

What We Believe – 6. Work of Christ

We believe in: *“The work of the Lord Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection as Representative and Substitute; His atonement for sin, thereby securing righteousness, forgiveness and eternal life for all the elect of God; His bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven and priestly intercession for His people at the right hand of the Father.”*

A) Introduction

Along with its counterpart, the Person of Christ, these areas of Christian teaching are at the very centre of the Christian faith. There are aspects of doctrine where error, although serious, isn't deadly. But deny the person or work of Jesus and you deny the Father also (John 5:23).

The Person and Work of Christ go together, since Jesus is only able to do the work given to Him because of who He is. As truly God and truly Man, He alone can reconcile God and humanity as a second Adam.

B) What did Jesus come to do?

In short, he came to fix the mess that Adam made! However, Jesus' work was not God's plan B in response to human sin but was assigned to Him before creation (1 Peter 1:20).

Adam's responsibilities can be summarised in terms of three aspects or "offices". He was to be a prophet, receiving and communicating God's truth. He was to be a priest, leading the human race in worship of God (the Hebrew words translated *“to work it and keep it”* in Genesis 2:15 are used of the priests in Numbers 3:7-8, 18:5-6). He was to be a king, exercising dominion over God's earth as a vice-regent (Genesis 1:26, 28 – one early example of this is the naming of the animals, Genesis 2:20).

However, Adam failed in all three areas of his work. His disobedience plunged the world into the corruption of sin, and all his children have followed him (Romans 5:12).

The Old Testament anticipates a coming human (**Genesis 3:15**) who will reverse the curse of sin. In some leading figures we see the three offices clearly together (such as Moses and Samuel), but it is apparent that not one of these individuals is the hoped for “new man”. Yet when the Messiah comes, He will be a prophet (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**), a priest (**Psalms 110:4**) and a king (**Daniel 7:13-14**).

Adam’s failure has led to a two-fold problem for humanity. Firstly, there exists a debt of sin that requires the payment of justice. Secondly, there exists the need for the perfect prophet, priest and king. For the first problem we require a Substitute – one who can stand in our place as the sin-bearer. For the second problem we require a Representative – one who will succeed where we fail and live the life required of us. Jesus came to be both of these.

C) What did Jesus achieve?

In short, Jesus secured redemption. Through His earthly life we clearly see the three offices at work. At Gabriel’s announcement to Mary we learn that the child to be born will be a king in the line of David (**Luke 1:32-33**). And from the angel’s visit to Joseph we learn that He will deal with the sins of His people (**Matthew 1:21**). Both kingly and priestly offices are also alluded to by the visit of the magi, hailing Jesus as “*king of the Jews*” and presenting Him with royal and priestly gifts (**Matthew 2:2, 11**).

On entering His ministry, Jesus is baptised in identification with His people (e.g. **Matthew 3:13-17**), before facing the temptation of Satan as a new head of humanity (e.g. **Luke 4:1-13**). But where the first man was defeated, Jesus triumphs.

Jesus’ teaching surprises the crowds in that it comes with authority (**Matthew 7:28-29**). John says of Jesus that He makes the Father known (**John 1:18**) and Jesus Himself professes to be “*the truth*” (**John 14:6**) and to have come “*to bear witness of the truth*” (**John 18:37**). He is the ultimate fulfilment of the prophet promised in **Deuteronomy 18**. His

miracles also have both a prophetic and kingly function in that they point to Jesus' kingdom and to His power over sin and its corruption (e.g. **Matthew 9:1-8**).

As the opposition against Jesus mounts up He begins to speak of His suffering and death (e.g. **Mark 8:31**). Whilst this is a great shock to the 12 disciples (**Mark 8:32-33**), readers of the Gospels have been prepared for this from the beginning (**Matthew 2:11, Luke 2:35, John 1:29**).

Borrowing language from **Isaiah 53, 1 Peter 2:24** explains that Jesus' death was as a substitute, suffering the penalty that our sins deserve. Through His death, sin was "atoned for" and the veil that symbolically separated sinful man from holy God was destroyed (**Matthew 27:51**). Thus God's justice and mercy are both expressed as God is shown to be "*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*" (**Romans 3:26**).

D) What is Jesus doing now?

In short, Jesus is reigning, speaking and interceding – i.e. He is continuing the work of the three offices. His glorious bodily resurrection from the dead was evidence of His vindication by the Father (**Romans 1:3-4**), and secures the "living hope" of all who trust in Him (**1 Peter 1:3**). The resurrection is an essential component of Christ's work – without it there could be no salvation (**1 Corinthians 15:17**).

For 40 days Jesus continued to be present with His followers and to teach them about the kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**), continuing His prophetic ministry. Then He ascended into heaven (**Acts 1:9**) and sat down at the right hand of the Father (**Hebrews 1:3**, ref. **Psalms 110:1**). Although as to His divine nature, He has always possessed power and sovereignty, now as the God-Man He receives all authority (**Matthew 28:18**) and is exalted above everything (**Philippians 2:9-11**).

Jesus' first regal act is to pour out the Holy Spirit upon the church (**Acts 2:33**), empowering His people for service, that they might continue to exercise dominion through the earth through making disciples

(**Matthew 28:19**). Thus the kingly reign of Jesus is manifested in the extension of His kingdom, whilst He continues to speak through His Word and Spirit.

As to His priestly office, **Romans 8:34** and **Hebrews 7:25** speak of Jesus' ongoing work of intercession. Just as the high priest interceded on behalf of the people by taking the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy place (**Leviticus 16:1-22**), so Jesus intercedes on behalf of His church by presenting His death to the Father. His death was the shedding of His blood for our sin; His intercession is the presenting of His blood to the Father. It is the ongoing application of what was done once-for-all at Calvary.

Jesus' intercession means that He is continually acting on our behalf before the Father. That the exalted, ascended King – whom angels worship – would spend His time seeking the ongoing good of His people should fill Christians with tremendous encouragement and great security. No accusation of Satan can ever stick.

E) Conclusion

The work of the Lord Jesus, though perfect and complete, is not altogether finished in its application. He is still at work in us His followers until we are brought to completion (**Philippians 1:6**), He is continually making intercession on our behalf (**Hebrews 7:25**) and the whole of creation is groaning until He returns to bring in the new heavens and the new earth (**Romans 8:19-23**). But what He declared to be finished on the cross (**John 19:30**) has secured a cosmic redemption. Nothing can or will prevent Christ from completing what was assigned to Him by the Father. It is only a matter of time.