



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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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 was this confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 16:16). 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 Mes-

siah—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" (Lk. 1:31-33). 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?

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SEX AND SANCTIFICATION

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

ALTHOUGH IT IS HARD to establish accurately, it appears that, of those marrying today for the first time, only between 3% and 10% are virgins. The vast majority of singles are sexually active. Christians are not immune to sexual temptation, but they do have something special to use in the battle against sexual immorality.

The CDC's National Health Statistics Reports (2023) said that about 40% of never married teens (15-19) had sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex. However, the number increased to over 60% for ages 18-19 [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr196.pdf>]. A 2015 survey reported that 90% of the population had lost their virginity by age 22 [<https://www.good.is/this-chart-shows-how-old-americans-were-when-they-lost-their-virginity>]. Sexual experimentation is happening now in grade school. Social media debates are about whether to "hook up" after the first date. Low "body counts" (total number of sexual partners) are mocked. Popular media flaunts casual sex as normal and expected. Access to pornography is easy and use of it is rampant. What can we do?

Some have made the mistake of attempting a less spiritual, more carnal approach to resisting sexual temptation and cultural pressures. We preach physical self-control and "just be strong." "You might get a disease or have an unwanted pregnancy." "Pre-marital sex may make you less desirable to a marriage partner or increase the risk of divorce." "You may have psychological issues, sexual dysfunction, or various sexual addictions." These reasons to abstain, and others like them, are generally inadequate. Anecdotally, people know that these things don't always happen to people who have sex before marriage. And, in the heat of the moment, people don't tend to think or care about them.

Saying "Be strong!" is not as effective as being "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Arousing fear of physical consequences may get the attention of some people, but it is more fearful to "fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Possible negative physical consequences may give some needed pause, but sin's spiritual consequence is a "certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (10:27).

When Paul wrote, "Flee sexual immorality," he stated the reason as being because our bodies are the "temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19). This isn't about having willpower and per-

sonal strength. We were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (6:11). He has made us—body and spirit—one with Christ. He has changed who and what we are. We are Christ-followers; Christ decides who we are joined to and one flesh with. Our bodies don't decide. Our culture doesn't decide. The media outlets don't decide. Who we are dating doesn't decide. The heat of the moment doesn't decide.

We need to be constantly reminded that sanctification makes us different from others and different even from who we used to be. People will think it is strange "when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you" (1 Pet. 4:4). Friends will be lost, relationships will end, disparaging labels will be applied. That's what happened to Jesus; and if it happened to Him, it will happen to those He sanctifies as His own (Jn. 15:20; 1 Pet. 4:12-14).

Of course we are strange—we are strangers and exiles (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11). Of

course we are different—we are set apart to God (2:9). Of course we emphasize the spiritual over the physical—God is spirit and our focus is spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). Of course God has the say in what we do with our bodies—our bodies are members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). Of course sanctification touches sexuality—we are joined to the Lord and are one spirit with Him (6:17). Of course we belong to the Lord—"you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (6:20 ESV).

The good news of the gospel is that in Christ we overcome temptation by following Christ. We are not alone (2 Tim. 4:16). We don't have to follow the world into sexual immorality. We can be the 3% who are virgins. The even better good news is that if, like the Corinthians, we are sexually immoral, we can stop, turn to Jesus, be washed, sanctified, and justified in His blood. We can be saints again. Living in sanctification is the real solution to sexual temptation and sin.

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Are You Better Off Today?

Spoiler Alert: THIS IS NOT ABOUT POLITICS

By AL DIESTELKAMP

THE POINTED QUESTION "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" is widely regarded by political analysts as a key factor influencing the outcome of the recent U.S. presidential election. It was a question that the incumbent political party could not successfully combat; but due to prevailing economic conditions, it was easily answered by much of the electorate. This got me thinking about more important matters.

Judging from responses to an article I wrote for the previous issue of *Think*, I have come to realize that our mailing list includes some individuals who no longer share the fellowship of brethren with whom they once worshiped. The fact that they remain spiritually minded enough to read such articles is encouraging; however, it prompts me to ask them, "Are you better off today than when you actively worked and worshiped with the saints?"

I'm not asking if you're better off financially or socially, but rather if you are better off *spiritually*. It may be that, from a worldly perspective, you are living a more comfortable life now than when you were part of a local congregation. However, do you possess "the peace of God, which surpasses understanding" (Phil. 4:7)? The Lord never promised that loyalty to Him would assure comfort and ease in this life. In fact, the apostle Paul warned that

"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Whatever event or negative experience may have led you to disregard the Lord's instruction to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." (Heb. 10:24-25), it pales in comparison to what lies ahead for you. "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him'" (Heb. 10:35-38).

The good news for those of you who have "drawn back" is that God is so merciful that He will renew His pleasure toward you if you return and "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:8). Furthermore, faithful brethren will joyfully welcome you back.

Each of us, including those who are faithful in assembling for worship, should consider a similar question: "Am I spiritually better off than when I first believed?" If not, Christ's message to us is clear: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works..." (Rev. 2:5). "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).

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'POLITICS AS USUAL'

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

AT ITS ROOT, *politics* is simply the involvement of citizens in matters that impact their communities. The concept of “seeking the peace of the city” where one lives (Jer 29:7) aligns well with the overarching principle of loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18).

However, this does not imply that our concerns as followers of Jesus will align with those of the citizens in the places where we find ourselves living. Similarly, the methods used by saints to promote the welfare of their communities will differ significantly from those of typical citizens.

Unsurprisingly, people often use carnal means to achieve what they deem advantageous for themselves and their party. In contrast, Christians understand that neither their own welfare nor that of their neighbors is best served through such self-serving methods. Saints do not resort to what has come to be called “politics as usual.”

Disappointingly, God’s words to Judah through Jeremiah have become a justification for embracing worldly politics while neglecting their original context. Jeremiah’s charge to his fellow Israelites was to seek the peace of the city to which they had been exiled as *captives*. Although they were not *citizens* of Babylon, they were still called to seek its peace. Was this a call to political action in the manner of the Babylonians? It was not. The prescribed method for seeking peace was through prayer to God on behalf of the city. Interestingly, this same exhortation was given to the earliest Christians (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4) who are similarly described as exiles (1 Pt. 2:11).

I am not saying that prayer is the only authorized means of political action for the saint. Peter urged honorable conduct “among the Gentiles” (v 12) and submission to authorities (vv 13,14) and wrote “that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (v 15). However, “politics as usual” is *not* “doing good.” The freedoms we have are to be used “as servants of God” (v 16). Our words must be substantively different from the partisan and populist rhetoric and hyperbole that typify the political processes of the nation in which we dwell.

Some contend that “everything is politics.” What is meant by this aphorism varies widely. However, if we take *politics* in its most basic definition, then this saying can be understood as an acknowledgment that our beliefs, values, and actions are all connected to moving those within our sphere of influence in a particular direction. In this sense, Christians engage in politics because, in word and deed, we *are* trying to

encourage our neighbors to follow Jesus as their Lord and King.

Certainly, all that Jesus taught and did was intended to influence and guide people toward what would be in their best interest. However, Jesus’ methods were not carnal even though His opponents resorted to “politics as usual.” As Jesus’ followers, we must remember that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4,5). Thus “politics as usual” is not in our arsenal to accomplish change.

Some say that “politics and religion don’t mix.” For many, *religion* is only a negative term with connotations of state churches, denominational hierarchies, or other belief systems dominated by power structures in organizations created by human traditions. While our English word *religion* may derive from the concept of being bound by a vow (as seen in the lives of monks, priests, and nuns), it can be more simply defined as one’s personal practice of devotion to God. The reality of both good and bad kinds of religion is demonstrated by James’s distinction between vain and pure religion (Js. 1:26,27).

What is usually meant by *politics* in the claim that “politics and religion don’t mix” is *not* the general influence one might have over his neighbors. Rather, it is “politics as usual.” It is the pursuit for power through various political parties and their carnal machinations.

Jesus explicitly warned His disciples against engaging in “politics as usual” when some of them ignorantly and ill-advisedly sought to secure positions of power in Jesus’ coming kingdom. In correcting them, Jesus observed, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those that are great exercise authority over them.” Then He clearly declared, “Yet it shall not be so among you” (Matt. 20:25,26).

Most would agree that Jesus meant that *His kingdom* would not be governed by “politics as usual.” However, some Christians compartmentalize Jesus’ words and thereby reason that they can engage in “politics as usual” *outside* the kingdom of God. This rationale reflects an inaccurate and unhealthy view of what it means to be a citizen of Christ’s kingdom.

God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood” (Col. 1:13,14). This transfer into Christ’s kingdom does not permit us to step back into “politics as usual.” Rather, Paul admonish-

es, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (3:2).

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that a saint must completely abstain from earthly things, political discourse, or the privileges that come with citizenship in an earthly city or nation. (Clearly, Paul used his Roman citizenship: Ac. 16:37; 22:25-29; 25:10-12.) However, we must cautiously observe that politics has also been called “the art of compromise.” While followers of Jesus do enjoy great freedom in Him, we are not at liberty to compromise the law, teachings, or values of King Jesus in order to serve others or their causes (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). “Politics as usual” often demands such compromises.

“Politics as usual” often distracts us from our true identity. Patriotism and political involvement often evoke a passionate loyalty that should be reserved for the kingdom of God. Indeed, many people across the political spectrum imagine that their engagement in worldly politics brings glory to God. However, such entanglements frequently lead one to being “unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

Even the worldly have observed that “politics makes for strange bedfellows.” Thus, saints must be continually asking themselves, “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with wickedness? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

For Christians, our means of effecting lasting change is not through popularly elected officials or their appointed judges. “Therefore, ‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says the Lord, ‘Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’” (v 17).

The opportunity to vote is a cherished liberty. It is right to do so as conscience permits; but do not imagine that hearts are transformed by majority rule, laws, or executive orders. The saints who “turned the world upside down” (Ac. 17:6) did so with the gospel rather than by populating the halls of political power with individuals who merely claimed some of their values.

What are we truly seeking? If we are sincere in seeking the peace of the place where we presently live, then let us pray to God and place our trust in Him. Let us embrace the Prince of Peace instead of embracing “politics as usual.” Let us humbly identify as migrants who confess that “here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb.13:14), “the city...whose builder and maker is God” (11:8-16).

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When *Think* began in 1969, each issue cost about \$80 to print and mail. Now each issue's total costs approach \$900. While inflation accounts for most of this increase, postage rates have climbed at a much higher rate than inflation; and 65% of our expenses relate to the cost of postage. Nevertheless, the generosity of so many has kept up with these expenses from issue to issue, and for this we are humbled and grateful. This issue is expected to cost about \$870 which leaves us about \$540 to put toward the next issue.

THINK

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Where Do We Go From Here?

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

LIFE PRESENTS each of us with all kinds of challenges and choices. The metaphor of walking is used both in and out of Scripture to typify our lives and the events and things with which we will inevitably intersect during our earthly sojourn.

As the philosopher of Ecclesiastes observed, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...a time to weep, and a time to laugh...a time to keep, and a time to throw away...a time of war, and a time of peace" (Eccl. 3:1-8). While we might see this simply as a poetic way of acknowledging and coping with the ups and downs of life, we must not draw the cynical conclusion that serves as bookends to the words of this philosopher, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (1:2; 12:8).

While life might appear to be meaningless from our limited perspective "under the sun," it is not! However, what gives life meaning—regardless of whether we are experiencing mountain-top highs, dark-valley lows, or something in-between—is not ourselves but God. "Fear God and keep His

commandments" (12:13) is the conclusion that offers stability in an otherwise chaotic, inconsistent, and often unfair world.

So, as we trudge through valleys or across plateaus and come to intersections in our lives that require us to make choices, do not become discouraged or paralyzed by the question of "Where do we go from here?" Many paths we might take are not objectively right versus wrong. Sometimes there are decisions to be made and several choices can be used to pursue righteousness, edify one another, or bring glory to God. We need not agonize as if there is only one right choice in matters of liberty.

However, this is not to say that all choices are equal. When many disciples of Jesus were challenged and offended by His teaching, they "walked with Him no more" (Jn. 6:60-66). "Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?' Then Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (vv 67-69).

Whatever choices we do make, we need to make sure our choices will keep us

following Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). Indeed, choosing a path that enables us to keep looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2) may require us to change our course. Too often, we get stuck on a path (which may have served its purpose for a time) on which we remain out of habit, convenience, sentimentality, or ignorance rather than out of sincere devotion to God.

My grandfather began *Think* in 1969 with the desire to publish a *free* paper. Following the first issue, he began receiving money from people (without any solicitation) who wanted to help defray his costs, and this has continued with every issue since. These "Voluntary Partners" (as they came to be called) have enabled *Think* to continue in print for over 55 years. However, as the new editor of this family paper, I have to give thought to the relevance and practicality of continuing to print this paper in a digitized, online world. As readers of *Think*, you can help me with this evaluation by sharing with me your thoughts by emailing me at the address below. Your input (or lack thereof) will help me to decide where we go from here.

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