

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by Mark Adams



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Introduction

The central claims of the gospel are unchanging from generation to generation. Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God who died on our behalf. He conquered death through His resurrection and now He reigns on high, in all places, both in this life and the next. Likewise, God's Word is unchanging, providing a source of stability and sanity in a confusing world. Although the claims of the gospel found in Scripture are unchanging, the world is ever-changing. Each generation of Christians must contemplate and act upon what it means to be Christ's ambassadors in our time and in our communities. We must be thoughtful about how to pass on our faith to a younger generation in relevant ways, while staying true to Scripture.

The purpose of this study is to provide a basic overview of *what it means to be the church*. We want to look at Christ, our foundation, as well as at His intentions for the church. We will give attention to the ongoing ways in which the church maintains our faithful community and works in expanding the borders of the kingdom of God. We invite you to have a fresh look at this great kingdom for which Christ lived, taught, died, and conquered death in order to establish.

About the Author

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Lesson 1

A King And A Kingdom

Scriptures To Study:

**Zechariah 9:9-12; John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-23;
Revelation 11:15-16**

WARM UP



The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But in doing so, they are also telling the larger story of how God's Messiah conquered the powers of darkness and claimed His rightful seat as King of the Cosmos (Philippians 2:9-10). Throughout Jesus' life, people continued to pronounce Him as the King, the Anointed One, and the Messiah. Some said this in derision and scorn (Mark 15:17-19). Others said this in confession and praise (John 20:27-28). But the most important truth to understand in this world is that Jesus Christ was and is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 1:4-6). There is no place outside of His absolute dominion. To be a "Christ-ian" is to be a willing servant of the one true King. The church exists as His representative Kingdom in this world, where all Christians are to play an active part during their time on life's stage (2 Corinthians 5:20). If we are to have a

proper understanding of what the kingdom of God should be in this world, we must first turn our eyes upon the King whom we serve.

WORK OUT



Our King the Creator

Jesus was not God's Plan B. Jesus was not an afterthought for dealing with a world gone bad. Even from the time of the first sin, we read that an offspring of man would one day crush Satan under his feet (Genesis 3:15). In fact, a fundamental truth about Jesus Christ is that He has always been and will always be the same (Hebrews 13:8). What is true about Him now was true about Him before the creation of the world. Though the events of His life might not have yet occurred, there was never any other plan than that He would come to do what He did.

When we read through John 1, we see that every part of God's good creation was made through Christ. Jesus was the Word of truth and the Light of all men. Whatever good is in us is a mere reflection of our Creator's goodness shining through. Christ reigns in this world, if for no other reason, because it is His and He made it.

Our King the Conqueror

The largest indictments against the existence of God will always come from questions about the problem with pain and innocent suffering in the world. Even if all men have sinned, the four-year-old Ethiopian child who is starving to death certainly seems to be experiencing much worse than he/she deserves. I have heard it said that if God was trying to create the world as one big pleasurable theme

park, He did a poor job. But perhaps this world was designed for a purpose other than our entertainment.

Though God did not create sin or evil, He has allowed the possibility for sin and evil to exist in the world. His challenge to mankind is that we would choose His will instead of whatever selfish idol we are tempted to follow (Genesis 4:7). And unfortunately, the majority of people in this world have chosen the wide path of rebellion, with the decisions of each passing generation reverberating into the next (Romans 1:29-30).

The good news is that God was not willing to be passive as the powers of darkness warred against His creation (Romans 6:23). Through Jesus Christ, God dealt a critical blow to all that strives against Him in this world. There are future aspects of life in Christ that Christians still anticipate with hope and patience, but we know that the victory was decided when Christ burst forth triumphantly from the grave (Hebrews 10:12-14).

COOL DOWN



What will we do with Jesus? It is a simple enough question to ask, yet it remains the biggest question that faces every generation of humanity. His teachings were too lucid for us to write him off as a crazy person. His character was too noble for us to brush him aside as a hypocrite or a liar. His miracles preclude our ability to ignore him as just another teacher. Having conquered death itself, Jesus proclaimed himself as having all authority in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Either it is true or it isn't. And if it is true, then it changes everything. If it is true, then it means we must take seriously His commission to go and

teach people from all nations to be His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

Many will settle for an understanding of Jesus that is far too small. In Jesus' time, most Jews had a far too limited vision of what it meant for the Messiah to come. They were preoccupied with the political status of Israel, and were primarily interested in having a king - God's "anointed one" - on their throne in Jerusalem to drive off the oppressive Romans. It is interesting to note that there are several other known historical figures whom Rome had to quash near the time of Jesus. Each claimed to be the Messiah, and had violent intentions towards the ruling empire. Passages such as John 6 come to life when read through this lens. Jesus had demonstrated a God-given ability to heal the lame and diseased, as well as to feed more than 5,000 people, having only the most meager of rations available. Can you imagine a more perfect commander in chief? John 6:14-15 indicates that Jesus had to get away from the crowd, because they were trying to make Him King by force. On several occasions, Jesus even told people not to tell others that He was the Messiah, presumably because of faulty expectations associated with the concept (Matthew 16:20).

Rome's cruelty may have been a particularly nasty symptom, but Jesus came to cure the underlying disease. He did not die on a cross to simply overthrow a few oppressive kings. He came to deal with the great deceiver of the entire world (Revelation 12:9-12). He came to establish His kingdom, against which the gates of Hell would never prevail (Matthew 16:18).

Since the time that Jesus walked the dusty roads of Jerusalem, people have continued trying to relegate Him to the neglected corners of their life. Some will pick out choice nuggets of wisdom from His teaching, but will be quick to evade His rightful claims on all of their priorities in life. Others will pay Him lip service once or twice per week in the assembly, but will try to keep Him tucked safely away

from all other parts of the week. But to be a Christian in the truest sense of the term is to give Christ the full reign over our lives to which he is entitled.

The purpose of this collection of studies is to understand the purpose and functions of Christ's church. Put simply, the driving truth behind all that the church is and does is that Jesus is Lord of all. We look at the world through different eyes, and try to arrange all of who we are in light of this reality. It may not always be the reality that the world perceives, but it is the reality that we strive, more than anything else, to embody. Jesus is Lord. We want to live like it. What will *you* do with Jesus?

Points to Ponder

1. What was your personal journey in coming to Christ? Are there things you said or did before becoming a Christian that you now look at in an entirely new way?
2. It is important to see Jesus' life as the culmination of God's bigger plan, and not as an afterthought, due to the sin in the world. Read Romans 5:6 and discuss what you see as the wisdom in God's timing.
3. What are some of the ways that people take too small of a view of Jesus' absolute authority? Can you describe any ways that our society would tempt us to trim His teachings down to fit pop culture's conscience?
4. What are some of the ways that Jesus' understanding of what it meant for Him to be the Messiah conflicted with His culture's views of what this position was to entitle?
5. What are some ways that churches could improve at embodying the idea that Jesus is Lord?
6. How has democracy made it more difficult for us to grasp the concepts of king, kingdom, and lordship?