SCRIPTURALLY SPEAKING: CHRIST by Noah Diestelkamp

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Jesus is known by many titles (e.g. Lamb of God, Son of God, Lord, Savior, and Teacher); but when Jesus asked his disciples who they said he was, Peter’s famous response in Matthew 16:16 is this confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” We call ourselves *Christians,* and we say Jesus is *the Christ*. It is a worthwhile endeavor to better understand exactly what it means to call Jesus “the Christ.”

The Greek word *Christ* and its Hebrew equivalent *Messiah* both mean *anointed*. A brief survey of the Old Testament provides examples of anointing in several different circumstances. God instructed Moses to anoint Aaron during the process of consecrating him as priest (Ex. 29:7). Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam. 10:1) and David as the second (1 Sam. 16:12-13). In each case, anointing was an indication of God’s choosing the anointed person. This choice had great significance! On account of Saul’s status as “the LORD’s anointed,” David refused to harm him, even as Saul attempted to kill him (1 Sam. 24:6).

However, when we arrive in the New Testament, we find that the concept of “the LORD’s anointed” had changed. Many people had been anointed throughout Israelite history; but by the first century, the terms *Messiah* and *Christ* were used as titles—*The* Anointed One—referring to just one specific person. This Christ was someone for whom the first century Jews were waiting and watching. We can see examples of this throughout the Gospel accounts. Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death “before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Lk. 2:26). People who heard John the Baptist’s teachings wondered if John “might be the Christ” (Lk. 3:15). Even during Jesus’ trial, as the council was trying to incriminate Jesus, the crux of their question was, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). Sometime between the anointing of priests and kings in the Old Testament and these first century accounts, the idea of “the Lord’s Anointed” had transformed from a general term to one which referred to a specific person.

In fact, it was God’s own promises that had shaped this understanding of *Christ*. As Jacob blessed his son Judah, he prophesied that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah” until Israel was ushered into a time of prosperity (Gen. 49:10-12). Some future Judean king (or kings) would be the one(s) to usher in a time of blessing for God’s people. God later made a promise to David (the first king from the tribe of Judah) that he would build a house for David, a throne that would be “established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). Indeed, the Davidic line of kings continued in Judah until the Babylonian captivity. This established an expectation for the Israelites – one day a king of David’s line would establish a time of peace and prosperity for God’s people from a throne that would never depart. This expectation was further developed by God’s prophets. Isaiah, for example, records God’s message of hope: a child who will be called God and who will reign on the throne of David in justice and righteousness (Is. 9:2-7)! As Isaiah later speaks of God’s judgment as the cutting down of trees, he says “there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse.” This root would slay the wicked, be righteous and faithful, and establish peace that was previously unknown (Is. 11:1-9).

In this historical context, it should not surprise us that the Israelites had developed an expectation that some descendant of Judah in the line of David would reclaim David’s throne and restore Israel’s prosperity – *The* Anointed One. Even as the Jews were held captive in Babylon; even as the Roman empire expanded and occupied their land; Israel could still point to the coming Messiah – the new ruler who would usher in the golden age of Israel. When Gabriel told Mary she would conceive Jesus, he clearly used “Messianic language.” This child would be given the throne of David and he would reign forever over a kingdom without end. There is no question who Gabriel was talking about!

However, we see from their reactions to Jesus and his ministry that people didn’t understand how he could be the long-awaited Christ. Where was the mighty king of Judah? Where was the restoration of Israel? Where was the time of prosperity and peace? Jesus did not march to Jerusalem to claim his throne or lead a rebellion against the Roman government. He did not restore temple worship or make Israel a powerhouse nation. Many saw this and decided there was no way he could be the Christ!

The reality of Jesus’ fulfillment as “the Lord’s Anointed” was unexpected but far better! Before claiming his throne, the King became a sacrificial Lamb. Instead of claiming the crown of men, he claimed the crown of thorns. Instead of overcoming the oppression of Rome, he overcame the oppression of sin and death. Instead of restoring Israel to the former “glory” of Sinai or David he restored Israel to the greater glory of a new covenant where true peace – a restored relationship with God – was available for people of all nations.

When Jesus faced death, it did not weaken his claim to the throne. Instead, his claim was made unshakeable through his death, burial, and resurrection. So Jesus reigns! As the Lord’s Anointed, the Messiah, the Christ – Jesus reigns as King over God’s never-ending kingdom. When we call Jesus *the Christ*, we confess the authority with which *he rules as King*;and we proclaim the hope we have because *he restores* our relationship with God.

Do you believe that Jesus is *the Christ*, the Son of God?