

MERCY & MAJESTY

**The Supreme Glory
of Christ**

Steve Fernandez

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CHAPTER ONE

The Supreme Glory of Christ

A few weeks after the tragedy of September 11th, Larry King assembled a panel of religious leaders from America on his nationally syndicated television show. He invited men from different faiths to ask them the question, "Where was God when these things happened?"

Among them was Deepak Chopra from San Diego, a best selling author whose books include *How To Know God*. He is the CEO and founder of the Chopra Center for Well-Being. He teaches a New Age-Hindu view of God, although perhaps he would not call it that. King also had on the panel a Jewish rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner. Kushner is the author of many books including *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, a popular book written a number of years ago. There was also a Muslim leader by the name of Maher Hathout. He is the senior advisor at the Muslim Public Affairs Council. Also there was evangelical leader John MacArthur. MacArthur is the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and president of The Master's College and Seminary. He is a best selling author who also has a popular national radio program.

They went back and forth disagreeing with each other on much of what was discussed. Finally a caller said, "You get these guests of all different faiths, I guess, and they say the extremists have problems. We all talk about it and they can't agree on anything. But these fellows can't agree on who

the authority is. The authority's name is God. And I think we have to look at it in a more broad sense. Who is God? He is God, you know."

In response to this caller, Larry King went around the panel and asked, "Who is God?" The interchange between MacArthur and the Muslim leader on this question shows the vital significance of what Christians call the doctrine of the incarnation. This, of course, is the doctrine that the eternal Son of God became a man. Specifically, it is the teaching that God has become a man and his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. King asked John MacArthur, "Who is God?" MacArthur answered,

Well, back to that question about God. I hear all these responses, but we have to go back to some authority outside ourselves. I mean I cannot define the God of the universe by starting with me. God in the scripture is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is the Sovereign over everything, Who was incarnated in Jesus Christ. He came down and died on a cross to provide atonement, so that the sins of those who repent were paid for in full. And therefore heaven was opened to them. That is God revealed in the Scriptures.

Larry King, after a couple of comments, turned to Muslim leader Dr. Hathout and asked, "How would you respond?" Here is the Muslim's response: "I agree with everything John said except for the incarnation part, because we don't believe in that. We believe that God is way beyond being present in time, or space, or imprisoned in a place. He is beyond perception. He is beyond concretization. He can't be localized in a body." King then asked Hathout, "Is Mohammed to you what Christ is to John?" Hathout replied, "No, to him Christ is God. To me Christ is a messenger of God." Larry King

then said, "Do you mean like Mohammed?" "Yes, like Mohammed!"

The significance of the interchange cannot be overstated. It brings out the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity. The Muslim leader was admitting that there is a vast chasm between Christianity and Islam and other world religions. They are not all the same, leading to the same God. Christianity alone teaches that God became a man and His name was Jesus Christ. That is not what Muslims teach and claim about Mohammed. They make no claims that Mohammed was God in the flesh as Christians do of Christ. It is a marvel to me to listen to people who are supposedly Christians talk as if all religions are the same. They are not the same! A Muslim will tell you that they are not the same! A Buddhist will tell you they are not the same!

Christianity asserts – as Christ Himself claimed – that Christ is God. Scripture and Christianity assert that Christ is more than a mere prophet. He is the God who sent the prophets! Now if that is true, Mohammedism is false, because the Koran says that anyone who claims that Jesus is the Son of God is an infidel, and must be punished.

The Incarnation is the Foundation of the Church and Demonstrates the Supreme Glory of Christ

By way of introduction, we will look at two things that show the significance and absolute centrality of the incarnation to the Christian faith. First, the fact that Christ is the eternal God who became man is the foundation of the church. It is the rock-foundation upon which everything else stands.

If Christ is not God in the flesh, then He is not qualified to redeem man, for He is a mere man Himself. All stands or falls here. In other words, a right perception of the person of Christ is critical to the condition of your soul and your eternal standing before God.

The second thing that shows the significance of the incarnation is that it reveals the glory of the person of Christ. There exists in Christ, in the same person, two distinct natures. One nature is eternal, infinite, almighty—the very being and nature of God. The other nature began in time, is finite, limited, and confined to a space—the very nature of man. It is important to realize that the human nature of Christ, to begin with, had no personality. The eternal Son of God, who is without beginning, gave the human nature its personality. In other words, there are not two persons. There are two natures, but there is just one person. This one person, the eternal Son of God, by the incarnation, exists through and in both of these natures simultaneously. There is no one like Him.

Colossians 1 deals with the glory of the person of Christ. Let us look at it, and I will try to explain further. Colossians 1:16 says, “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him.” This speaks of the divine person of Christ. He is the creator God. How much did He create? All things! Everything! In addition, He is eternal. Verse 17 says, “And He is before all things.” As creator, He predates the physical creation. He is eternal; He is before the universe and all spiritual creation as well. Finally, verse 17b says, “And in Him all things hold together.” Christ not only created all things, but He sustains all and He

orchestrates it all even at this moment. These things demonstrate the deity, the divine nature, and divine being of Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

Next Paul speaks of Christ's humanity. Colossians 1:18 says, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead" –this refers to the resurrection of Christ's physical human body. Christ became a man, died as a man, and was raised from the dead in His human body as a man! Therefore, as a result of the fact that He is both God and man, He has come to have first place in everything. He is preeminent. Paul says in verse 18b, "...so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything." Christ is supreme above all. Though He is a man, He is the God-man! And Christ, as the God-man, is supremely glorious!

The Threefold Glory of Christ's Incarnation

The Glory of the Constitution of His Person

We will now look at the threefold glory of Christ's incarnate person. First, there is the glory of the constitution of His person. By His incarnation, Christ was constituted a completely unique person. What do we mean? We mean that He, though one person, now possesses two distinct natures. As I said, the human nature of Christ had no personality. Therefore, the incarnation does not mean that there was a person (named Jesus of Nazareth) whom God came upon in some special way. In other words, there are not two persons: Jesus of Nazareth and God. There is one person. That person—God Himself—took to Himself a human nature and gave

that nature its personality. The eternal God, therefore, took on a new existence—existence as a man. A number of passages make this clear. For example, we are told in the Gospels that when Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, it was called “that holy thing [offspring]” (Luke 1:35). It is described with a neuter case, not with a masculine or feminine. This indicates that the embryo in her womb initially did not have a personality. It was not yet a person. At some point, which we are not told, Christ came and took possession and gave personality to the body in Mary’s womb. Then in Hebrews 10:5 it says of Christ, “...a body Thou hast prepared for Me.” Notice that first the body was prepared, then the eternal Son took possession of it. The Scripture also tells us that, as Mary nursed Him, He trusted God. Psalm 22:9 says, “Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother’s breasts.” Clearly Christ was conscious of who He was while He nursed from Mary’s breast! Even as an infant, He remained the eternal omniscient God who knew all things. In His human nature, yes, He grew and learned. But in His divine nature, which He always possessed, He did not learn anything.

Along these lines the Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus would talk to people in response to their thought life. He would speak out of his omniscient divine nature. A Pharisee, for example, criticized Him for allowing a woman known as a sinner to pour perfume on Him and anoint His feet. Luke reports that the Pharisee said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what sort of person this woman is” (Luke 7:38-39). Christ then turned to him and said, “Simon, I have something to say to you” (Luke 7:40). He spoke to him based on his thought life! Can you imagine what that would be like? Imagine, just for the sake of illustration, coming to

church wearing new clothes. You see a friend and think to yourself, *I don't think she likes my outfit*. Then the person turns and says, "Oh no, I do like your outfit." All you did was think it, yet this person answers you as if you spoke it! How frightening that would be! Christ did that very thing. He talked to people based on knowing their thoughts.

Therefore, there is only one person, the divine eternal Son, and it is He who gave personality to the human nature. The title "Son of God," as I have mentioned many times, does not mean that Christ had a beginning. It means that He has the same nature as the Father. And we will see that clearly as we go through this study. So Christ's glory is seen in His uniquely constituted person. He assumed (took on Himself) a human nature, yet at the same time—and this is the marvel—He remained the eternal Son of God.

Now notice what John says about Christ in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John says to go back to the beginning. You would naturally think of Genesis 1:1 where God created the heavens and the earth. There is no doubt that is alluded to here. Go back to that beginning—the beginning of the universe, the beginning of the physical creation—and the Word is there! "The Word was," John says. He was already continuously existing. The phrase "in the beginning" reads literally in Greek "in beginning," but it does not read well in English. In other words, there is no "the" used before the word "beginning." It is simply "in beginning." John is not referring to a specific known beginning. He is referring to any beginning. Even in English we use the word "the" to specify. For example, a man's wife says, "I'll meet you at the bank," and he knows where it is. It is where they regularly bank or else

she would not say *the* bank. But if she says, "I'll meet you at *a* bank," he would say, "Now wait a minute that doesn't do me any good; there's a lot of banks in town; it's not specific." John said, "in beginning"; he does not use the definite article "the," so he does not refer to a specific beginning. He is referring to anything that could be called a beginning. This is the strongest possible way to state that Christ Himself has no beginning. Go back to any beginning, which means all beginnings, and Christ "was." That is, He already is. He continually exists before any and all beginnings. Since He already exists at any and all beginnings He Himself has none! It is the strongest way possible to say that He is eternal. Moreover, John says Christ was with God, which refers to the Father. The preposition "with" speaks of face-to-face communion with the Father from all eternity. Therefore, the great truth of the incarnation is this: the eternal Son, continually existing without beginning, consciously acted to come into this world and assume the form of a man to join Himself to a human nature. We see it in verse 14 where John says, "The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us."

It would be helpful if we go to the book of Isaiah and look at the famous prophecies in Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 9. First, Isaiah 9:6 says, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us." Here we are told that there is to be "a child...a son...given." Now notice it goes on to say, "His name will be called Wonderful." It means that this person will be wondrous, awe-inspiring, peculiar and unique, full of wonder! The thing that makes Him full of wonder is the incarnation. He is to be the God-man amongst men. He is also called "Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"—a child who is Mighty God and Eternal Father! Notice it is one person, not two. This one child is also Mighty God, Eternal Father.

Amazing! Hebrews 2:14 says it like this: “Because the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same.” So by an act of His will, He chooses to become a man. He chooses to subsist in a human nature the same way He subsists in His divine nature—to exist through it and in it. When He exists in this human nature, He does not cease to act in and through His divine nature. He exists in both simultaneously.

What this means is that while He sits and has a meal while on earth, while He discusses things with humans, at that same moment His divine nature knows everything that is going on everywhere in the world and in the universe. Though He is truly a man, He remains omniscient and omnipresent. While He sits visiting, He is controlling all things everywhere in the world and throughout the universe. Therefore, He has a human nature by which He thirsts and hungers and suffers. But at the same time, He still continues to possess the divine nature by which He knows and controls all things. He controls all and cares for all while He sits and visits. That truly is wonderful! He should be called wonderful! In other words, the eyes of the person coming out of His human body are not the eyes of just a human person. It is a human body with human eyes, but the person making contact with you, the person animating the eyes, the person animating the body, is the Son who has no beginning. Truly, He is glorious!

In Philippians 2, Paul carries this out further. He says in verse 8, “He came and He humbled Himself...to the point of death, even death on a cross”—the death of a criminal. The eternal God dies! This is an amazing thought. The heavens themselves and the sun must react to this, and they did. The sun and the stars grew dark. The earth must

react, so it shook violently. He is wonderful. And He is your Savior, if you have turned to Him. And He is your friend as well. He has all power and all wisdom and is full of good intentions for you, and He has already proved it on the cross. There can be no doubt.

Secondly, we see that his assumption of a human nature means that there is now a union (this is somewhat overlapping I know), a permanent union of the two natures in one person. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall be with child and bear a son." A virgin is going to have a child, a son. It goes on to say, "She will call his name Emmanuel," which, of course, means "God with us." So it was prophesied that God would become a man, and there are many more prophecies in the Bible we could point to. So now there is a union, because of His assumption of this nature to Himself, a union of these two natures: Not a mixing of the natures, nor a mingling of them, nor a conversion of them both into a kind of new nature that was unheard of before. The two natures stay distinct; they are never mingled. Christ said of Himself in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was born, I am." He, in essence, was saying – because they knew of His physical birth 30 years earlier – that He received His human nature 30 years before, but He possesses another nature which He had before Abraham was. "Before Abraham was, I am." That is, 2,000 years prior to their time, He already existed! He is one person, but united in Him are two natures – He can be acted upon or He can act in either nature. Yet, these two natures are never mingled.

So He can be hungry and eat, and while hungry or eating, He can read your mind. He can become tired and sleep. He can be weary, fall asleep in a boat, and yet wake up and say "be calm and be still"

to a raging sea and it become perfectly calm. So there He is in His human nature, asleep in the boat, apparently uncaring and not knowing what is going on. He wakes up and sees seasoned Galilean fishermen, who have been on that lake all their lives, terrified by a 100-year storm. "Be still!" He says. And then He turns and says to them, "Why are you afraid?" It is as if He says, "Don't you know that even when I'm asleep, I am not asleep? That I neither slumber nor sleep?" (Psalm 121). A person sent me a little note that said, "Before you go to bed tonight, pray, because God is going to be up all night anyway." Christ never gets tired in His divine nature, and He always knows exactly what you are going through.

So in this union of the divine and human natures in Christ, the natures are preserved distinct. The divine nature cannot change. It is immutable. There is no shadow of turning in it. It is unchangeable. The Bible makes it clear that the divine nature—God's nature—cannot change. Therefore, Christ could never have lost that. He continued to possess all the nature of God—all the attributes in their fullness and perfections—while, simultaneously, He possessed the nature of man.

In Colossians 2:9 Paul says, "In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in a bodily form." Now listen to Paul's language very carefully. He did not really need to use the word "all." "In Him the fullness of deity dwells" would have been adequate. If you say "fullness," you mean that you have all that you need. You do not need anymore. To say "all fullness" is emphatic. It stresses something so that we do not miss it. It is an emphatic way of saying that all the fullness of deity—the divine nature—was in Him in bodily form. He had the fullness of the divine attributes in a human body. And all the

attributes were at His disposal. This is a marvel! He is wonderful! Truly, He is wonderful! This is why the Christian sings. Someone says, “Why do these Christian people sing the way they do?”—as is sometimes asked about our church. How can they not sing? They are not going to wait for you to start singing. Play on! This great and wonderful Savior has come. He has redeemed us; He has delivered us and we want to sing to Him! So we see He preserves both natures distinct in His one person. There is a single person acting in both natures. These natures are indivisible, yet they cannot be mixed. It is not like water being turned into wine. No! There is still a distinct human nature and a distinct divine nature, yet one person actuates and personalizes both. It is an amazing thing! This is what makes Him preeminent and praiseworthy! That is why Paul said, “...that He may have first place.” That is why Isaiah says, “His name shall be called wonderful”—full of wonder, yes full of wonder! So this is the glory of the constitution of His unique person.

The Glory of His Condescension From His Exalted Position

Next is the glory of the condescension that He made from His exalted position as God. Philippians 2:5 says, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” We must remember that this passage is an explanation of why we, as Christians, must prefer one another and consider one another more important than ourselves, and look not on our own interests only (notice Philippians 2:3-4). Verses 5 and 6 say, “Have this attitude in yourself which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He existed in the form of God...” “Form” means that He possessed in His essential being the full nature of

God. The term refers to more than a mere incidental outward, external form. It is a form that reflects an inherent, essential reality. We get our word “metamorphosis” from this word. It refers to something changed in its essential nature, like a caterpillar to a butterfly. Christ was in the form of God. It was His essential nature. This is proven by verses 6 and 7, which say that He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself.” This speaks of His condescension and humility. Though He was an infinite, majestic, exalted being—truly God—“He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.” He did not empty Himself of being God. As God, He is unchangeable and immutable. He emptied Himself of being displayed as God, of receiving adoration as God. In short, He veiled and hid His glory!

Next, we see His motivation for this great condescension. It came from within Himself. Verse 7 says, “He emptied Himself” —He took the initiative. There was nothing imposed upon Him. Nothing was done out of necessity; it came from within. He was compelled and constrained by His own love and mercy for the most lowly, insignificant, and unworthy creatures. That was His motivation.

Notice also the magnitude of His condescension. He was in the form of God. This means that in His essence and being, He fully possessed and displayed the nature of God. There is an infinite distance between his exalted position and ours. “Infinite” means it is beyond proportion or comparison. You can compare something only if there is a legitimate comparison. You can compare great athletes, but you cannot compare a great basketball player with someone who cannot even dribble a basketball, nor can you compare a great football player with

someone who cannot even run. There are some things that are just not comparable. He is so infinite and above us that the Bible says there is nothing to compare Him to. All our greatness is nothing to Him. Isaiah tells us that the nations are like a drop in the bucket; they are like grasshoppers and worms to Him. There is no proportion. He is infinitely high.

You can compare the Pacific Coast Mountain Range to other mountains, though few of them can be called true mountains. Mount Tamalpais is barely a mountain, and Mount Diablo is more of a mountain. But when you compare them to the Sierras, they are not really mountains. People from the Midwest visit here and say, "These mountains in Vallejo are really something." I have had people say, "It must be fun living in the mountains!" Imagine Vallejo known for its mountains! I say to them, "Let me take you to the Sierras, and you can see real mountains." So you can compare the Coast Range with the Sierras if you like. But then you cannot compare the Sierras with the Himalayas. Even Mount Whitney does not compare with the Himalayas! Then if you get on a space shuttle and orbit the earth, you cannot even see any mountains. In comparing one to the other, there is no noticeable difference. It looks like a flat surface globe. God says, "Who can you compare Me too? All the nations are like a drop in the bucket." There is no proportion. And the Bible says it was a stooping, a bowing down, for God to even take notice of us. Not just to come to earth, but even to notice us. It would be a stooping down for great people to even notice some of us, would it not? Someone of greatness would not even know who we are or take notice of us. It would be another thing for them to come here. God says it is a stooping, a bowing low, for Him to even notice us, let alone to come to be with us.

Psalm 113:5-6 says, "Who is like the Lord our God who is enthroned on high? Who humbles Himself to behold [notice, He humbles Himself to behold] the things that are in heaven...?" Heaven is greater than the earth, and He says He is stooping and humbling Himself even to notice the things which are going on in heaven. How much more to notice you who are fallen, sinful and rebellious. So what a great infinite condescension and stooping down it must be that such a majestic being would not only notice us but also come to be with us, and not only come to be with us but to become one of us? Amazing! Absolutely amazing. And then he died in an act of obedience on the cross to bear our sin and guilt!

The magnitude of His condescension is seen not only because of His infinite distance above us. It is seen also because of the infinite self-sufficiency and excellency of His person. He has no need. He is perfect in His qualities and His attributes. He is not unhappy and unsatisfied so that He needs something.

Romans 11:34-35 says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord or who became His counselor. Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?" Notice, "Who has known the mind of the Lord or who became His counselor?" God has never been confused so that He needed a counselor. He has never been perplexed at what has happened or at what has gone wrong. He has never said, "I don't know why this happened?" He has never needed to be counseled. He has never needed more information. He has never needed to learn anything, for He knows all. He has absolutely no need. Then it says, "Who has given to Him that it might be paid back?" In other words, there has never been something that someone had that He needed. He has

never received something from someone so that He owes it to him. He has never been in debt to anyone. He has never had a lack or been unhappy or dissatisfied and had to receive something from someone. On the contrary, there is nothing He needs. He is completely self-satisfied and self-sufficient in His person, as well as exalted in an infinite distance above us. This brings great glory to Christ, does it not?

That takes us back to Philippians 2. It speaks of the glory of His condescension, His coming down, what we call His stooping. It is not only the motive with which He did it that glorifies Him. It is not only the magnitude of it that glorifies Him. It is the mode of existence which He took to Himself that glorifies Him. It says in verses 6 and 7, "He humbled Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of man." That would have been enough, but it goes further. "And being found in the appearance of man" — an actual man, He then humbled Himself further — "He became obedient." In our place He became obedient. In place of our rebellion He became obedient — "He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of a cross."

The cross was well known in the Roman world. They crucified malefactors, the worst of criminals. He hung between heaven and earth, thought to be smitten of God, as a vile criminal. (It is wonderful, great and glorious!) These criminals were so wicked and vile that they took them outside the city walls to execute them. Christ was crucified outside the city, as were the vilest of criminals.

How humble we should be; how patient we should be; how kind we should be; how trusting of Him we should be; how intent on honoring Him we should be. The marvel of this is that, as we said, He maintained His divine nature through all of this.

When He emptied Himself, it was only an emptying of the display of His deity. This is evident in the Gospel of John, for example, when as the Jews were about to stone Christ, He asked them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me? The Jews answered Him...because You, being a man make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:32-33). They saw a mere man when in fact He was God. They did not see any glory in Him, nothing at all glorious. And that is still true. To Christians He is precious, but to the rest who believe not, He is a rock of offense, a stone of stumbling. They see nothing in Him. At best, He is another Mohammed. But for those who have been given eyes and who have been drawn and convicted, He is glorious. He is more than glorious. The Christian life, in fact, is an ever-increasing gaze upon this glory. Therefore, His glory is seen in the mode of His existence in that He was made a man who died a criminal's death. It was an act of self-humbling where He laid aside His glory. It was an act where He took on manhood, actually becoming a man. In other words, He became what He was not, but He ceased not to be what He was! This is the glory of His condescension from His exalted position.

The Glory of the Consequences of the Incarnation for His People

The last thing that shows He is glorious in His incarnation is its consequences for His people. The first consequence is that by the incarnation He has revealed to us the glory of His person and work. It is His person that primarily attracts true Christians—by the Spirit's work of showing Christ to them. But He is glorious to Christians not only because of who He is, but also because of what He has done. His

people see the glory of His person and the glory of His work. "Those who are perishing" perish because they believe not; their minds are blinded by the god of this age lest they "see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:3, 4). The lost are blinded to Christ's glory. However, to His people He has revealed His glory.

The second result of the incarnation is that He is His people's rock and sure foundation. As the God-man, He is His people's unshakable rock. The gates of hell will oppose this great reality, but they will not succeed against it. Matthew 16:18 says, "And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." The gates of hell, in other words, will assault the identity and glory of the person of Christ, but they will not prevail. Jesus asked those men, "Who do people say I am?" They said, "Some say you are Jeremiah. Some say you are John the Baptist, raised from the dead. And some say you are the prophet" – the great prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18. Christ said, "Who do you say I am?" They said, "You are the Christ; the Son of the living God." They did not mean that Christ was created. They meant that He had all the attributes of God. There is a sameness in the sonship of Christ – He is unique in His relation to the Father. There is a sameness of nature in Christ with the Father. "You are the Son," they declared! "Your character, your being, demonstrates that you possess God's nature. You are God's Son," they confessed! "We've seen a sea calmed. We've seen the dead raised. We've heard words that you spoke that no man has ever spoke. We watched entire villages healed as you walked through their infirm and touched them. You are the Son of the living God! You are God in the flesh." Christ then said, "Blessed are you, Simon

Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you [you did not come to that on your own], but My Father Who is in heaven" has revealed that to you (Matthew 16:17). As God incarnate, He is the rock of the church, and the Devil will assault that. It says the gates of hell will not prevail against it, meaning that the gates of hell will, in fact, make an assault on Christ's glory. Throughout the church's history, all heresy, all problems in the church, have fundamentally been a result of the demeaning of His glory – a diminishing of His person, a hiding of Him, an obscuring of Him. But He said that they will not prevail. So He is the resting place of our faith.

The third consequence of the incarnation for His people is that He is the ruin of Satan. Remember the Devil—the Bible calls him the great shining one; Lucifer, the shining star; the highest of the created spirit beings and angelic creation; the highest of them all: the anointed Cherub—rebelled against Christ's nature. He rebelled against Christ's divinity and His divine authority. He said, "I will not serve Him. I will be like Him." So he rebelled against the Son of God's rightful place wherein He receives adoration and esteem and glory. He rebelled against Him. Then when God created man and put him in the garden, Satan came into the garden and destroyed human nature. So he rebelled against the divine nature and authority, and then he destroyed human nature. Therefore, God put in one person—Christ—both the human and divine, and destroyed the Devil. He broke Satan's hold on sin, and He broke the power of death. And you know that you have met Him because sin's bondage has been broken.

We know as Christians that the purpose of the incarnation was redemptive. His incarnation was redemptive in its design and purpose. We know that there is an impassable barrier of sin. The Bible tells

us this, and we have been awakened to it. Sin is so offensive to God that it created a barrier that simply cannot be removed by man. You cannot redeem yourself. You cannot self-reform. You cannot remove your sin by being good. You have an impassable barrier in sin. We know that God will bring a sure judgment upon every man and boy and girl and woman –the Bible says it and we know it is true because of Calvary. We know this because of the nature of sin. Sin created a chasm of offense. It created a moral chasm that cannot be crossed. There is no one that can redeem himself, because each is so filled with what he needs to be redeemed from. The Bible says in Revelation 5 that John saw a scroll in the hand of the one sitting on the throne—which was the Father—and there was no one to take the scroll, which represented the redemption and deliverance of the earth. There was no one adequate. As John began to weep and cry, an elder came and said to John, “Stop weeping; the lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome.” He alone was found in heaven and earth because He is not a man fallen in sin. He is the God-man—God in a human nature so that He can redeem man and at the same time satisfy God. He can be, as it were, a bridge between man and God for sinners to cross over. He is the only way, and the Christian knows this. He is infinite in His grace and kindness. And He is now our refuge and our place of solace. John Owen, commenting on Isaiah 8:14 which says of Christ, “He shall become a sanctuary,” remarks,

He is...a sanctuary, an assured refuge unto all that betake themselves unto Him. What is it that any man in distress...may look for in a sanctuary? A supply of all his wants, a deliverance from all his fears, a defense against all his dangers, is proposed unto him therein. Such is the Lord Christ...to sin-distressed souls; He is a refuge unto us in all spiritual distresses

and disconsolations. Are we, or any of us, burdened with a sense of sin? Are we perplexed with temptations? Are we bowed down under the oppression of any spiritual adversary? Do we, on any of these accounts, “walk in darkness and have no light?” One view of the glory of Christ...is able to support us and relieve us. What will He not do for us? He who thus emptied and humbled Himself, who so infinitely condescended from the prerogative of His glory in His being and His self-sufficiency...for the discharge of the office of a mediator on our behalf,—will He not relieve us of all our distresses? Will He not do all for us we stand in need of...? Will He not be a sanctuary...to us? Nor have we...any ground to fear His power; for, by this infinite condescension to be a suffering man, He lost nothing of His power as God omnipotent,—nothing of His infinite wisdom or glorious grace. He could still do all that He could do as God from eternity. If there be any thing, therefore...to constitute a sanctuary for distressed sinners, it is all in Christ Jesus.

He is still the God that He was. He has not lost His divine nature. So we have as our sanctuary and mediator the God-man. It is an amazing thing to me. I have been saved a while, so I have come to see that it is true not only in Scripture, but it has proven true in experience as well. He will never leave me; He will never forsake me. A passage in Psalms says, “I will make you fruitful in your old age. You will flourish and prosper in your latter days. Surely goodness and mercy will pursue you all the days of your life. I will make a table for you in the midst of your enemies.” Oh, why are you not a Christian? How foolish! You do not know what you are missing. Have you turned to Him and said, “God, I want to be a Christian. I bow my knee; I know I am a sinner; I know that my only way to go to heaven is

CHAPTER TWO

The Supreme Reason Christ Became Man

Jesus Christ was not just a man. He was God in the form of a man. The New Testament teaches that the eternal God became a man, and His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. The following story can help us understand the great significance of the incarnation—of God taking on human flesh and becoming a man.

Antioch was the city from which the apostle Paul was sent forth on his missionary journeys. It was a great Roman provincial city of over 200,000 people known for its commerce as well as for its culture. In February 387, there was a riot in the city. The imperial government had decreed that it would impose a new tax on the people—a new and exorbitant tax above the tax burden the people already carried. A great crowd of people gathered and went to the town hall to address their city councilmen to demand that they appeal to the governor and protest this tax. When the governor refused the appeal, a riot broke out in the streets of the city. A roving mob attacked the governor's mansion, and vandalized the public baths. They also pulled down the pictures of the emperor and destroyed the bronze statues of his likeness. As a result, the city was in absolute dread of what the emperor would do.

There was a famous preacher in the city at this time by the name of John Chrysostom, also known as John of Antioch. They called him Chrysostom, which means “golden mouth,” since he was such a great

orator. John preached that next Sunday to a packed church; to a people in terror of what the emperor would do to punish their city. They were well aware that the emperor, in response to civil unrest, had just slaughtered 40,000 people in Thessalonica (a Grecian city not far removed from them), including many hundreds of women and children. So they were terrified. There were many ideas of what would happen, including the possibility that the emperor would raze their city from the face of the earth.

Chrysostom preached a number of sermons during this time while the emperor delayed his decision on what he would do. There were many theaters in the city, and much entertainment including a hippodrome, where they had chariot races. However, no one was attending these entertainments, for the people feared for their lives. So they packed the church. He said to the congregation on one occasion, "You are like a harbor that is packed with ships in bad weather, wondering what the emperor will do!" It reminds us of the recent events of September 11th, doesn't it? I don't know if our church has ever been as packed as it was September 16th. People were frightened by what had happened, so they went to church. Well, they were packed into John's church, too. On another occasion he said, "Normally our city is as busy as a hive of bees. Now the streets are deserted and everyone who has not abandoned it is shut up indoors."

People were terrified, constantly hearing about the latest person to be rounded up and executed. The emperor, in the interim, had sent two commissioners to Antioch who arrested anyone even indirectly suspected or remotely responsible for what had happened. People crammed into the judicial courts where the authorities passed sentence on the

accused. Soldiers, armed with clubs and swords, stood guard around the relatives and families of the accused. Outside the courtroom the families would wait—the agonizing silence pierced periodically by the shrieking of someone who was being scourged. The accused would be sentenced to death, then quickly led away in chains to be executed; their property seized by the state, and their wives and children left without a roof over their heads. John said in a sermon, “There is a great despondency which weighs heavy upon us.” In desperation, they asked Bishop Flavian, the aged patriarch who had mentored John Chrysostom, to go on the city’s behalf and speak before the emperor. John himself requested, “Flavian, make your way to Constantinople and beg Theodosius that he will pardon us.” So they sent him off on the long journey, passing the commissioners on the way who had been sent by the emperor to Antioch. As the church prayed, they heard unexpected news—the emperor had relented and released the city from its guilt. Flavian had somehow won the emperor.

This account from church history vividly illustrates the great significance of the incarnation—God taking on human flesh and becoming a man. More specifically, it helps us grasp the great and glorious reason for the incarnation. We have been looking at the incarnation. We have been looking at who Christ is. All the way through this passage, in the beginning chapters of the book of Hebrews, the uniqueness of Christ is affirmed. It declares that He was God. It declares that the man Jesus Christ was not actually a man in His true identity. In His person, in His identity, He was the eternal Son of God. It declares that He became a man; that He took a body to Himself. Chapter 2, verse 14 says, “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He

Himself likewise also partook of the same." The eternal Son of God became a man. He took on flesh and blood. Notice also verse 17: "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things." So who is Christ? Hebrews 1:6, tells us, "And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, and let all the angels of God worship Him." Christ is the eternal God who came into the world. He, who had no beginning, became a man. He is unique, unparalleled, and supreme. There is no one like Him. He is the eternal God who became man. Therefore, we, with the angels, must worship Him.

But what is the reason that He became a man? This is answered in chapter 2, verses 17 and 18. The supreme reason why He came into the world was to be—like Flavian before the Emperor Theodosius—our representative before God. Notice verse 17: "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." This is the great and glorious reason why He became a man. Man needs a representative before God. Like Antioch of old, the Bible says that man is in great disfavor, not with a mere emperor, but with God Himself. Man has offended God; he has sacked and pillaged His glory. And so Christ came into the world to be our high priest, our representative before God, to represent all those He will save.

This is why you must not reject Him; this is why you need Him. The whole book of Hebrews declares this. It declares that if you are not a Christian, you need Christ. It is amazing the dread that can come on people like it did recently on September 11th. That same dread, only more, came on Antioch. The Bible says that man is in an even more dreadful position before God. Therefore, man needs a

representative. In other words, this passage declares that you cannot die without Christ, but more than that, it says that you cannot live without Him either. First, in verse 17, it says that you cannot die without Him, since He alone made a sacrifice to put away sins so that He can represent you before God as your sin-bearer. It says that Christ became “a faithful High Priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Secondly, in verse 18, it says that you can’t live without Him either. Look at verse 18: “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” Christ comes to the aid of those who are tempted—that is, His people. He Himself supports and sustains them. He is able to do this because of what He has suffered. He has felt and experienced the very things that His people experience and He is able to support them. As a result, He is able to help His people live, and He is able to help them die. Therefore, you can’t live without Him and you surely must not die without Him either! That is what the author to Hebrews is saying. So let’s look more closely at why you need Christ.

Christ Stands Before God as the Representative of Those He Saves

The Supreme Reason Why Christ Became a Man

First, you need Christ because He stands before God as the representative of those He saves. That is what He does in His work as a high priest. A priest is someone who is appointed to stand before God on behalf of others. This is the supreme reason why

Christ became man. It is the preeminent, chief purpose for Him coming into the world. It is supreme over His work as a prophet, and it is supreme over His work as a king. The Bible teaches that Christ is a prophet, priest, and king. But of the three, the preeminent reason He became a man was not to become a prophet, nor to be a king, but to be a priest. He could rule as king without ever being a man; He could reveal truth as a prophet without ever becoming a man; but He had to become a man to represent us as our priest. It says in verse 17: "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things." Notice it says, "He had to be made like His brethren." There was no other way that He could represent us. Our sin is infinitely offensive before God; it makes reconciliation impossible by our own efforts. Therefore, peace with God was impossible without Him becoming a man on our behalf. He had to be made like His brethren. There was no other way. Man is sealed in his doom. His condemnation is irreversible apart from help outside of himself. There is no self-redemption; there is no self-working; there is no self-righteousness that can bring about a man's redemption or his right standing with God. It is not taught in the Bible that you can somehow fix yourself so that you can be acceptable before God. So He had to become a man. If you could right your wrongs, straighten yourself out and make yourself acceptable to God, then why would He become a man? Why would He die on the cross a torturous evil death, and suffer in the sinner's place? Why would He suffer as He did, if you, by your own self-reformation and self-righteousness, could somehow merit a right standing before God? So it is clear. He had to become a man to represent men and offer Himself as a sacrifice on their behalf.

To represent man, He participated in human

nature: He was “made like His brethren in all things.” There are two ways He was made like us. First, He was made like us in our essential properties; that is, He took on a human body and He took on a human soul. He joined Himself, engrafted and knitted Himself, as it were, to a body and soul forever. He is like us, though He has never sinned. But more than that, He became like us, it says, “in all things.” In the context this is *more* than simply His participation in human nature; it is the experience He underwent as a result of His human nature. It goes on to say in verse 18, “Since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” So we see, He was made like us not only in the essential properties of human nature, but in personal experience as well. He was susceptible to everything we were susceptible to. He experienced everything we experienced, yet apart from sin. He did not become a man and, as it were, stoop over a balcony in heaven and look down on us and say, “Wow, this is really interesting, being a man. How are you doing down there?” No! He suffered as a man and, having suffered, He understands heartbreak, betrayal, and disappointment. He didn’t look over the balcony of heaven and say, “I am a man now.” No! He not only participated in our essential nature, but He participated in our experiences so that He has felt what we feel. God has actually felt what we feel: human joy, human love, human fear, human sorrow, human shame, and human loss, as well as human heartbreak. This is true not only in His soul, but in His body. He has experienced human hunger and thirst and cold and heat and pain and even what it’s like to die. So this is the preeminent and supreme reason that He became a man. He became a man to act as a representative on behalf of those whom He

would redeem. And to do this, He participated fully in human nature.

This, of course, presupposes sin. If everything is okay with us, why do we need a representative, correct? Why don't we represent ourselves? Why don't we say—as some say when they are in trouble with the law—"I don't need a lawyer, I'll defend myself." Or to put it another way, why would Christ become our representative unless there is disfavor and offense before God that is infinite? The Bible teaches everywhere, and experience proves, that there is a mutual enmity between God and man. For example, look at Romans 8, verses 7 and 8. Paul says, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God." You see there is, in fact, this enmity. Enmity is estrangement and alienation. It is an alienation that is a deep seated, hostile thing. In man's heart there resides this hostility towards God and God knows it is there. Then there is God's response to man's enmity. God responds with enmity Himself, because man's enmity is evil. It is a treacherous thing on man's part. To make matters worse, part of man's sinful state is that he refuses to see it.

Let me show you a verse that proves that this is man's state before God. Ephesians 2:1 says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." Notice you were swept along like everybody else in "the course of this world." Like a river flowing to the sea, you willingly and voluntarily flowed downstream in a river of sin with everybody else. Here's how you did it. Verse 2 says you lived "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh." You gratified your own selfish desires; you didn't care who you hurt, or

what it cost, or what the consequences were; you lived according to the lusts of the flesh. You governed your life solely intent on satisfying your own selfish, fleshly desires. You didn't care whether it broke God's commands; you didn't care how many people it hurt, or what kind of life it meant you would have to live, or what kind of devastation it brought; you lived according to the flesh! And then Paul says you indulged it freely; you abandoned yourself to the desires of the flesh. Paul says that you were "indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind" (Ephesians 2:3a). In other words, you handed yourself over to it. You did this knowing that it was a violation of God's law and His standards, His standards of adultery, stealing, lying and so forth. Yet, you flowed in this river of sin, if you will, downstream. The result of all this is that it greatly offended God. Paul says we were "children of wrath, even as the rest" (verse 3b). Someone may say, "But the Bible says God loves sinners." Yes He does! He loves the ones that, at the same time He has hostility towards. He has a love/hate relationship with sinners. Notice the end of verse 3 again: "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, *even as the rest.*" Notice *we* were objects of His indignation and wrath; we highly offended Him. But, of course, we know that He loved the very ones that aroused this indignation and hostility in Him. And that is where Christ comes in. Christ is the One offended; Christ is the One indignant. And yet Christ Himself becomes the representative of those who had offended Him! Grace truly is an amazing thing!

Christ's work as representative for His people not only presupposes sin, but it was pictured and

portrayed by the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The primary thing pictured in the Old Testament is Christ's work as a priest, not His work as a king or a prophet. The whole sacrificial system described in the Old Testament pictured Christ's work as priest and representative of His people. The Old Testament instructions about bullocks and goats and lambs, especially in the book of Leviticus—but also all the way through the early chapters of the Bible—was designed to picture what Christ would do.

The animal sacrifices were what the Bible calls shadows. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 1 says, "For the law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near." The law was a shadow of the good things to come. What is a shadow? A shadow is an obscure representation or reflection of something. You really can't tell what someone looks like if all you see is their shadow. You know that the shadow is there; but you can't tell what a person's features are like, or clearly see their shape. For example, you can't tell whether they are tall or short. A shadow is a very obscure thing, but it does tell you someone is there, doesn't it?

Therefore, the Old Testament sacrifices were never intended to remove anyone's sin. The ritual of animal sacrifice were there as a picture of someone who would come and be a final, complete sacrifice for sin. They pictured the sacrifice of Christ that would, in actuality, take away sin. It says clearly right here in Hebrews 10, verse 1 that they couldn't remove sins. It says they "can never, by the same sacrifices year by year which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near." The animal sacrifices could never make a person perfect before

God; they could never give a person a secure standing before God. Otherwise, as it says, "Would they not have ceased to be offered?" You see, it makes sense! The ritual of slaying and sacrificing an animal clearly did not take away sin, otherwise they would not have kept on doing it. If it worked the first time, it wouldn't have needed to be done over and over again. If you take your car to a mechanic and he fixes it, you don't leave it there, right? The fact that they kept repeating these sacrifices meant that they could not and did not take away sin. It is a marvel to me how people perform rituals in church, doing them again and again. I would ask them, "If it worked the first time, why do you have to do it again?" You see, it's the same problem: it really does not work; therefore, they have to keep doing it. In fact, some people spend their lives doing it. There's a meaninglessness to rituals, ever since the "once for all" sacrifice of Christ.

In the Old Testament there was a divine sanction for those ceremonies and rituals because they pictured Christ, but clearly they could not take away sin. Notice, starting verse 2: "Because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sin. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year." Not only could they not take away sin, they couldn't take away a person's consciousness of sin either; they couldn't ease a person's conscience; they couldn't remove guilt. So they only pictured Christ, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world which is your sin, if you receive Him as your Lord and your Savior. That's the starting point. The supreme reason why Christ became a man was to become a representative for men before God, and this was clearly pictured in the Old Testament.

Christ is Supremely Qualified to Represent His People

Next we see that He is supremely qualified to represent us before God. Hebrews 2, verse 17 says of Christ, "He was made like His brethren in all things that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest." Christ is qualified to represent us because He is merciful. He is inclined to care for His people. He has a disposition that is tender and merciful. So, surely, He will represent you well before God Almighty.

What is mercy? In general, mercy is a readiness to help those in trouble. It is goodwill toward those who are in misery and affliction, joined with the desire to relieve them. Christ is merciful! Mercy is not empathy; they are not the same. Mercy includes empathy, but means much more. Empathy means that you feel for someone's plight. It means you feel for their heartbreak, their neediness, and their loneliness. That is empathy. Mercy includes that, but it goes further. Mercy involves acting to alleviate their misery. In the Bible, mercy is always towards people in misery and affliction. But it is always a self-inflicted misery; it's always a self-engendered misery. In other words, our misery is brought on us by our own doing. And herein is the glory of Christ's mercy. We were the ones indulging the flesh; we were the ones abandoning ourselves to the desires of the flesh; we were the ones who destroyed and were being destroyed; we were the ones who left a wake of ruined relationships behind us, burning bridges and angering people. We were the ones who had bitterness in our hearts; we were the ones who had stubbornly gone our own way; we were the ones who strayed. So, we were also the

ones to whom He could have justly said—like we often say to people—“You made your bed, now you lie in it.” Aren’t you thankful that God isn’t like that with His people? He says, “You made your own bed, but I’m going to yank you out of it. You created your own misery, but I’m going to deliver you from it.” He is a merciful representative. He is tender.

You may say, “Yes, I have made my life a mess. I have wrecked my life. I’ve lived for myself and have destroyed people and now I am being destroyed. I’ve burned many a bridge. What does God have for me?” I can confidently say God has a merciful High Priest for you! If you will humble yourself and own your sin; if you will quit finding fault and raging in your heart towards God; if you will pour out your soul before the living God through Christ; then He has nothing but a storehouse, a treasury, an ocean of blessing for you! He is a merciful high priest! He is a merciful representative!

In order to show mercy, there must be three things. First of all, you must be mindful; you must be aware that someone is in misery. You have to be sensitive and caring enough to see their misery, and that’s why so many people live in isolation. This is why so many Christians don’t serve. When you start serving you might find out about problems and needs and it might disturb your life. And you are too busy anyway. Oh, how grateful we must be that He didn’t say, “You know, I’m busy right now, I’m running the universe!” He didn’t say that, did He? So we stay detached, we back off so that we are not brought face to face with messy people—very messy people. Someone said, “The ministry would be great, if it wasn’t for people!” Messy people! People who have messed up their lives beyond belief! I’ve met kids who have sworn on their grave, “I’ll never

talk to my dad again." And I have talked to dads who said, "I haven't seen my kid in 20 years." Yes—messy lives. But He is merciful. He is not like your dad or your mom, if that's the way they are, or your son or your daughter—He's not like that. The Bible says that "when we were dead in our trespasses and sins," when we were full of sin, hell bent, living to fulfill the desires of the flesh, it was at that point that "God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4). So you have to have a mindset for it. You have to be aware of the need—and Christ was fully mindful of our miserable state.

But secondly, to show mercy, you must be moved and affected. You can't be mindful of something and not be moved in your heart to act. Our hearts are naturally like stones, incapable of being moved and touched. That's how many of our kids are being raised. They are being raised to be like stones. No one hugs them when they cry, as they spend hours every day in a day care center. How can they be hugged? Correct? They sit in a corner and cry, because there are 30 kids and only two workers. No one picks them up and shows any care. So, when they get about 16 years old in high school and someone begs for their life, they show no care and pull the trigger. Right? Am I not right? Some of you kids know just what I'm talking about. "Nobody cared for me! I wept and wept until my heart felt like a stone and now it can't weep, for stones don't cry." Isn't that true? Yet Christ is merciful. Yes, He is merciful! He is moved by someone's misery, even if they deserve it.

But thirdly, you must not just be moved. You must take the steps to relieve the misery. This is more than empathy. You see, empathy is standing by someone dying of cancer and feeling for their

pain, but not being able to do anything. I've done that. That's not mercy, that's empathy, because you aren't able to relieve their misery. But Christ can and does do something. It reminds me of the story of the widow of Nain, whose only son had died. Jesus would trek up and down Palestine and go into little villages, into obscure towns. Walking among these villages, He came to a town called Nain. He heard the wailing and weeping of mourners, many of whom were hired to portray the sorrow of the bereaved. Jesus heard the wailers as they were coming out of the town with the funeral procession. The woman was a widow, which, of course, means that she had no husband. And the Bible says that her only son had died. Jesus empathized with her plight. It says, "He felt compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" (Luke 7:13a). But, because He is the all-powerful, eternal God come in flesh, He did more; He acted to relieve her misery. He, in effect, said, "Stop the funeral!" They were carrying the boy on a pallet above their heads with the bereaved mother wailing and dressed in black. After the procession stopped, He said, "Young man, I say to you arise!" (verse 14). Suddenly, the boy sat up—alive—and began to speak, and Christ gave him back to his mother! He is able to act to relieve misery! Irrespective of the depth and degree or extent of misery, He can relieve it. He is a merciful High Priest. Now, He may not change the thing, which causes you problems, but He will sustain you, comfort you, and console you in your affliction. He will relieve your misery!

The compassion that characterized Christ was a consequence of His own experience. That's the point of this text. Jesus, by His divine nature is compassionate. God by nature is compassionate and merciful. But this particular reference to His mercy,

indicates more than that. It is His mercy that is in consequence of His own particular experience as a man. See verse 18: "He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered...." It could also be translated: "And since He Himself has suffered in being tempted...." That is, He suffered in and through His temptations. So ultimately it says this: "He has suffered because of His temptations; therefore, He is able to sustain His people. He has felt what it is like to suffer as a human. He has a memory of suffering and misery. He remembers abandonment, isolation, and betrayal. He remembers false accusations. He remembers loneliness, and not having a bed where to lay His head. He remembers poverty. He remembers these things." He acts out of His experience, His memory of these things. So He is able to show compassion—to relieve misery. For example, you have the story of Jesus in Gethsemane agonizing—as He anticipated Golgotha. He anticipated unspeakable human horror, abandonment by God, a torturous death, and betrayal by friends. He is on His face, sweating drops of blood from the pressure pulsating through His skin. His blood is seeping right out of His skin; the pressure is so intense. Then God sent angels to minister to Him. What does that mean for us? It means He has a memory! He knows what it's like to be in the throes of emotional despair and affliction, and to have someone lift you up. Therefore, He is able! He is able to come to the aid of those who cry to Him! You must notice it says those who *cry out* to Him. Have you cried out to Him? If so, He acts to alleviate misery. He is a merciful and faithful high priest.

Christ Sacrificed Himself to Remove God's Wrath for the Sins of Those He Represents

The supreme reason why Christ became a man was to stand before God as a compassionate representative of His people. But there is more. To represent His people, He became a man in order to become a sacrifice to remove God's anger toward them for their sins. The end of verse 17 says that Christ came "to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Propitiation is a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice that completely removes and turns away anger for the offense of sin. The Bible says that Christ in His priesthood acted in relationship to God on behalf of men. An Old Testament priest functioned in two ways. He did things "with God for man," and he did things "for God with man." Think about it. A priest did things, first, for God with man. For example, he performed temple service—things such as lighting the candlestand, putting the bread on the table, and cleaning the pans. But he also did things with God for man. This was offering sacrifices. The primary thing Jesus did as our priest and representative is He offered Himself as a sacrifice before a holy God for our sins. He did something with God for His people. He removed God's offense towards us so that now He can bring us into favor with God.

How did Christ's death accomplish a propitiation? In general, the term propitiation means to appease someone, to turn away their anger. It was used throughout the ancient world in all religions of taking away an offense by a sacrifice in a public punishment. So it involves taking away anger by a punishment through a sacrifice. Now this was common language. It was used of Zeus and the

other gods and how they needed to be appeased when the Greeks thought the gods were angry. Of course, their gods' anger was arbitrary; they could be angry about anything. They were fickle and moody. The God of the Bible is only angered for just reasons—there is nothing arbitrary or unexpected about it; there's nothing hidden about it.

There are four elements involved in propitiation. First there is an offense brought about by sin. Exodus 32, verse 30 says, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement [propitiation] for your sins." Moses said this to Israel after they had built the golden calf and offended God. So there is an offense that needs to be atoned for, that needs appeasing. God is offended by our sin; He is greatly bothered to the point of wrath and anger. Secondly, the object of propitiation is always God. It is God who must be turned from His anger. Notice when describing the sin offering in the book of Numbers it says, "One male goat as a sin offering, to make atonement with God for you." So God is the one that has to be changed. He is justly offended. It is a righteous anger. It's not an arbitrary or a moody thing. It's not an unjust offense. It is a very reasonable thing for God to be angered. And He is, in fact, offended by our sins, as you would be by your sins if they were committed against you. So, first you have an offense. Secondly, you have the object of it, which is God. Thirdly, there is an offering required to make propitiation. There must be an offering. Lastly, you have the outcome of propitiation, which is a new relationship of favor. This is what is involved in making propitiation. It is an atoning sacrifice that completely removes God's anger.

Now turn to Hebrews chapter 9, verse 14. It says,

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Here is the amazing thing about Christ’s sacrifice—He offered Himself! Look at verse 14: “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself....” Notice He offered Himself! This phrase “He offered Himself” occurs six times in Hebrews. There is an entirety to what He offered. He offered His entire self—nothing was left out. Hebrews 10:5 says of Christ, “A body you have prepared for Me.” He was given a body so that He could offer it as a sacrifice. But the Bible also says that His soul was offered. It wasn’t just a corporeal thing, a physical thing, without a person, that was offered. It wasn’t a body without a soul, without a heart. It wasn’t someone without affections or without an emotional capacity. It was a person who was offered. It was a person who could be broken and crushed. Christ’s heart was broken—the Bible tells us that in Psalm 69:20. The whole ordeal broke His heart. Christ wasn’t a detached, desensitized robotron. No! His body and His soul were offered entirely in sacrifice. Isaiah 53:10 says, “You shall make His soul an offering for sin.” He offered His whole person as a sacrifice for your sins, friend, so you can be forgiven and go to heaven; so that God can become your Father. The Bible clearly tells us that His body and His soul were offered up.

Who is the “He” that offered “Himself”? The “He” is the eternal person, the Son of God, the glorious, uncreated, worshipped and adored second member of the Godhead. This is the “He” who offered “Himself”. The body and the soul that He took upon Himself as a man He offered whole and entire—nothing was held back. Therefore, He made

propitiation; He turned God's wrath away entirely; He appeased God completely for all your sins past, present, and future.

Hebrews 9:26-27 says, "He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." What is a sacrifice? A sacrifice is an offering, made by the service of a priest, that is dedicated and devoted to God for destruction. That is a sacrifice. It's the act of a priest, who is appointed by God, by which he devotes an offering for destruction. Think about it. What did the Old Testament priests do with the animal sacrifices? First, they would slay them, then they would burn them. They would, in effect, offer them for destruction.

Christ became our sacrifice. He, in effect, said, "Father, I will assume a body and a soul so You can crush Me, so You can destroy Me, so You can consume Me as by fire on the altar." Think about the goats offered on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16:7-22, which picture Christ. The priest laid his hands on one, then he slew it. It was then put on the altar to be consumed. What did he do with the other one? He sent it out into the wilderness. They both picture Christ. The goat slain pictures His body slain; it pictures His body destroyed. The goat sent as a scapegoat into the wilderness was sent away to die of famine; it was sent away to die alone, to be famished, to starve slowly to death. This pictures the death and destruction of Christ's soul (verses 20-22). It pictures that He would be abandoned, or poured out, as it were. It pictures that He would entirely sacrifice Himself on the behalf of His people.

Do you know the Lord? Do you know Him? He in effect says, "I will sustain them, as a result of My suffering. I will be more than able to come to their aid. I will be perfectly qualified as a merciful and faithful high priest to comfort them, to console

them, and to sustain them. I will have a memory of all of this. I will have the experience of all of My suffering. Therefore, when they come to the end of themselves and pour themselves out to Me, I will have a memory of pouring Myself out. I will also have a memory of when the angels came and ministered to Me, a memory of being sustained, a memory of what it was like to hear a kind word fitly spoken in the right circumstances." Haven't you ever noticed how, at some of your low times, suddenly, unexpectedly someone will say something, or something will happen and you will be lifted up? Look back and note this! Christ is there; He is sustaining you; He comes to your aid. But, if you don't know Christ, you will go further down, and further down, and further down until you die in some gutter, perhaps. Or maybe you will die in a mansion somewhere, but friendless, with nothing. And then, as in the case of many who live selfish sinful lives, no one will be at your funeral. Then you will go on into eternity and you'll have no one there either. No! No one there!

But not the Christian! No, not the one who has the faithful high priest! Never! Never! Never! They could slay me, they could throw me to lions, as Ignatius of old, who, when cast into the arena to die, stuck his arm into the mouth of the lion and said, "Now I begin to be a Christian!" How could he do this? Who is it that sustains God's people like this? Who sustains us, who helps us? Our faithful high priest does! Do you know Him? Is He your Lord and your Savior? Have you given Him your life? Have you said, "I am a sinner. All I ever wanted to do is live to fulfill my lusts and my desires?" Has He shown you that? Has He shown you that it will destroy you? Has He shown you that you need His forgiveness? His death is sufficient to put away all

your sins! You receive this forgiveness simply by saying, while reaching out with an empty hand, as it were, with nothing to offer God, "I put my faith in Christ—simple faith in Him alone. It has nothing to do with my own righteousness. He alone washes away all my sins." Have you done that?

Father, we bow before you this day marveling at the work of Christ, the great, great high priest who represents His people before the throne. I know, Lord, that when my life is over I will say to myself, because I already say it, that my greatest privilege in life has been to preach Christ. Paul called it "the unsearchable riches of Christ," the great and glorious God-man. Move in our midst, Lord! Speak and soften hearts. Amen.

