

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

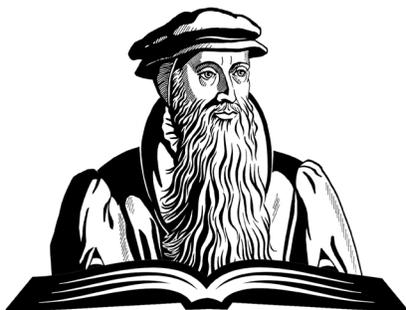
by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4:

CHRISTOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Lecture 1

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTOLOGY



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 4 ~ Christology

Lectures by Dr. Stephen Myers:

1. Introduction to Christology
2. The Divinity of Christ
3. The Humanity of Christ

Lectures by Robert D. McCurley, ThM:

4. The Hypostatic Union
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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Dr. Stephen Myers

Module 4 ~ Lecture 1

Introduction to Christology

We want to begin now our study of Christology, where we learn both who Jesus Christ is, and what he's done for his people. In the Gospel of Matthew, in Matthew 16, Jesus has an important conversation with his disciples. They're in the town of Caesarea Philippi, a town outside of Israel, and Jesus begins in Matthew, chapter 16, verse 13, with a very simple question for his disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Jesus wants his disciples to tell him what other people are saying about his identity, about who he is. The disciples tell Jesus, in verse 14, that some people say that he is John the Baptist. Some people say that he is Elijah. Other people say that he is Jeremiah. Still other people say that he is simply one of the prophets.

Now all of these identities are very important identities. All of these are people whom the Old Testament had said would come before the coming of the Messiah. These are important identities. To have been any of these figures, would have been to be a very important person. None of these are lowly assessments of who Jesus is. But they're all wrong. All the people on whom the disciples are reporting have said exalted things about Jesus. None of them has sought to insult Jesus, or underestimate his importance or his glory, but they've all been wrong. So Jesus turns his attention to the disciples themselves. In verse 15, Jesus looks upon his disciples, and he says, "But whom say ye that I am?" But in hearing this question, the disciples—they are men who have left behind everything to follow Jesus: they've left their homes, their jobs, their families, they've laid down everything to follow Jesus, to be with him. So who is he? Who is this man who is positioned at the very center of their lives?

Peter speaks up and speaks into the charged silence, and he says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And with those words, Peter speaks the truth that stands at the very center of history. Peter tells us who Jesus is. He is the Christ, the promised One of God. And in that identity, Jesus tells us what Jesus has come to do—he's come to bring the deliverance that had been foretold from the very beginning of the book of Genesis. In one sentence, one answer, to one question, Peter has given us a Christology that it will take us the rest of this lecture series to unpack. You see, it matters who Jesus is. It matters deeply who Jesus is. Doubtless there are many things on your heart and on your mind right now. There are distractions, and cares, and concerns. There are things going on in your life, in your family, and they're all terribly important—they are. But none of them is as important as your answer to this simple question: Whom do you say that Jesus is? You can say a lot about him. You can say high and lofty things about him, and still miss him in his glory. All of the people whose responses the disciples reported had—those people had encountered Jesus, but they didn't know who he was. Whom do you say that Jesus is? That's more important than anything else.

Let's start with an easy answer, with an obvious answer. Who is Jesus? Well, he's Jesus. In Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21, Joseph just has learned that Mary, whom he is supposed to marry, is pregnant, and so he has decided to end their relationship quietly. However, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, and tells him that the child in Mary's womb is conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost. And then the angel goes on to say, "And she shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name, JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." This holy One is named Jesus, because he will save his people from their sin. His name "Jesus" means, literally, "Jah saves," or "Jehovah saves." Now if you likely already know, Jehovah is the most precious name of God given in the Old Testament. It's his covenant name, his most precious name—the name that most clearly points him out as the God who faithfully, and all-powerfully saves his people. And "Jesus" means "Jehovah saves"—or even "Jehovah is salvation". His name, Jesus, is conjuring up all of God's saving acts in past generations, all of his deliverances of his people, and placing the baby in Bethlehem as the ultimate fulfillment of that salvation. Jehovah is the God who delivered his people out of Egyptian shackles. Jehovah is the God who brought the children of Israel into a land flowing with milk and honey. Jehovah saves. All of history, all the Old Testament, all of it is testimony of the same truth that Jesus' name holds forth—God saves, Jehovah saves.

But notice the subtle shift in what the angel says. Jesus is given this name "Jesus", which means "Jehovah saves"—why? Because Jehovah saves? Well yes, but that's not what the passage says. Verse 21 says that this child is to be named "Jehovah saves," because he will save his people. When we see Jesus saving his people, we see Jehovah saving his people—we see God himself saving his people. Jesus just is the saving God of the covenant. Jesus isn't named "Jesus" because Jehovah is going to save his people through him. No, the passage tells us that Mary's son will be named Jesus, because, as Jehovah, he will save his people. Jehovah saves—Jesus saves—it's saying the same thing.

And notice what Jesus is saving. Verse 21 says that Jesus will save his people. When Mary's son undertakes and accomplishes his work of redemption, he won't be saving God's people, he won't be saving Jehovah's people. No, Scripture tells us that he will be saving "his" people. To speak of God's people, and to speak of Jesus' people, is to speak of the same group. In Mary's son, the God of Israel has come for his people.

And from what will this saving Jesus save his covenant people? He'll save them from their sin. He hasn't come to save them from political oppression. He hasn't come to save them from hardship or affliction. No, according to verse 21, he's come to save them from their sin. Many centuries earlier, the psalmist had written, in Psalm 130, verses 7 and 8: "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." The son of Mary is that One—the Jehovah of Israel, who has perforated time to redeem his people from their iniquities, just as he had promised.

Do you see the glory of this Jesus? The Lord of glory, whose throne is in heaven, and whose footstool is the earth, he names himself by his Majesty. He is the Jehovah who saves—the Almighty God who saves. And he also names himself by our need. He's the One who saves. He names himself by the mission of salvation that he has undertaken to bring us to himself. The incandescent glory of the thrice holy God, and the crushing need of his people—they meet in Jesus. They kiss in his name—his majestic glory and our debilitating need.

Who do we say that Jesus is? We say that he is Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, who has come for his people to save them from their sin. And this Jesus, he is the Christ. That is specifically the name that Peter uses for Jesus in Matthew 16, verse 16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And this word, this title “Christ” means “the Anointed One”. Now here is one of the many places where it’s important to remember that the Old Testament originally was written in the Hebrew language, while the New Testament originally was written in the Greek language. The two parts of the Bible originally were written in different languages. And so sometimes, the same word will look different, will be different in the New Testament than it was in the Old Testament. And that’s precisely what happens here. In the New Testament, the title “Christ” is used to mean the exact same thing that was meant by the title “Messiah” in the Old Testament. When Peter says that Jesus is the Christ, he is confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. And the Messiah, in the Old Testament, was the longed-for deliverer whom God had promised that he would send for the salvation of his people. By the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry—and that phrase “Jesus’ earthly ministry” refers to the whole span of time between Jesus’ birth, and his crucifixion.” But we’ll talk more about that later. By the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Jewish expectations for the Messiah had become attached specifically to the promises surrounding a Davidic king. In 2 Samuel, chapter 7, God had made a covenant with David, and among other things, God had promised that one of David’s descendants would rule over Israel forever. That promise had become Israel’s great hope. There was a king, a son of David, whom God would send to rule over them. In Psalm 2, the psalmist had said that the nations, the wicked leaders of the world, were arrayed against God, and against his Messiah—in verse 2. And then in verses 8 and 9, God had declared that all of those nations would be given to his Messiah. His Messiah would shatter his enemies before him. The Messiah, who would reign over God’s people in accordance with God’s promise, he would destroy all of the enemies of his name and of his people. This promise, and many others like it—the promise of a coming Messiah—was very dear to the Israelite people, as they suffered in the hands of others, in the hands of pagan nations; as they were carried into captivity in Babylon; as they were ruled by the Roman Empire. It was these promises of a Messiah to which they clung, and in which they hoped.

One place where the Old Testament speaks of this Messiah, and of his deliverance, is in Habakkuk, chapter 3. There, the prophet Habakkuk is praying, and he describes this scene of coming deliverance; this raw, harrowing description of the Lord coming in judgment against the nations and in deliverance for his people. And in Habakkuk, chapter 3, verse 3 through 5, we read this: “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.” This is a deliverer. This is One who lays the mountains down, in order to gather in his people, and in order to deliver them. And then we read, skipping down to verse 13: “Thou wentest forth for the salvation thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.” This mighty, trembling deliverance that God is going to bring to his people, Habakkuk says, he will bring through his Messiah, with his Messiah. This is the Anointed One. This is the Messiah. And he brings the deliverance of the God whose feet spew burning coals. There is hope. There is deliverance. There is power here for the people of God.

This judging, all-powerful Messiah appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, of course. In Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 1 and following, we read this: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of

knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” Now here, the promised One of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, he isn’t anointed in any ordinary way. He’s anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon him. And as you see towards the end of the passage that we read, this Messiah will be precisely what we read described in Habakkuk 3. He’ll smite the enemies of his people, he’ll slay the wicked. But before we get there, before we get to the judgment, we see something more. Not only will the Anointed One deliver his people by destroying their enemies, but also by ruling among them in peace, and in wisdom, and in equity. This Messiah, he is marked by wisdom, and by love for the Lord. The poor, the meek, the vulnerable, they’re not intimidated by him—he is for them. This Anointed One, he delivers the children of Israel, he destroys their enemies, and with him, his people are safe. They are people set free, and ruled in righteousness, delivered from oppression, and ruled in peace.

Now if you noticed, at the very start of our passage, we were told that this Messiah is of the stem of Jesse. Now Jesse, of course, was the father of David. This is a Davidic Messiah, a Messiah in the line of David who is described here. And we find this Davidic Messiah once again in Micah, chapter 5, at verse 2. And there, through his servant, Micah, the Lord declares: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.” In Bethlehem, there would be born the One who would rule in Israel—the great son of David. Descending from David, this One would come and rule over God’s people.

Now here, it’s important to note what we find in Matthew, chapter 2, at verse 2. There, three wise men from the east, far away from Israel, men who aren’t Jews. They’ve seen a star in the sky. They’ve known that this star means that the king of the Jews has been born, and they have travelled for a long, long time to find, by that star, the newborn king. Now here, they have arrived in Jerusalem, they ask King Herod where the king of the Jews has been born, where the Davidic king, the promised Messiah, in other words, has been born. And Herod goes to his chief priests and his scribes, he goes to his religious leaders, and according to Matthew, chapter 2, verse 4, he demanded of them where the Christ should be born. Continuing into verse 5: “And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” In this one panicked scene, you see the coalescing—the coming together—of all of these components of Messianic expectation. You have the promised descendant of David, the king of the Jews to whom the wise men refer in verse 2, when Herod hears mention of this Davidic descendant, and he speaks of that Davidic figure to his scribes and priests, what does he call it?—the Christ, Messiah. And instantly, the scribes and the priests know where this One has been born. They’ve read their Bibles, you could say—they know that he is to be born in Bethlehem. They quote Micah, chapter 5, verse 2 to that effect. So, the descendant of David, the Messiah, the One through whom God would rule over and care for his people, it all is the same person. They all speak of the same One—the Messiah, the Christ, is the promised One through whom God would deliver his people from every oppression, and through whom, he would rule in righteousness in their midst.

And then, in Caesarea Philippi, outside of Israel’s bounds, Peter says to Jesus, “Thou art the

Christ.” Now, we don’t know this for certain—none of us were there. But you can imagine, Peter’s words must have hung in the air—silenced everything else: “Thou art the Christ.” Generation upon generation of God’s people, all had been waiting for this promised deliverer, and then he came, and he was standing before Peter—Jesus, the Christ. First Peter, chapter 1, verse 12 tells us that these things are so wonderful that the very angels of heaven long to look upon. Jesus is the Christ.

Always, there is the question: Whom do you say that Jesus is? We’ve started to see something of the answer. We will spend the rest of our time together seeking to see that answered more fully—the answer to that question that ought to punctuate all of our days, and that will be before us even on the last great day. And in what we’ve seen so far, we’ve seen at least three things.

First, when we seek to understand who Jesus is, we are not dealing only with New Testament realities. All of the Old Testament speaks of Jesus. Through it, God was preparing his people, so that, at the perfect moment, when Jesus, the Messiah, came, they would be prepared for it. In Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, God promised that at the perfect time, he would send One who would crush the head of Satan, One who would destroy the enemy of the souls of his people. In that promise, God promised Jesus. And all of the rest of the Old Testament unfolds the riches of that promised Messiah. In Luke, chapter 24, and verse 27, the Scriptures tell us that all of the Old Testament is about Jesus. It prepares the way for him, it points to him, it traces out who he will be in the hearts of his people. And as we work our way through the study of Christ, we will deal often with the Old Testament, because Jesus is there, and it speaks of him.

You are here, and you’re listening to these lectures, because you want to know truth, and that’s wonderful—it’s commendable. In wanting to know truth, you are desiring a good thing. But at the very center of Biblical religion, there is not an abstract truth, there’s a person—there’s Jesus. If we could but see him and know him, we will have all other things besides. Jesus is at the center of God’s revelation to man. Jesus is at the center of the Bible. And so, we will draw on all of God’s Word as we consider Christ.

Now the second thing that we’ve seen is that when we deal with Christ, we are dealing with an infinitely glorious person. We’re told, in Isaiah, chapter 53, at verse 2, that there was nothing visibly different about Jesus. When he was born, he looked like any other child. You could walk past him on the dusty streets of Galilee, and he would appear like any other person. In fact, in places like John 6, verse 42; Matthew, chapter 13, verse 55 and 56, people who knew Jesus personally, had difficulty believing that he was any different from any other person from their home towns. But Jesus was the glorious, living God, come in the flesh. In Isaiah, chapter 6, verses 1 through 4, the prophet Isaiah has a vision. And he sees the Lord sitting upon his throne. We’re told that the Lord is high and lifted up. His glory fills the heavenly temple. His glory is so overwhelming that the very pillars of the heavenly temple quake—they nearly collapse under the weight of his glory. And he’s encircled by angels—angels with six wings. With two wings, the angels cover their feet; with two wings, they fly; and with two wings, they cover their eyes—they cover their eyes. They cover their eyes, because the holiness of this God is so pure, is so clean, that they cannot even look upon it—he’s too holy. And one of the angels, he cries out: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” And Isaiah, the prophet who’s seeing this, he falls back. He sees his unworthiness. He fears that he will be consumed. This is the God of glory—the God of a glory so immense that even the heaven of heavens cannot contain it, and the angels cannot behold it. And in John 12, verses 40 and 41, John tells us that this Holy One, this One of such overwhelming glory, was Jesus before he came in the flesh.

Brothers and sisters, as we learn about Jesus, as we draw near to Jesus, we’re not dealing with

just another religious leader. We're not dealing with one who fits neatly into our categories and understandings. We're dealing with the living God of heaven and earth. We're dealing with One too holy for the angels to behold. We're dealing with One before whom one day, all of the rulers of the world will bow. When we draw into his presence, we draw into the fire of the holiness of God. This is the One, this is the One in whom we have all things. This is the One without whom we have nothing. Brothers and sisters, I want you to know truth. I want you to know doctrine. But I want most for you to know Jesus, because he's everything. He's everything. He is the radiant glory of the living God.

But third, because of who he is, Jesus has undertaken a very specific work. There are things that he came to do. There are things that he even still now is doing. He redeems his people. He saves them from their sin. He rules over this people in peace. He judges the wicked. Because he is Jesus the Christ, he has a majestic work that he has undertaken. Because he is Jesus the Christ, that work will come to certain complete perfection in his time.

Now all of this will be our concern in the coming lectures, as we undertake the study of Christology. Who is Jesus? And what has he done? And what is he doing? Brothers and sisters, these are not trivial questions. These questions have, as their answer, the gospel. So let us set out to answer them. Together, we will do that—we will seek to answer these questions. But I invite you, I challenge you, the whole time to be asking a question that no one else can answer, that I certainly can't answer: Who do you say that Jesus is? If you will but see him in what lies ahead, not seeing just facts, not seeing just Scripture references, but seeing him, you will cry out with Thomas, in John 20, verse 28: "My Lord, and my God!" And you will know life, and you will be able to minister that life to others. May it be so.