
Why Did Jesus Come to Earth?

What would you say if a news reporter came up to you as you were walking along the side of the road in your city and asked you, “What do you believe is the greatest single event that has occurred since the beginning of the world?” How would you answer him? What incident is bigger than all other events in human history? My answer would have to do with the Lord Jesus’ coming into the world to be our Savior.

The most far-reaching occurrence in the history of the world has to be the life—the incarnation, the becoming flesh—of Jesus, God’s Son. Paul wrote that even though Jesus existed in the form of God, He did not regard this equality with God as something to be clung to at all costs. He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,” and was “made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). According to John, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

We could say that *Christ was just as much human as if He were not divine at all, and He was just as much divine as if He were not human at all.* So completely did Jesus identify with the human race in His becoming man that He was born as all humans are born (Luke 2:6), grew as all humans grow (Luke 2:40), was subject to all the sufferings to which all humans are heirs (Hebrews 5:8, 9), and lived in a body that could be affected by disease, decay, and death—a body that humans could even kill on a cross (Philippians 2:8, 9). He was thoroughly a man and was called the Son of Man, yet He was entirely divine and must be acknowledged as the Son of God (Hebrews 2:14, 17, 18). He was the perfect joining of humanity and deity into one personality. He became man without sacrificing His deity; He remained divine even though He became like us.

The nature of Jesus' coming to earth raises serious questions: Why did Jesus come to earth the way He did? What was the purpose of His entering the human race, living among us, and dying upon a cross? Why did the divine Son of God lower Himself to the extent of becoming wholly man? The answers to these questions can be summarized in a single sentence: *"He came to call out—by His ministry, death, and resurrection—a people for His name whom He would call His church"* (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10).

In other words, the result of His visit to this earth is the church. Jesus did not write a book, found a college, or establish a physical family. The only reality that His earthly ministry produced was the church. The only body Jesus ever said He would build was a spiritual body which He termed "My church" (Matthew 16:18). The only foundation Jesus laid during

His ministry was the foundation for the church. Hence, the church can be said to be *the singular creation* of the earthly advent of Christ.

AFFIRMED BY THE GOSPELS

This truth is forcefully affirmed by the Gospel Accounts. Each of the Gospels points to and leads up to the church, the kingdom of heaven, that Jesus would establish on the first Pentecost following His death and resurrection.

As one studies the life of Christ in the Gospels, he is struck by three topics that spring up about His ministry: (1) the mission He set out to accomplish, (2) the way His work prepared for something more, and (3) the way His work was to continue.

First, the Gospels indicate that Jesus did not set out to evangelize the world during His personal ministry. After choosing His apostles, He did not give them a special worldwide commission for their preaching; rather, He calmed their zeal by saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5b, 6). To our amazement, during His ministry Jesus limited Himself to Palestine. He never went to the countries outside of the Roman world. His mission was accomplished by His preaching and teaching in a very small area of the world. Had Jesus set out to evangelize the world during His personal ministry, He would have gone about His work in an entirely different way, employing different wide-scale strategies and methods.

Second, the Gospels indicate that Jesus' life, works, and death were preparing for something to come. Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at

hand" (Matthew 4:17b). He taught His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10a). Jesus was careful to prevent the crowds from being overwhelmed by His miracles and, in reaction, rallying behind the idea of making Him their earthly king. He did not allow the multitudes of people to dictate His schedule. When He worked a miracle, Jesus sometimes asked the recipient of the miracle to "tell no one" (Matthew 8:4).¹ He chose twelve apostles and personally trained them, but it is apparent that He was training them for the work that they would do after His departure (John 14:19).

Third, the Gospels picture Jesus' ministry as having a sense of incompleteness about it. Jesus did what the Father had sent Him to do; but at the end of His life on earth, He prepared His apostles to expect other events and revelations following His ascension. Jesus said to the apostles, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). He also told them, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will

¹See also Matthew 9:30; 12:16; 17:9; Mark 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Luke 4:41; 8:56; 9:21. J. W. McGarvey wrote concerning the strange command "tell no one": "It is accounted for by the necessity of guarding against such undue excitement among the people as might have provoked an interference from the military authorities, and such as would have rendered the people incapable of calm thought in reference to the teachings of Jesus. (See also Mark 1:45.) Sometimes, as occasion required, he reversed his course, and commanded men to go tell what he had done for them" (J. W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew and Mark* [N.p., 1875; reprint, Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., n.d.], 75).

“speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13). After the Resurrection and just before the Ascension, Jesus commanded His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Following the reception of power, they were to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations, starting in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–49).

These characteristics of our Lord’s ministry before and after His death clearly show that His ministry on earth was that of bringing together the essential elements for the building of His kingdom, the church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus announced to His disciples the burden of His earthly work: “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” *Jesus did not come to preach the gospel; He came so that there might be a gospel to preach.*

The famous sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who chiselled out the remarkable Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, also sculptured a head of Abraham Lincoln for the Capitol in Washington, D.C. He carved it from a block of marble in his studio. It is said that when the woman who came in each morning to clean his studio saw the lifelike sculpture for the first time, she stood in astonishment for a moment and then asked, “How did he know that Lincoln was locked in that block of stone?” The answer to her question is that Borglum could see what others could not. He had the eye of an artist, the perception of a sculptor. He could see the face in the block before his skilled hands and visionary mind brought it out.

With the aid of the Gospels, we can see what Jesus saw during His earthly ministry. Locked up in His ministry was the vision of and preparation for the

coming kingdom. He preached about it, prepared for it, and purchased it with His blood.

CONFIRMED BY ACTS

The New Testament book of Acts confirms that Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection had behind them the controlling purpose of creating the church, of bringing in the kingdom. The Gospels candidly announce the truth, and Acts confirms the announcement by living-color illustrations.

Ten days after our Lord's ascension, the Holy Spirit was miraculously given to the apostles on Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4); the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was preached for the first time; people were invited to respond to this gospel by faith, repentance, and baptism for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; Luke 24:46, 47); and three thousand accepted that invitation by receiving the Word which was preached and by being baptized (Acts 2:41). Therefore, following Jesus' ministry as night follows day, the church of our Lord was born.

The remaining story of Acts is the story of the church's moving, as a flame of sacred love, from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and beyond, to other parts of the Roman Empire. Whenever inspired preaching occurred in Acts, hearers responded, coming into the church by obeying the Word preached. Whenever a mission trip took place in Acts, churches were left in its wake in new areas of the world. The three missionary trips of Paul in Acts planted churches throughout the world, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Romans 15:19). No one can read Acts without observing anew the overwhelming conclusion that the church is the outcome of Christ's earthly advent.

A preacher once said, “We must employ the same methods that Jesus employed in our task of evangelizing the world. Let us gather around us twelve men and train them for future work. Jesus shows us how to evangelize the world in the method He used.” Certainly, Jesus was perfect in everything He did. A thorough study of His ministry, however, reveals that His mission during His ministry was not that of evangelizing the world. It was that of laying the foundation for the church; it was that of putting the pieces of the blueprint together for the evangelization of the world. In His approach to His work, He employed ways and means suitable for the fulfillment of His unique mission, a mission which was different from the worldwide evangelistic mission He has given to His followers.

We do not see in Acts that the apostles and other inspired men used the same approaches that our Lord used. They did not try to imitate His way of teaching, gathering around them twelve other men to train. Instead, through their preaching and teaching, the apostles and other inspired men brought people into the church. These new Christians were then nurtured, trained, encouraged, and taught for service and evangelism *by the church as a part of the church*. Acts shows us the life of the church as the outcome of the earthly ministry of Jesus. The life of Christ makes up 48 percent of the New Testament; the other 52 percent is composed of what the life, death, and resurrection of Christ produced—the church.

REAFFIRMED BY THE EPISTLES

The New Testament epistles stress the application of the truth that the church is the natural fruition of

Christ's earthly life and death. The Gospels assert this truth, Acts amplifies it, and the Epistles apply it. The Epistles show us how to respond to the life of Christ by being His spiritual body.

The Epistles were written to people who had chosen to come to Christ through faith and obedience. They lived at a time when the effect of Christ's life, death, and resurrection was in fresh focus. The import of the messages of the inspired men was that Christ is honored as Lord and His human life among us is properly received by our becoming and being His church.

In every epistle the followers of Christ are urged to live and serve as Christ's spiritual body. The Epistles, when brought together, actually provide a "guidance manual" on how to be and live as the church of Christ in all kinds of circumstances and in different places. They teach us how to apply Christ's earthly ministry to our lives.

We submit to Jesus as Lord by entering His body through obedient faith. Paul likened the final act of this faith response to putting on, or being clothed with, Christ (Galatians 3:27). According to the Epistles, no one has submitted to Jesus until he has entered His body through a baptism for salvation that has been preceded by faith, repentance, and confession of Jesus as God's Son.

We honor the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by living and worshiping together as God's family in His spiritual body, the church. Paul said,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:4, 5).

. . . there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:25–27).

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them . . . (Acts 20:7).

When we fail to live and worship as God's family, as Christ's church, we take away from what Christ came to accomplish and damage what He died to establish.

Jesus has called us to be His body, His church. The Epistles never describe His people as being any church or body other than the church of Christ. According to the Epistles, Jesus created only one way for us to follow Him, only one way to serve Him, only one way to receive His blood and the salvation He provides. That way is to live faithfully in this world as His spiritual body.

A little girl found a Bible in the corner of the house. She held it up and asked her mother, "What book is this, Mother?" Her mother said, "That is God's book, the Bible." The little girl, with piercing insight, advised, "Why don't we send it back to Him, since we never use it?"

The truth is that we can read it and *still not really use it*. We can quote the Bible in every conversation, read it every day, and yet *fail to apply it*. Real application of the Bible requires us to follow it in the practical way of being Christ's church. When we become what the Bible teaches us to become, only then are we making the right and proper use of it.

CONCLUSION

The entire New Testament, therefore, joins together to teach that the church, the spiritual body of Christ, is the creation of Christ's mission in becoming man. The Gospels affirm it by promising it, Acts confirms it by picturing it, and the Epistles reaffirm it by practically applying it to life.

Since the New Testament says that the only way for us to respond to the One who lived, died, and arose from the dead for our salvation is by entering His church and living as faithful members of it, the question that follows is this: "Are you in His body?" What a mistake it would be to come to the end of life and discover that you had completely missed the true purpose of life! Perhaps there is something even sadder—missing the purpose for which the Son of God came to this earth. As surely as the New Testament gives us God's divine message of salvation, as surely as Christ came to this earth in human form, anyone who does not enter His body will learn at the end of life's journey that he has missed the reason why Christ came to this earth. *This conclusion is the basic teaching of the entire New Testament!*

When Christ came to the end of His brief life here, He could say, "Father, I have done what You asked Me to do. I have fulfilled Your mission for Me." Bet-

ter it is to live a few years on this earth within the circle of God's will, fulfilling His purposes, than to live a long life in a palace, reigning over the kingdom of selfish pursuits. At the end of life, scores of people are only able to say, "God, I have lived out the years that You gave me on this earth, and I have done only what I have wished to do. I have pursued the mission I chose for myself."

May it be that when we come to the close of life, we can say, "Lord, I have discovered from the Scriptures what You wanted me to be and do, and I have dedicated myself to that mission. I have sincerely tried to glorify You on the earth, and I have sought to live the plan that You gave to me. I have lived as the church of Christ."

STUDY QUESTIONS

(answers on page 264)

1. What is the greatest event that has ever occurred in the history of the world? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Was Jesus completely man or just partially man?
3. Was Jesus completely divine or just partially divine?
4. Why did Jesus come to earth? What one purpose did He come to fulfill?
5. Show how Jesus' ministry was preparation for something to come.
6. What is the function of the Epistles in the New Testament?
7. Can we respond properly to the life of Jesus without being His church?
8. Can we fulfill Jesus' mission for us in this world without living as His church?

WORD HELPS

added to the church—made part of God’s obedient people. All who obey the terms laid down by Jesus in the Great Commission are added by God to the body of the saved (Acts 2:41, 47).

church of Christ—not a building, but the group of those who have obeyed the gospel and have been added to the church (as in Acts 2:36–47).

epistle—a letter. Many New Testament books (Romans through Revelation) were written as letters to Christians.

evangelism—the practice of sharing the gospel. Timothy, for example, was told to do the work of an evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:5.

Gentile—a non-Jewish person.

Jewish—of the race of Jews, or Israelites; being a descendant of Abraham through Jacob.

kingdom of God—the reign and rule of Jesus in the hearts and lives of men.

righteousness—the nature of being without guilt or sin. Since this is impossible for man himself, being “righteous” means receiving the forgiveness of God and becoming justified, cleansed of all sin, before God. The Christian exhibits this right relationship with God through living daily according to His Word.