rejected about the Messiah, what would it have been and why?

- What are some examples of the Cross found in faithful men and women throughout the Old Testament?
- What made it possible for these individuals to live this lifestyle out? Was it their own mind and character or something greater?
- How did Christ live out the Cross in full? What indwelt Him?

Unless YOU—The Cross defines the cost. What is the cost? Our LORD and Savior exemplified that through His walk and called us to the same life. He lived in poverty, accepted rejection, served rather than ruled, and loved others to the point of dying for them. The Cross showed that the world ruled over Him, that He was subject to both the governing social structure and also the religious authority by hanging on a tree, willingly. But it's not only Him... it's YOU. The life of the Cross is consistent, it's universal, and it's voluntary. However, it must be experienced to claim Christ (Luke 14:27), through the power of the Holy Spirit in a humble mind.

- How can the Cross of Christ be experienced in us?
- How was Apostle Paul crucified with Christ if he was not one of the thieves? (Galatians 2:20)
- In what ways is the Cross of Christ consistent for all believers in Him?
- What does it mean that the Cross of Christ is universal? Do some people groups not have to experience the Cross?
- How/Why is the Cross of Christ voluntary? How is it mandatory?
- Does the life of the Cross change, depending on outside factors? (prosperity, hardship, oppression, religiosity, war, wealth, famine, etc.)

Conclusion

Without the Cross, we have no sacrifice. Without sacrifice, we have no ransom. Without ransom, we have no redemption. Unless we each individually live out the very same Cross we see in our Savior, we cannot be His disciple.

"Why should crosses ever grieve me; Christ is near, What can here Ever of Him deprive me? Who can rob me of the heaven that God's Son for mine own to my faith hath given? Weak was I and empty-handed when on earth at my birth my first breath was granted. Helpless, too, when death overtakes me. Shall I go from life's woe—When my breath forsakes me."

—Zion's Harp #151 Verses 1, 2

Notes

Lesson: Thursday

“Follow the Leader”

John 13:1-17

Objectives

- To recognize the life of Jesus the Christ (Messiah) through His teachings and actions
- To consider and review how aligned we are personally to the one we claim to follow

“Christ must be the leader of our life.”

Today’s Lesson

1 John 2:6 “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

Following Jesus Christ can be broken down into two main categories:

- Obey His teaching
- Imitate His example

Matthew 22:37 “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” Jesus showed profound love for His Father through perfect obedience, doing the Father’s will even to the point of sacrificial death on the cross (Philippians 2:8; Luke 22:42), living in constant communion with the Father, drawing His strength and direction from Him (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 11:1), and resistance to the devil’s temptations (Matthew 4:1-11).

- What is obedience?
- Who do you obey?
- Why do you obey? What’s the motivation?
- Is our obedience about fear, duty, or desire to please God? (John 8:29)
- Why do we sometimes catch ourselves grudgingly following Christ’s commands?
- What’s our average communion time with the Father each day? Is it consistent?
- Can you be in a stressful situation or difficulty while keeping communion with the Father?

Matthew 22:39 “And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Jesus showed profound love for his neighbor through radical service (John 13:1-17), compassion—healing sick, feeding hungry (Mark 1:32-34, 8:2), forgiveness—even His crucifiers (Mark 2:5-10), spending time with outcasts—sinners, poor, children (Matthew 9:10-12), and communicating the Father’s word (John 12:49-50).

- When was the last time we used “it is written” when tempted by the devil?
- What was the lesson the disciples needed to learn in John 13:1-17?
- So if we don’t wash feet, what is a similar service of love we can show today? (John 13:15)
- What are the dangers of a lack of forgiveness? (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Do you speak the Father’s word to your peers? (encouragement, admonishment, discipleship)

Conclusion

The life of Jesus Christ (Messiah) was a radical life to live. He was abandoned, mocked, spat upon, and ultimately killed by His own. Yet, He showed us the perfect example—the only example. A life of obedience, communion with the Father, loving others, and being near to the humble and the hurt. The life of Christ is not an easy road. It is not filled with roses, but rather thorns. It's bearing pain and suffering for the sake of others. It's about giving and not getting. It is a sacrifice. Yet the rewards are out of this world. So walk, as He walked, and talk as He talked.

"Thy life shows what my life should be—A mirror thou and light to me; But, oh, how far I am away from thy true image day by day! In watchfulness on lonely heights, Thou oft, O Lord, didst spend Thy nights; Thou always wast in fervent prayer; Oh, that I too Thy zeal might share!"

—Zions' Harp #164 Verses 2, 4

Notes

Lesson: Friday

“Set the Example”

Philippians 3:14–17; Colossians 3:12–17

Objectives

- To be inspired by the example of Paul and other believers as they took up the cross and followed Jesus
- To equip ourselves to do the same

“There are rare Christians whose very presence incites others to be better Christians. I want to be that rare Christian.”

Today’s Lesson

Purpose Living—Paul lived in such a way that he was able to model what a life sold out for Christ looked like. He suffered various perils, but steadily kept Jesus the Messiah as the focus of who he was following. Paul lived with purpose—that purpose was to glorify God. A key characteristic in a follower of Jesus is one who “does all things to the glory of God” and “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17)—it’s a way of life!

- What are some practical examples of how we can do ALL things “to the glory of God” on a daily basis? Recall this is one of the keys to following Jesus.

That THEY—Another key attribute in Paul was how he sought “the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:32–33). Evangelism and discipleship were core attributes that marked Paul’s life as he displayed what a life following Jesus looked like. Rather than seeking his own profit, he sought the profit of others to “please all men in all things... that they may be saved.”

- How can you implement discipleship (teaching others, modeling the life of Christ) practically in your life and the life of your family?

Be Mindful—We have the incredible ability to help lead and inspire other believers into greater obedience to Christ—equipped and equipping others with the mindset for the Kingdom of God; the mind of Christ. Conversely, we also have the ability to do the opposite.

- Besides Paul, we also have other noteworthy examples of believers (both inside and outside of the Bible). What are some of their names and ways that they exemplified a Christ-like life worthy of following? What are some negative examples you may have heard of or experienced?

That WE—On a broader scale, we collectively, as a body of believers, should be able to exemplify to others what a community of Jesus followers look like. Consider both—on a denominational level as well as in the local church context.

- What are ways that we as a church body (both locally and on a denominational level) can clearly and practically demonstrate and exemplify what it looks like for a group of believers to love one another, take up the cross, and follow Jesus?

Conclusion

Taking up the cross and following Jesus is not meant to be a vague and frustrating pursuit. Rather it is a life-long endeavor that has eternal fulfillment and joy in the constant presence of Jesus. The more our lives are conformed to Christ, the more glory God will receive and the more fulfilled we will be. Let's seek to find examples of believers that help us follow Jesus, and let's seek to be those examples ourselves.

"Walk thus, cheering one another, Little flock, even to the end, If ye see a stumbling brother, Helpful word and hand extend; Filled with God's own mighty fullness, Follow Christ in holy stillness; Sing to Him a "Gloria!" And rejoice, "Hallelujah!"

—Zions' Harp #95, Verse 8

Notes