

Women's Bible Study ~ Fall 2011

Who do YOU say I AM? A Study of the Names & Character of Christ

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He is the Messiah - Matthew 1:18-25

Jacqui Stahl



My journal entry from mid-July simply reads, "How long, O Lord? How long?" It's been a year I would like to put behind me.

- On January 4th my mother-in-law underwent surgery for lung cancer. All removed lymph nodes were negative and the tumor was encapsulated.
- 2 days later my mother fell while on a bike ride and broke her pelvis in 2 places.
- In February my mother-in-laws post-surgical scans revealed a trouble spot in her remaining lymph nodes.
- Then in March, during her first dose of chemo, she suffered a severe reaction and respiratory arrested. Though she recovered, issues lingered with her treatment.
- In April, the lining in my hips became painfully inflamed from my arthritis so that it became difficult for me to sit, walk, or stand.
- So in May, I endured a series of 7 injections in my hips and low back to relieve the discomfort. I'm not sure which was worse!
- In June, my mother's follow-up visit from her fall showed she now required a total hip replacement.
- Now July brought news that my uncle had stage IV lymphoma and was given 6 weeks to 3 years to live.
- And in the coming weeks, I still had to face my father's eye surgeries, my mother's hip replacement and immediate postoperative care, and host my siblings for an extended period of time.

I wondered how I would continue to bear up under the seemingly endless and enormous weight of sickness and responsibility. My goal became to survive one day at a time. Maybe you've had a similar year, or month, or week.

The Israelites felt this way too, not just for 9 months but for over 700 years. They first fell into captivity and oppression to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., then to the Babylonians, and finally remained under various foreign rulers up to and beyond the birth and ministry of Jesus.

At the time of Jesus' birth, eight million Jews lived in the Roman Empire, just over a quarter of them in Palestine itself. Romans branded Jews "atheists" for their refusal to honor Greek and Roman gods, and regarded them as social misfits because of their peculiar customs. Herod the Great was a modern-day Stalin and kept the religious community in a state of suspicion and terror through his network of spies. (Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Zondervan Publishing. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1995. p.61)

The Jews anxiously anticipated Messiah's coming to deliver them from the oppressive rule of Rome. The title of Messiah came to signify the ideal king who would free them and establish an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity. So the Jews, too, were asking, "How long, O Lord, how long?" And God answered. But as we will see today, God did not answer as the people were hoping.

Please open your Bibles to Matthew 1:18-25 and follow along as I read today's scripture text.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us."

What Matthew does in today's passage is similar to geo-caching. Geo-caching is an outdoor sporting activity in which a GPS receiver is used to hide or seek containers with small treasures called "Geo-caches." Our family participated in a geo-caching scavenger hunt this summer. We plugged in satellite positions to our Global Positioning System which then became a glorified and interactive compass. It directed us to landmarks and native plants in the area in which we were vacationing. Being led to specific items helped us understand the uniqueness of this area of the country. Similarly, Matthew helps us plug in scriptural truth to our spiritual belief system to help us discover and understand Jesus is the Messiah.

Matthew first of all points out that Jesus is the Messiah because...

He Fulfills God's Promises

Matthew begins his gospel by appealing to the Jewish tradition and expectation that the rightful heir to the throne would come from the house of David as God had promised.

"...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (2 Sam. 7:12-16)

Matthew painstakingly lists the genealogy of Christ in the opening verses of his gospel to show Christ's royal family connection. Matthew re-emphasizes this point for his Jewish readers when he records the angel's words, "**Joseph son of David...**" This Davidic genealogy not only establishes a premise for Jesus to be a possible candidate for the position of Messiah but if it is a valid premise, it also shows God's faithfulness to do what he promised to do.

Besides God's promise to the house of David, Matthew points out that Jesus' birth fulfills God's promises spoken through the prophets. Around 700 B.C, King Ahaz of Judah was fearful of a plot against the Southern Kingdom. God promised Ahaz that the plot would not come to fruition. God even went so far as to offer to give Ahaz a sign of his choosing as confirmation of God's promise. When Ahaz refused, God considered it an affront towards his graciousness. Isaiah then declares...

"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and he will call him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14

God spoke through his prophet and gave a clear sign which Jesus' birth fulfilled. Is it no wonder that during his ministry Jesus became angry at the Pharisees and Jewish people every time they asked him for a sign to prove he was the Son of God? God gave his word, backed it up with a sign, fulfilled it through Jesus' birth, and yet they did not believe.

There are over 425 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament which Jesus fulfilled. Ones like:

- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- He would be called a Nazarene based on living in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-2)
- He would come out of Egypt as a child (Hosea 11:1)
- He would descend from the house of Jesse and David (Isaiah 11)
- He would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)
- He would be betrayed for exactly 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12)
- He would suffer (Is. 53)
- None of his bones would be broken (Psalm 34:20)
- And He would spend three days in the grave and rise again. (Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:38-40)

Paul writes, "No matter how many promises God has made they are "yes" in Christ." (1 Cor. 1:20)

In Jesus' fulfillment of all the promises of God, we see God's faithfulness to his word. So the question for us becomes whether or not we will believe God's Word. Will we believe God will supply all our needs when the pay check is half of what it should be? His Word says he will. Will we believe God can restore the brokenhearted when our spouse walks out on us? His Word says he can. Will we believe God is good even though someone in our family has a terminal illness? His Word says we can. Will we take God at his word or will we harden our hearts like the Jewish leaders and demand something more?

Next, Matthew points out, Jesus is the Messiah because...

He Fulfills God's Requirements of the Law

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matt. 5:17)

Jesus' teachings were never meant to replace the Old Testament. Rather they completed it and accomplished what the Old Testament could not do, particularly in saving us from sin.

Levitical law required a high priest to offer a spotless lamb as a yearly sacrifice. **Leviticus 16:34 states,**

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

Once it was slaughtered, the lamb's blood was sprinkled seven times on the Most Holy Place, the Tent of the Meeting, the horns of the altar, and on the people themselves as a symbol of perfect cleansing. Yom Kippur literally means "the day of coverings" because the blood of the sacrifice is to cover over or atone for the sin of the people.

But this Old Testament celebration was only an illustration of what was to come. It was incomplete in itself because the sacrifices offered could not clear the conscience of the worshiper. The regulations of the law cleansed outwardly but not inwardly. (Hebrews 9:9-10)

Recently, we bought a new dishwasher. The first time I used it, I was a little overwhelmed with all the cycle options on the control panel. So I decided I best read the manual. I discovered I never again have to choose between a normal, fast, pots and pans, or turbo cycle. Instead I can simply press the "smart wash" button. This cycle washes each load of dishes with just the right amount of water, power, and heat for them to come out spotless. That's what Jesus did to the regulations. They were no longer necessary. He became the only "smart sacrifice" we need. And his perfect sacrifice causes us to come out spotless – inside and out.

The Bible tells us Jesus knew no sin. He was blameless and pure, spotless of a rebellious heart. And unlike the high priests who entered the Most Holy Place every year cleansed by the sprinkling of the blood of a lamb, Christ entered the sanctuary of heaven once for all by his own blood so we might have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. His blood cleanses our consciences – it purifies us inwardly. It does what the law could not do. It does what we cannot do for ourselves through works.

"But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26b)

Jesus initiated a new covenant. Through his once-for-all sacrifice, He saves us from our sins - those in the past, present, and future - just as His name describes. So I ask - will we believe we are saved not by our outer works but by the inner work of faith in Christ's blood shed on our behalf? Will we believe Jesus paid for all our sins, nailing them to the cross? Will we confidently live as if his grace is enough for our salvation, or will we demand something more?

Next, Matthew points out, Jesus is the Messiah because...

He Fulfills God's Work

The Hebrew Word "Messiah" and the equivalent Greek word "Christ" mean "Anointed One." The term comes from the Old Testament practice of anointing people with oil for the work God ordained for them. In the New Testament God anoints Jesus by the Holy Spirit, rather than with the crown of oil.

If you were with us last spring, you might remember me sharing about my daughter who has an interest in fashion design. Two weeks ago, she participated in the downtown "Style" show. We had great fun hooting and hollering at her as she walked the runway. However, afterwards she let us know that though it was fun, modeling isn't her career aspiration. That's okay; it isn't our hope for her either. But we explained that by participating in different fashion career opportunities and building her portfolio, she gains a more complete picture and understanding of the process of fashion design. Similarly, the three Old Testament offices which required anointing foreshadow aspects of the complete work of Christ in the New Testament. By studying them we gain a fuller picture and understanding of what Christ accomplished for us as Messiah.

The first of these offices was that of prophet. Prophets spoke God's word to the people and revealed his desires and expectations for them. Moses foretold of a future time when the Lord God would raise up a

prophet like himself from among the Israelites. (Deuteronomy 18:18) Although Jesus never calls himself a prophet, others refer to him in this way. For example, when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well and revealed her past, she responded, **"Sir, I can see that you are a prophet."** (John 4:19) Likewise after multiplying the loaves and fish, people proclaimed, **"Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."** (John 6:14)

Jesus, too, reveals God and speaks God's words to us. But he is far greater than any prophet who came before him primarily because He embodied God. Jesus was God come down. He lived like us, was tempted like us, and suffered like us. And yet he remained holy and just in his thoughts and actions. He showed us how to live according to God's Word.

Jesus was far greater than the prophets because he himself was the source of truth. People noted Jesus spoke and taught as one with authority. He changed the Old Testament prophetic opening of, "Thus says the Lord..." to, "But I say to you..." He was one with God and became God's mouthpiece. He said, **"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it."** (John 12:49)

And all prophecies point to Him, not to another prophet. When speaking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, the Bible says, **"And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."** (Luke 24:27) None of the earlier prophets could make this claim. Jesus was Immanuel, God with us.

The second office Jesus fulfilled is that of priest. As we have already seen, part of the work of a priest was to offer sacrifices in the temple on behalf of the people. Jesus himself was the perfect sacrifice; but he was also the priest who offered the sacrifice.

Jesus did what the high priests could not do. They only represented the people before God in the temple once a year. But Jesus tore the dividing curtain of the temple when he died indicating a way had been made for all, not just a high priest, to have access to God. Jesus takes us into the presence of God.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." (Hebrews 10:19-22, italics mine)

Jesus also offers up prayers for us. As the *great* high priest he continually intercedes for us. The author of Hebrews noted, **"...he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."** (Hebrews 7:25)

To intercede means to stand as someone else's representative before another and make specific requests on their behalf. It includes prayers which ask, request, petition, and plead for or with another. Our feeble prayers offered in faith pass through the God-man Jesus Christ. James tells us, **"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."** (James 5:16b)

Jesus mediates for us before the throne of God. Because he was tempted in every way as we are while in the flesh, Jesus can sympathize with us and also knows how to petition God for us. We can speak

honestly to him about our temptations and sorrows. He will plead for us. His prayers are powerful and effective as they are always in accordance with the Father's will.

Jesus is not just Immanuel, God *with us*, but He is also God *for us*.

And the third office Jesus fulfills is that of king. Old Testament kings had authority to rule over a nation with military and political power. The Jewish community was expecting Messiah to do the same. During Jesus' lifetime, revolt against the Roman Empire hung in the air, explaining Herod's rash murder of boys two years old and younger when the wise men arrived in Bethlehem looking for the new-born king. (Matt. 2:16) It was a self-inflicted death sentence to declare allegiance to another.

So why would anyone want to claim to be "King of the Jews" at a time of such political mistrust and unrest? Though he often said the kingdom of heaven was near, Jesus never desired to give the impression that he was out to rebel against earthly kingdoms. He even told Pilate his kingdom was not of this world. (John 18:36)

Paul writes God raised Jesus, **"...from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him head over everything for the church..."** (Eph. 1:20-22)

Jesus' kingship isn't just over a nation but over the universe, the church, spiritual forces of evil in the heavens, and all powers of this dark world. His is a kingdom of everlasting peace. It's free from spiritual oppression. It's free from pain and sickness and death. It's free from tears.

Messiah came and conquered sin and death. He is coming again to rule heaven and earth. Every knee will bow to him (Phil. 2:10) and every tongue will confess him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16). His Kingdom will have no end. (Dan. 4:3)

So again I ask - Will we believe he is "God with us" when our children are screaming around us or death leaves us all alone? Will we believe he is "God for us" when we are slandered, accused of wrong, or suffering physically? Will we believe he is sovereign over us when wars break out, disasters happen, or life-changing accidents occur? Or will we demand something more?

The title Messiah means so much more than we give it credit for. But until we turn this head knowledge into heart knowledge it all means nothing. True belief changes us. It changes our perspective of our circumstances because we know a better tomorrow is coming when Messiah comes again. But we can only know such truth from all that the Bible teaches. Head knowledge and heart knowledge are not inseparable. They hinge on each other. The more I know of Messiah in my head, the more I can trust him in my heart and vice versa.

So when we come to a place of really trusting him in our heart, we discover...

He Fulfills our Purpose

Let's return to today's passage and finish reading Matthew 1 beginning in verse 24.

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

Believing Jesus is just a prophet, or a great teacher, or a rebel leader has very little impact on our lives. But believing he is Messiah changes everything. CS Lewis said, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse.” (Mere Christianity, p.113)

When Joseph awoke from his dream, he had a choice to make. Would he believe what the angel said as foretold in Scripture, or not? Would he believe this unborn baby had a greater purpose than he understood, or not? Would he believe God could use a humble girl and a poor carpenter to reveal the Messiah to the world, or not?

At the moment of decision, Joseph’s life changed. His beliefs did not result in a life of ease. He endured the looks, the questions, and the gossip of others as Mary’s womb grew. They had to flee to a foreign country for theirs and the child’s safety. Outwardly, they still struggled to make ends meet as he worked as a poor carpenter and raised a growing young family. But inside, inside he found peace and purpose when he believed and chose to obey.

We are on the other side of history than Joseph was. Not only do we have the Old Testament to fall back on, but we also have a rearview perspective by which we can see the fulfillment of the whole of God’s Word in Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. We too must make a choice. Is Jesus a lunatic or is he the Messiah?

So when we trust him our first purpose becomes to glorify him as Messiah. Scripture guarantees that if we believe on the name of the Lord, we will be saved. (Acts 16:31) If you do not have a personal relationship with Christ and would like someone to pray with you, please see me or one of the other teachers or leaders after the lecture. Becoming a believer brings God glory. The heavens rejoice over one lost sheep returning home. (Luke 15:7) Messiah is still in the business of saving people from their sins if we come to him by faith, confess our sins, and ask him to change our hearts. He will give us rest from guilt and shame.

But we need to glorify him as Messiah as seasoned believers too. Every day that life hurts we are faced with the question, “Who do you say I am?” In the big picture, I understand Messiah is the means of forgiveness for my sins and for my salvation. But in the long picture, I must decide daily if I really believe he is all that Scripture says he is. And I have to decide if that is enough or if I will demand something more. The simple act of believing in all that the Messiah of scripture encompasses allows us to walk by faith in the hard places of life. Every moment is an opportunity to believe and follow him. And that brings God glory.

We find our second purpose is to choose a life of obedience like Joseph did. Obedience shows our love for God and for what Christ has done for us when he saved us from our sins. We will not be free from hardships or sorrows but we will have hope. Obedience means we participate in the death march

towards the cross. Through “dying obedience” we are transformed further into the likeness of Christ. We learn to love more, serve more, forgive more, and suffer more. Obedience brings God glory.

And our last purpose as redeemed people is to continue the work of Christ as prophets, priests, and kings. We are to carry on his work until he returns, especially that of offering Christ’s freedom from the oppression of sin. We are to be ambassadors for Christ. People need to know Jesus lives. They need to know Jesus reigns. And they need to know Messiah still saves.

As prophets, we are to share the Good News of the gospel with others. (Matt. 28:19) We’re to encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:18) and be ready to give an explanation of the hope that is in us. (1 Pet. 3:15) We’re to reveal Christ to others by giving grace freely and serving where we can. We’re to be Jesus with skin on for one another.

As priests, we’re to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise. We need to find the good in all circumstances, confess his name (Hebrews 13:15), intercede for one another (James 5:16), and forgive just as he has forgiven us. (Eph. 4:32) We are to be living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. (Romans 12:1) We’re to walk humbly before God and before each other.

As kings, we have authority through the blood of Christ over Satan. We need to take thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5) and put to death the desires of the flesh through the blood of Christ. (Col. 3:5) We are to clothe ourselves in priestly garments of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal. 5:22) We’re to be a kingdom of light in a dark world (1 Pet. 2:9) by the words we speak, the attitude we display, and the actions we live out. We’re to promote peace and justice and mercy.

Carrying on the work of Christ brings God glory.

So the question today is not “Is Jesus the Messiah?” He has fulfilled God’s promises, the requirements of the Law, and the whole of God’s work. Jesus is who Scripture says he is. He is the Messiah. The question today is “Will you believe?”

Then when we get an email like I did this week which says your father-in-law most likely has cancer too, we know we can run to the cross. We know that we know we can find strength, and peace, and rest in its shadow. We know we can cling to the God who is with us, the God who is for us, and the God who rules over all.

Let’s pray...