

To The Cross Ministries

IS JESUS CHRIST TRUTH FOR TODAY?

The life of Jesus Christ stands in stark contrast to the pluralism of the postmodern world. Are the claims of Christ still relevant to us today? If they are, how does this truth change our daily lives?

YOU WILL KNOW THE
TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH
WILL SET YOU FREE.

JOHN 8:32

A seven-part Bible study based off a series of lectures by English theologian John Stott

TO THE CROSS MINISTRIES

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

It is my prayer that what you learn from this Bible study will draw you closer to Christ. He truly is worthy of all your attention and your devotion. His life has the power to change yours. It is not easy to be a Christian in the ever-changing world in which we now find ourselves. The man or woman who stands firm on the foundational truth of God's Word will always be out of place in the constant turmoil and change of this world. But in Jesus you will find all the strength you need and all the peace you desire. To Him be the glory.

- Matt Musser

Visit www.tothecrossministries.com or email me at matt@tothecrossministries.com for more information.

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Introduction

Why is a discussion on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ necessary? Is it not sufficient to say that Jesus made a substantial impact on world history and leave it at that? Is His influence any different from that of other religious figures of the past? Many in the world are asking these questions? But I have found these problems are not limited to the secular world, many within the Church have expressed doubts on the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. Consequently, finding the answers to these questions is of the utmost importance.

I do not think it is too far a stretch to say that the very fabric of Christianity is being called into question by the modern world. If today's Christian is to hold onto the reliability of the Scriptures and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, then they must answer the various points of contention posed by the postmodern world.

First, there is the **Argument of Relativism**. Relativism maintains that what is true for one person is only true to them because of the personal, cultural, and social, context in which they exist. Second, there is the **Argument of Syncretism**. This view holds that there is a common religious theme that is shared by every religion. Finally, there is the **Argument of Pluralism**. This belief considers each religion to be independently valid.

Each of these views is intricately blended into the philosophy of American thought. They have carried with them sweeping changes in America's political, economic, and social sectors. But their effect on the religious climate of America is much more interesting (and important).

The Context of the Discussion

This all has caused an atmosphere of uneasiness and worry to hang over the American populace. The average person is left confused and bewildered by the array of opinions and views that are thrust upon them. Stott tells the story of a student who had amassed an interesting arrangement of books. He had the Bible, next to the Book of

Common Prayer. He had a copy of the Quran. He kept several publications from Jehovah's Witnesses. Scattered around his room was also the biography of Karl Marx and a book of Yoga exercises. And on his bedside table was apparently the book he had read the least entitled, *How to Stop Worrying*.

How well this story summarizes the average American today! When it comes to religion, they want to make sure they have all their bases covered. It is better to be safe than sorry right? And the sophisticated person today is measured, not by the understanding of and commitment to a single subject, but their willingness to appreciate and accept various views. It is into this context that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ makes a vital entrance.

The Nature of the Discussion

An important note must be made on the nature of the discussion in this Bible Study. The uniqueness sought is in the historical person of Jesus Christ, not the various Christian denominations. Neither is the discussion about the numerous "Jesuses" on display around the world today. I am saddened to see Jesus weaponized by modern leaders to back a particular political or social agenda. Jesus was who He was, not who we have made Him to be. It is my hope and prayer that in this study we can value the life of Christ as it is evidenced in the Bible. If the historical Jesus, as recorded by the New Testament authors is not unique to the pages of history then Christianity is worthless and fake. But if Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be, and did what He said He would do, then Christianity is the only reasonable religion.

If the person of Jesus Christ is absolute, unique, and final then He demands our attention and affection. In this Bible study we will look at several aspects of Christ's ministry that make His life distinctive. Scripture will be studied to build a foundational understanding. Group questions will be given to encourage further discussion. Ultimately, it is my prayer that this Bible Study will give you a clearer vision of our Wonderful Savior, and a better way to share His story with your friends and family.

Week One: The Uniqueness of Christ's Claims (His Teaching)

The teachings of Jesus are both deep and wide. He taught in such a way that His words were understood by the common man, yet they are still studied and debated today. Two thousand years have passed and yet we are still analyzing these words of Christ. To say that His teachings have left an unparalleled impression on the modern world would be an understatement.

And yet, when we analyze the teaching of Jesus, we find He was in fact very self-centered in His teaching. He was always teaching about Himself. He was not like other prophets who predicted a future climatic event of the Lord. Instead, He claimed to be the very Person the whole of Scripture is speaking about.

Jesus' Fulfillment of the Old Testament Narrative

1. Jesus sees Himself as the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

When you consider these words of Jesus, what is He saying? What is the significance of Him saying the Kingdom of God is initiated by His ministry?

What does this mean for you? Is there an attitude you should alter? A behavior you should change?

2. Jesus sees Himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecies.

Luke 4:16-21

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

*And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.
And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

By saying that these Old Testament prophecies centered around Himself, Jesus was claiming to be the realization of all that the people of Israel had waited on. This caused some to follow Him and others to despise Him. Why would this cause such division?

3. Jesus sees Himself as the fulfillment of the hope of Old Testament saints.

John 5:43-47

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes

from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

John 8:56-59

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

In these passages Jesus claimed to be the subject of Moses' writing and Abraham's anticipation. How do these Scriptures prove that Christ made unique claims of divinity?

Jesus' Familiarity with the Father

1. Jesus claims to be the Son of God

Matthew 11:27

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

People have come claiming to be sons and daughters of God. In fact, the title son of God is given to multiple people in the Bible. What is unique about Jesus' claim?

The relationship between God and Jesus is one of unique familiarity. In fact Jesus said His relationship with the Father was one of equality (see John 10:22-39). He went beyond referring to God as *the Father*; He referred to Him as *my Father*.

Jesus' Authority Came from Himself

Modern pastors and preachers can only claim authority when they quote, "The Bible says..." And so it was the same in Jesus' day. The scribes and Pharisees authority only came from the Biblical text. The Old Testament prophets only had authority because they were speaking for God: "Thus saith the Lord..." But Jesus' authority to teach came from His very being. As the eternal Son of God, He had the unique ability to say, "But I say to you..." (Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)

1. Jesus has authority to teach.

Matthew 7:28-29

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

What was it that caused Jesus to teach with greater authority than the other teachers of His day? Did this authority originate from His divine character?

2. Jesus has authority to forgive sins.

Mark 2:7-11

"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the

paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

By claiming (and proving) to forgive sins, Jesus did something no one else in all history has ever done. When we then consider what Jesus has done for us on the cross there is hope that we too can be forgiven of our sins. Consider the hope this gives you and reflect on how your life is different because “your sins are forgiven.”

3. Jesus has authority to judge the world.

Matt 25:31-32

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

The authority of Jesus to judge the world causes those of us to believe in Him great hope. But for those who don’t know him there is only great fear. How can we tell others about the love of Christ, while also reminding them He will judge the world?

These teachings of Christ are so outrageous and insane if He is not truly the Son of God. Perhaps He was simply mistaken. Perhaps His words were twisted by His followers to mean something He did not intend. Or perhaps He said what He meant. And meant what He said. And as we will see next week, His character backed up His claims.

Week Two: The Uniqueness of Christ's Character (His Life)

The character of Christ is perfectly balanced with his teaching. He is presented in the pages of the Gospels as perfectly sane and stable. Stott comments that even “those who reject His claims, admire His character.” Instead of being self-centered in His actions He was continually seeking the will of the Father and the good of others. This presents us with a paradox unheard of in any other person throughout history. There have been many ego-centric, religious leaders who have displayed their selfish beliefs in their behavior. And though Christ's claims about Himself were indeed very proud, His character is exceedingly humble. The combination of Christ's claims and His character is unique in the history of mankind.

The Humility of Jesus

The humility of Christ is shown in several key interactions throughout His earthly ministry. The very fact that Jesus was born as human being demonstrated his humility (Phil 2:7). And His humble nature was verified throughout His life, to the very point of His death on a cross. The Apostle Paul comments on the humility of Jesus saying, “that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor 8:9)

1. Jesus feeds the five thousand.

Mark 6:30-36, 39-42

And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach

them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat" ...He commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied.

Though Jesus and the disciples were tired from many busy days of ministry He still had compassion on the people. What does this say about His character? What does it say about the mindset we should have in ministry today?

2. Jesus washes the disciple's feet.

John 13:3-5, 12-16

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I

have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Jesus understood His position as the Son of God, yet this motivated Him towards humbleness and servitude. This type of selfless behavior is not popular today. How can the example of our Lord change our perspective? List some practical things You can do to serve others in your daily life.

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1. Pastor Jim
 2. Professors
 3. Friends

3. Jesus willingly goes to the cross though He could have been delivered.

Matthew 26:53-56

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

The Miracles of Jesus

Against the backdrop of His great humility, comes the great miracles He performed. The miracles of Christ are numerous, yet they each carry important theological implications. To try and survey each is beyond the scope of this Bible study.

But to summarize the miracles of Jesus it is suffice to say they convey two central themes:

1. To demonstrate the work and power of God

John 9:1-7

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

When the disciples saw a tragedy, Jesus saw an opportunity. We may see only the bad in the world, but Jesus can use even the bad things to bring glory to God. What is something, in your own life, or in someone else's life, that Jesus has used to display the work of God?

Jesus made mud with His spit to heal this man from his blindness. What does this say about how Jesus performed miracles?

2. To prove that Jesus was the Messiah

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The purpose of John's Gospel was two-fold. What are the two reasons mentioned in the above Scripture?

The miracles of Jesus give evidence that His claims about Himself were in fact true. Yet, many saw the miraculous signs He performed and still did not believe in Him. What does this say about human nature in response to seeing the work of God?

Both the humility and miracles of Christ attest to the exclusivity of His character. He willingly serves us. Yet He rightfully demands our service of Him. His life is undoubtedly unique. John says this about Him: "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25) And equally as unique as His life is His death, which we will look at next week.

Week Three: The Uniqueness of Christ's Crucifixion (His Death)

None of the significant leaders of any other major religion died a death like Jesus Christ. Mohammed died at 62 years old of natural causes. Confucius died at 72 years old of natural causes. Buddha died at 80 years old of natural causes. Jesus Christ died at 33 years old of unnatural causes, namely crucifixion. His death, for all intents and purposes seemed to be the end of His mission. His disciples abandoned Him. His nation rejected Him. And even the Father, whom He had spoken so much about, forsook Him.

Surely, His death would be the end of His following. Do you know who Theudas is? I would imagine unless you are a careful student of ancient history you do not. He was a man from the time period of Jesus who had risen up claiming to be someone special. He gathered a number of men, about four hundred in total who joined his noble cause. But he was killed, and those who followed him dispersed and his mission died along with him (see Acts 5:35-39).

The Prediction of Christ's Death

But the death of Jesus was different. It was central to His teaching. Never before and never again, has someone taught on their own death in such precise detail. The night before His death, during the Last Supper, He clearly explained His own demise and told His disciples how they could remember it in the years to come. And now, the cross is the symbol of Christianity.

Matthew 20:17-19

And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

The death of Christ is predicted accurately both by the Old Testament prophets and by Jesus Himself. Why do you think His disciples did not understand that the Messiah must suffer and die? What is the significance of their misunderstanding?

Do you think the predictions made about Christ were fulfilled passively or actively by Him? In other words, did He do certain things that just happened to fit the biblical expectation or because they were predicted specifically by the prophets?

Matthew 26:26-29

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

During the Last Supper Jesus makes it expressively clear that He knew he was going to die. Considering this, and His experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, what would cause Jesus' to continue on His path towards crucifixion?

The Purpose of Christ's Death

We find purpose in life, not death. To us, death nullifies a person's ability to change or impact the world. Not so for Jesus. He taught that the purpose behind His life was in fact His death. He saw it as the central point of His entire ministry. The ultimate reason He came to this earth was not to teach multitudes of people. Nor was it to heal the sick or feed the crowds. The end purpose and goal of His life was to die on a tree for you and me.

And the death of Christ was a demonstration of the Father's love for us. It was both sacrificial and substitutionary. It is seen in the New Testament as the only way of the forgiveness of sins.

1. The death of Christ proves God's love for His creation.

Romans 5:6-8

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Far too many people doubt that God loves them. They wander through life unaware of His love for them. Who is the death of Christ for, and what does it mean to you?

2. The death of Christ provides the only way of salvation.

Matthew 26:38-39

Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and

prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

In this passage Jesus pleads with the Father to take away His approaching death. Yet, He also submits to the Father's eternal will and plan. What would have happened had Jesus not gone to the cross? What would you have to do in order to be saved?

Jesus faced His final hours alone. He was not surrounded by His admirers and disciples like other religious leaders at the time of their deaths. Instead, only His mother and a few others dared look on from a distance. How does this provide another unique aspect to the death of Christ?

3. The death of Christ *presents* believers blameless before God.

Colossians 1:21-22

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

Here Paul gives a picture of the result of the death of Christ in the life of the believer. What is the picture before the death of Christ? What about after?

The Power of Christ's Death

Jesus did not die like an ordinary man. Instead, the Bible testifies that at the hour of His death many sensational events took place. These mark yet another instance of Christ's unique and powerful death.

Mark 15:37-39

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

The death of Christ broke the separation between God and man. His death was enough to cause belief in a hardened Roman centurion. What does His death tell you about who He was?

Matthew 27:50-53

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit...And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Jesus' death was followed by an earthquake and the reappearance of many dead saints. Why were they raised? What does this tell us about how Jesus died? How does it point to His resurrection?

Jesus' death is the single most important historical event in the history of the world. His death was foretold thousands of years before it occurred. And it still holds an all-important place in the life of the believer today. But without the resurrection, His death would have been purposeless. Next week, we will look at how Christ's resurrection has been proven true and the impact that should have on us all today.

Week Four: The Uniqueness of Christ's Resurrection (His New Life)

No one has ever claimed to be physically resurrected from the dead. And yet Jesus not only claimed to be resurrected after the fact, but He also even predicted it before his death (see John 2:18-22). And the resurrection is the essential element to the uniqueness of the Christian religion. The tombs, monuments, and shrines of every other religious leader can be visited. Their bones speak quite clearly to their lack of a resurrection. And to supersede the Christian faith, one would have to not only die in a unique way, but also come back to life again. No small task!

When the Bible speaks of Christ's resurrection it is more than a metaphorical resurrection. Also, it is more than a mere resuscitation. Christ was fully and completely dead, from the moment they took Him off the cross to the moment the stone was rolled away from the tomb. He was not brought back to this life, like Lazarus was. Instead, He was raised to a new life. His body retained some of its physical characteristics yet contained new powers and would never be able to die again.

The Evidence of Christ's Resurrection

In order to explain away Christ's resurrection, critics must give an answer for several dilemmas. First, there is the empty tomb. Next there is the missing body. These are undeniable, permanent facts of history. Even the most critical skeptic of Jesus' resurrection cannot deny these truths and they must attempt to explain them away. But there are, I believe, two greater evidences of Christ's resurrection that I would like us to study further.

1. The post-mortem appearances of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the

Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

These appearances do not fit the pattern of hallucinations. Jesus appeared to many individuals over a period of time. These appearances give perhaps the most compelling conviction of the resurrection. What are the reasons for these appearances? Why was it important that Jesus returned to His disciples?

2. The post-resurrection actions of the disciples.

John 21:4-8

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

Nothing can account for the transformation that took place in the life of the disciples except to say that Jesus really was resurrected. Peter went from denying Jesus, to dying for Him. How does the testimony and martyrdom of the early disciples give undeniable evidence to the resurrection of Jesus?

The Significance of Christ's Resurrection

1. In the *past*: Vindication

Romans 1:4

[Jesus] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead...

By raising Christ from the dead God declared that Jesus had not died in vain. His death, as with His life, accomplished the purpose for which it was intended. This verified Jesus as the only true Son of God. Take a moment to reflect on how the resurrection proves Christ's divinity.

2. In the *present*: Power

Philippians 3:10-11

...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

By raising Christ from the dead God demonstrated His power over sin and death. This power is available to us today. How can you use this power? Where does it come from?

3. In the *future*: Hope

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

The resurrected body of Jesus is the first piece in the observable universe to be redeemed. He has given a glimpse into what the New Heavens and New Earth will be like. What are some things that the resurrection may indicate about eternity?

As we consider the uniqueness of Christ's resurrection, we are reminded of the power of God to bring life to dead things. The evidences for the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ are irrefutable. The impact His resurrection had on His disciples is still being felt in the world today. And the resurrection has crucial importance in the life of the believer as they follow Christ's example and anticipate His return. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ the world finds what it most desperately needs: hope for life after death..

Week Five: The Uniqueness of Christ's Exaltation (His Ascension)

The ascension and exaltation of Christ is a fundamentally Christian doctrine. As Christians we assert that the same Jesus, who humbled Himself to death on the cross, has now been attributed the highest place of honor and authority by God the Father. His exaltation also implies His current reign over the world which He created. And it implies His eventual return to judge the living and the dead.

The Consequence of Christ's Exaltation (Worship and Evangelism)

The reality of Christ's exaltation has two significant implications in the life of every believer. First, it indicates that Christ is to be the central Figure of our worship. He is to be more than *admired* like Moses or Elijah. He is to be *adored* as the Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Read Isaiah 45:21-23. Paul takes these words from the Old Testament, where they apply to Yahweh, and reapplies them directly to the person of Jesus. What does this tell us about the way the New Testament writers and early Christians viewed Jesus?

When we worship Christ, we are acknowledging His rightful place as Lord over all. But we are also asserting that He is Lord over our personal lives. Have you given Him complete control over your life? List a few areas of your life that you need to recommit to Him as Lord and share them with the group.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

This also means that Christian missions and evangelism are not a horrible form of religious intolerance. We cannot force, or coerce, any one into following Christ. But one day God will force everyone to acknowledge Christ as Lord. How would you explain the purpose and meaning of evangelism to an unbeliever?

Does your life reflect Christ's rightful place as Savior and Lord? Are you worshipping Him as you should? Are you sharing Him with others as you should? Take time to pray that the Lord would help you in this, your greatest responsibility. Write down your prayer.

The Culmination of Christ's Exaltation (His Return)

The ultimate reminder of Christ's heavenly exaltation is that He will return to set up His Kingdom on earth. This is clear from the moment Jesus was taken up into Heaven. The return of Christ is as essential to His deity as the incarnation, crucifixion, or resurrection. As every word of Christ was proven true during His earthly ministry, we have a guaranteed assurance that He will return in the same way He left. It is on our part to both prepare for His coming and wait for it with patience expectation. At His return there will no longer be any doubt as to who Jesus really is.

Acts 1:9-11

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The ascension of Christ tells us His work on the earth is finished. Or is it? The angels promised He would return "in the same way." Is the work of Jesus finished or not? If not, what will He do during His return?

Matthew 24:30-31

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The return of Christ is promised throughout Scripture. We cannot know the precise day nor time. But Jesus taught that there would be certain signs that would indicate His return was drawing near. What are some of these? Include Scripture references.

The return of Christ is a great source of hope for believers. We have the promise that when He returns, we will see Him face to face. What do you think that day will be like? What are some of the emotions you may feel?

The return of Christ causes some people to feel uneasy. Many people, even some Christians, are so attached to this world that they are not looking forward to the day Jesus returns. What about you? Are there things that you feel you will miss from your old life? Do you believe seeing Jesus will far outweigh anything else?

Billy Graham once said, "If I knew that Christ was coming back tomorrow, I'd be doing exactly what I am doing today!" Yet, for many of us how drastically our lives would change if we knew Christ were returning tomorrow! It should not be so. We are to be constantly prepared for—and living in light of—His return. What might you need to change in your own life?

The ascension, exaltation, and return of Christ all provide important reminders of His unique position in history. No other person is accredited the power or place of Christ. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Week Six: The Uniqueness of Christ's Gift (His Spirit)

The role and purpose of the Holy Spirit is perhaps one of the most debated—and least understood—topics in Christianity. Yet, the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus and His continuing ministry in the world in which we live is definite. The essential role of the Holy Spirit is to take the person of Jesus Christ into the realm of experience for the believer. Again, this is unique. You can read the biographies of Hamilton, Lincoln, or Martin Luther King, and get a picture of what these men might have been like. But the Holy Spirit takes the life of Jesus from the theoretical to the personal.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-17, 25-26

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Jesus indicated that you can know the Holy Spirit. How might we know that we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us today?

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The Holy Spirit bestows power to His witnesses. Where does this power originate from? What does it empower us to do?

The Purpose of the Holy Spirit

1. To Convict the World

John 16:7-8

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the world. According to this passage, He is convicting the world of three things. Why might He be doing this? (Hint: Look at John 16:9-10)

2. To Counsel the Believer

John 14:25-26

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

The Holy Spirit also works within the life of the believer. In other translations He is referred to as the Comforter, the Counselor, or the Advocate. Considering these roles of the Holy Spirit, how is the Christian prepared to face the world in which they live?

Jesus says the Holy Spirit will teach us all things. What does this mean? What is the method and means of His teaching? How does He do it?

3. To Convey the Message of Christ

John 15:26-27

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

The Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to witness for Christ, because the Holy Spirit is constantly pointing us to Jesus. Oftentimes we feel inadequate to share Jesus with others. How do these verses encourage us?

The Presence of the Holy Spirit

John 14:16

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.

From this passage we learn that the Holy Spirit will never leave the Christian. Through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit Christ can truly say, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20) What is always available to the believer because of the eternal presence of the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Holy Spirit fell on each of the assembled believers at Pentecost. What are some things you notice from this passage? What were they doing? What happened to them after the Holy Spirit filled them? How does this line up with the purpose of the Holy Spirit that we have already discussed?

The Holy Spirit is yet another evidence to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gives contemporary, personal knowledge of Christ to the believer. Christ promised that His Spirit would be given to all believers throughout all time. And the internal working of the Spirit within the Christian allows them to live in obedience to God.

Stott tells the story of a man who was asked to write an amazing play like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. His response was, "Shakespeare could do it, but I can't." And so it is, that the Christian is asked to live an extraordinary life, like the life of Christ. Our response may very well be, "Christ could do it, but I can't." But the great truth is that the Spirit of Christ lives within you, to guide you. Therefore, you can in fact live a life of obedience and service. You may not be perfect. But the Spirit is. And whenever you submit to Him you will know Christ's greatest Gift.

Week Seven: The Uniqueness of Christ's Legacy (His Church)

A discussion on the uniqueness of Christ would not be complete without examining the Church which He founded. To be sure, the Church has had its fair share of difficulties and troubles. But I wish to emphasize we are not analyzing the modern Church's adherence to biblical principles. Instead, we wish to see if the Church as it is outlined in the pages of the New Testament was a distinctly unique entity, as it relates to the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is both the Founder and the Sustainer of the Church (see Matt 16:18; Heb 13:20-21). The endurance of the Church for nearly 2,000 years is another indicator of the uniqueness of Jesus. The (biblical) way in which Christians interact with one another and the world around them is of exceptional quality.

The Church's Relation with One Another

There are approximately 59 ways in the New Testament that believers are instructed to behave towards one another. Indeed, in the Church there is a connection and concentration of love which is unknown to the rest of the world. Bishop Stephen Neil was quoted as saying, "Friendship between the friends of Jesus of Nazareth is unlike any other friendship."

1. The Church is a Family.

Matthew 23:8-12

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The Church is made up of brothers and sisters. It takes people from different races, social backgrounds, languages, and economic ranks and creates a perfectly blended family. What are the ties that bind this family together?

2. The Church is a Body.

1 Corinthians 12:24-27

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Throughout the Scripture the Church is pictured as a body, with individuals working together for the good of the whole. This can only truly be experienced with the Church. Government, organizations, political parties, will always have people who are looking out for themselves. What is different about the Church?

Ephesians 4:11-12

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

In the Church there are leaders, but their job is to equip the followers. Such inverted management is typical of Jesus who told His disciples “Whoever would be great among

you must be your servant.” How does this verse tell us that no matter our position in the Church we have an important role to play in the Kingdom of Christ?

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The most important part of the body is the head. And so it is in the Church. Jesus is the Head; we are the members. How does Paul’s use of imagery here express the role of Christ in the Church? What about our roles?

3. The Church is a Bride

Revelation 19:7-9

*Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

In addition to the Church’s relation with one another, there is our relation to Christ. The Bible compares the relation between Christ and His Church to that of a husband and bride. What does this tell us about Christ’s connection to the Church?

The Church's Relation with the Outside World

Not only does the church have distinctive dealings within itself, but it also has a special relation with the world. The Church has an obligation, not to withdraw in on itself and have no interaction with unbelievers. Neither is to militantly demand the adherence of others to its precepts. Both of these are seen in all other religions around the world. Instead, the Church is to speak the truth in love to those who need to hear it most.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

The Church has an obligation not just to be considerate of people on the inside, but the outside as well. Here Paul indicates that the Christian should walk wisely before unbelievers. Part of this is in knowing how to give an answer to each person. Are you prepared to give an answer for the hope you have? If not, what are some things you can do to get ready?

1 Corinthians 14:24-25

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

The Church, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, plays an integral role in convicting the unbelieving world of their need for Christ. What are some ways that the Church can share and show the love of Christ with others?

1 Peter 2:16-17

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

In this passage we learn that the Church is given specific instructions on how it is to interact with the world, other members, God, and authority. Once we realize that we are servants of God living out the ministry of Christ, then we are better able to witness to a dying world. Are your priorities in the right place? Are you listening to God or to man? Take time to label the priorities of your life as God would lead you to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The Church has the unique and challenging position of having to stay above the world's sin and corruption, but also stay low enough to help the lowliest, desperate sinner. The Church is the extension of Jesus' life on the earth today. If the Church does not show the love of Christ to this sin-cursed world, then who will?

Conclusion

You have made it to the end of this seven-part Bible study. It is my prayer that God has used this to deepen your faith—but more importantly—that He has used it to glorify His Son. Jesus Christ is truth. Not just for yesterday. But for today. And not just for today, but for tomorrow. And not just for tomorrow, but for all eternity.

Perhaps this Bible study has opened your eyes to the person of Jesus Christ in a new way. Perhaps you have not given Him the rightful place in your life that He deserves. We all lose sight of Christ from time to time in the chaos of this this cursed world. But now is the time to set your eyes firmly upon Jesus. You need Him. The world around you needs Him. Commit your whole life to Him today. He is worth it all. I will close with this Scripture from Revelation 5:

And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation,

and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,

and they shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might

and honor and glory and blessing!”

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

There is no one else like Jesus. There never has been; there never will be. If Jesus Christ is in fact absolute Truth, then nothing else matters. You should give everything you have to Him and His cause. Will you do that today? If you would, then I would encourage you to simply take the time to pray. When you are ready, you may find it helpful to write down some words of commitment in the space provided below. In the end, make sure to tell Jesus how much you love Him, because He has already said how much He loves you.

If you made a decision to follow Christ, recommit your life to Him, or you just want more information about how you can better serve Him in your daily life, then you can send me an email at matt@tothecrossministries.com. I would be delighted to help you in any way I can. To Christ be the glory.