

Jesus Christ
Lesson 3

Opening Prayer

PSALM 2

1 Why are the nations in an uproar? *
Why do the peoples mutter empty threats?
2 **Why do the kings of the earth rise up in revolt,
and the rulers plot together, ***
against the LORD and against the LORD's anointed?
3 "Let us break their yoke," they say; *
"let us cast off their bonds from us."
4 **The One enthroned in heaven is laughing; ***
the LORD has them in derision.
5 Then in wrath the LORD speaks to them, *
and divine rage fills them with terror.
6 **"I myself have set my king ***
upon my holy hill of Zion."
7 Let me announce the decree of the LORD: *
the LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
this day have I begotten you.
8 **Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance
and the ends of the earth for your possession.**
9 You shall crush them with an iron rod *
and shatter them like a piece of pottery."
10 **And now, you kings, be wise; ***
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
11 Submit to the LORD with fear, *
and with trembling bow down in worship;
12 **lest the LORD be angry and you perish; ***
for divine wrath is quickly kindled.
13 **Happy are they all ***
who take refuge in the LORD!

Sovereign God,
you gave us your only begotten to be the Savior of the world,
and you crowned him with grace to rule over all.
Give us humility
that we may faithfully serve him,
and so know the joy
given to all who take refuge in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(Book of Common Worship, page 612)

Christology ...is the touchstone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense, the touchstone of all theology. "Tell me how it stands with your Christology, and I shall tell you who you are." This is the point at which ways diverge, and the point at which is fixed the relation between theology and philosophy, and the relation between knowledge of God and knowledge of men,¹ the relation between revelation and reason, the relation between Gospel and Law, the relation between God's truth and man's truth, the relation between outer and inner, the relation between theology and politics. At this point everything becomes clear and unclear, bright and dark. For we are standing at the center. And however high and mysterious and difficult everything we want to know might seem to us, yet we may also say that this is just where everything becomes quite simple, quite straightforward, quite childlike.

Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, 66.

The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them, he took upon himself the judgment under which all men stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all men.

The Confession of 1967 9.01, 9.08

7 We trust in Jesus Christ,
8 fully human, fully God.
9 Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
10 preaching good news to the poor
11 and release to the captives,
12 teaching by word and deed
13 and blessing the children,

¹ To honor the integrity of the quote I have intentionally left the word "men" to stand, as it was intended in the original, for all humanity in this as well as *The Confession of 1967*.

14 healing the sick
15 and binding up the brokenhearted,
16 eating with outcasts,
17 forgiving sinners,
18 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
19 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
20 Jesus was crucified,
21 suffering the depths of human pain
22 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
23 God raised this Jesus from the dead,
24 vindicating his sinless life,
25 breaking the power of sin and evil,
26 delivering us from death to life eternal.

A Brief Statement of Faith

10.02

Appendix to a Brief Statement

As part of your daily Bible study, you may wish to look up the biblical references to the faith as it is articulated in A Brief Statement of faith. The PC (USA) proclaims that we are “people of the books – the Bible, the Part 1 of the Constitution: the *Book of Confessions*; and Part 2 of the Constitution: the *Book of Order*.” The Bible is the source of our theology and polity. The *Book of Confessions* articulates our theology and the *Book of Order* orders our polity in submission to and informed by the Bible and confessions.

The Confession of 1967 says this, “Confession and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him . No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is irreformable (sic). Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its traditions” (9.03).

We have a theological informed and rich tradition.

Lines 7–26

7–8 Scripture Ps 86:1–2; Is 12:2; Mt 1:18–25; 11:27; Mk 8:27–30; 14:61–62; Lk 2:1–52; Jn 1:1–18; 5:1–18; 7:25–31; 10:30–39; Gal 4:1–7; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20; 2:8–10; Heb 1; 2:14–18; 4:14–15; 5:7–10; 13:8; 1 Jn 1:1–2.

Confessions NC, 2nd art.; SC, VI; HC, qq 31, 35, 47; SHC, XI; WCF, VIII, 2; WSC, q 21; WLC, qq 36–42; C67, IA1.

9–18 Scripture Ps 34:6–18; 146:5–9; 147:1–6; Is 42:1–7; 61:1–3; Ezek 34:15–16; Zeph 3:19; Mt 4:23–25; 9:10–13; 13:1–58; 15:21–28; 18:21–35; 23:1–4; Mk 1:14–15; 5:1–20; 6:30–44; 9:33–37; 10:13–16; Lk 4:16–22 (18); 5:17–32; 6:17–36; 7:1–27; 33–50; 8:1–3; 10:38–42; 15:1–32; Jn 4:1–42; 8:1–11; 10:1–18; 11:1–44; 16:33; Acts 10:34–43.

Confessions SC, XIV, XVI; HC, qq 1, 31, 74, 107; SHC, XIII–XV; WCF, VIII, XII, XXV; WSC, qq 21–30, 36; WLC, qq 43–50, 135; BD, I; C67 IA1, IIA4c, III.

19–22 Scripture

Lines 19–20 Mt 26:57–68; Mk 14:53–65; Lk 22:63–71; Mt 27:32–37; Mk 15:21–26; Lk 23:32–35; Jn 10:22–39; 19:1–22; 1 Cor 1:20–25.

Lines 21–22 Ps 22; 88:1–9; Is 52:13–53:12; Mt 27:27–31, 39–50; Mk 15:16–20, 29–37; Lk 23:11, 39–46; Mk 8:31–35; 10:45; Lk 22:39–46; Jn 1:29–34; 3:16–18; 10:7–18; 19:28–37; Rom 5; 2 Cor 5:17–21; 1 Tim 2:5–6; Heb 2; 5:7–10; 9:11–22; 1 Pet 2:21–24; 3:18; 1 Jn 2:1–2; 4:9–10; Rev 5.

Confessions SC, VIII, IX; HC, qq 29–44; SHC, XI; WCF, VIII; WSC, qq 28–31; WLC, qq 44, 49.

23–26 Scripture

Lines 23–24 Ps 24:4–5; 26:1; 37:5–6; Is 50:4–9; Matt 27:3–4; 28:1–17; Mk 16:1–8; Lk 24:1–47; Jn 20–21; Acts 2:22–36 (32); 17:16–34; Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 15:3–57; 1 Tim 3:14–16.

Lines 25–26 Ps 49:13–15; Is 25:6–8; Dan 12:2–3; Jn 3:16–18; 5:19–24; 11:17–27; Rom 4:24–25; 5:1–21; 6:1–23; 8:1–11; 1 Cor 15:20–28; Eph 2:1–7; Col 1:9–14; 2:8–15; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 13:20–21; Rev 21:3–4.

Confessions SC, X; HC, qq 45–52; SHC, XI; WCF, VIII, 4–8; WLC, qq 52–56; BD, II, 2–4; C67, IA1.

Key: SC – *Scots Confession*; HC – *Heidelberg Catechism*; SHC – *Second Helvetic Confession*; WCF – *Westminster Confession of Faith*; WLC – *The Larger Catechism*; WSC – *The Shorter Catechism*; BD – *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*; C67 – *The Confession of 1967*;

The Reformed Doctrine – Jesus Christ²

The Apostles' Creed deals a lot with "*who*" – who is God, who is Jesus Christ, who is the Holy Spirit. In Lesson 2 we dealt with the issue "who is the Creator?" In this lesson we examine the question, "*Who is Jesus Christ?*"

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13-18, ESV)

We begin with a man – the Son of Man, the Jesus of and the actuality of our faith. Our faith is in Jesus who we believe to be the Christ and that the Christ is Jesus of Nazareth. There is no room in the Christian faith to separate the *Christ* from the person named *Jesus*. Jesus Christ defines who we are as Christians.

- Christianity was first named as such by Pliny the Younger to describe the followers of Jesus in Antioch. It was a pejorative term – much like a bigot's racial epithet today.
- It did not define a "world view" or philosophy but was explicitly used to identify those who followed Jesus of Nazareth and who believe the he was the Christ (Messiah) – see footnote #2.

The Quest for the Historical Jesus

This has been a detour into one of the deadest of dead-end streets. It continues to this day with the "Jesus Seminar."³

² The word Christ is derived from the Greek word *crīstoj* for the title Messiah (Jewish). The word latterly means "The Anointed One."

Scholars, theologians, historians and philosophers, in the wake of the Age of Enlightenment, undertook the task to search for the historical Jesus. They believed that eventually they would find a “good and moral teacher who preached ethics of the kingdom of God ... whose tragic death gave his life’s work it full meaning, inspiring other people to follow his example.”⁴

- Purpose: find faith in history
- Search for the classical liberal theology for Jesus as the great moral teacher
- Immanuel Kant – Christianity an ethical-religious movement ⁵
- Schweitzer – significance of Jesus is not his moral example but his spiritual force; at the end of the day, either accept Jesus on faith or not
- Jesus significance is not in moral life but because he spiritually arises within people (Schweitzer life work is a good example of the latter).

Kerygma⁶

The first sermon in the New Testament was delivered by Mary Magdalene to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” (John 20:18).

Content of the early church’s preaching⁷

- Jesus is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy
- He did good and preformed miracles
- He was crucified according to God’s design
- He was raised and ascended into heaven
- He will return in judgment
- We should repent, believe, be baptized
- Examples: Acts 2:14-38 (Peter’s sermon at Pentecost); 13:16-41; 15:1-21; 17:1-15; Romans 1:1-17; 10:1-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-19; Hebrews 14

Dietrich Bonhoeffer summarized the preaching of the early church and the Christian’s response in Christ the Center: the beginning point of the theological study of Christ is personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord

³ If you are interested in learning more about the seminar you may visit the official website of the seminar at <http://westarinstitute.org/> or “Google – Jesus Seminar” and read the Wikipedia article

⁴ Jinkins, 99

⁵ Heron, Alasdair. A Century of Protestant Theology, 16ff

⁶ Greek: κήρυγμα preaching in the early church

⁷ For an exhaustive account see Hughes Oliphant Old: The Reading and Preaching of Scripture in the Worship of the Christian Church: Biblical Period, vol. 1.

(the first confession of the church, "Jesus is Lord!"). The ability to claim this faith is through the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearing of the Word of God (see Romans 10:17) and it is mediated through the witness of the church (not a singular personal, worship God on the mountain top sort of faith). Historical studies, while they have their place and it is an important place, cannot serve as a "sacrament" by which we have access to Jesus of Nazareth. "There is ... no way from historical investigation to absoluteness. There is no absolute ground of faith in history."⁸

A personal relationship with the living Christ as was witnessed to by the disciples does not have efficacy greater than that available to contemporary Christians. Kierkegaard observed that those persons who saw Jesus in the flesh have no advantage over those of us who only hear the proclamation either in sermon or Scripture since both the Word of God,⁹ because faith comes through hearing the gospel, and in hearing the gospel we encounter Christ himself.¹⁰

Christology

Karl Barth defined as Christian as "one who makes confession of Christ. And the Christian confession of Jesus Christ the Lord."¹¹ Saying this rolls easily off the tongue of most church going Christians. I once gave a talk to a group of Christian business men (and they were intentionally men) and the banner behind the speaker's platform had this confession boldly printed in giant red letter. But what does it mean?

The Greek word is Kyrios – meaning Lord. This title had political and religious connotations. First, for Jews saying the name Yahweh was not allowed, hence the other names for God – adonai, eloheim; lord. So saying that Jesus is Lord means that Jesus has been put on the same level as God! The Jews considered this blasphemy.

Second, in the Roman governed world, Caesar was lord. A double whammy for Christians, they were both blasphemers and seditious.

The confession that Jesus is Lord raises three questions:

1. If the Lord is one as Deuteronomy says, how can Jesus be God?

⁸ Bonhoeffer, 72

⁹ *The Second Helvetic Confession*, Chapter 1, 5.004

¹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard. *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, 69.

¹¹ Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*, 65.

2. How can God become flesh if God is both eternal and immutable and how can God suffer and die?
3. How can Jesus be both a human being in the flesh (incarnate) and the God's eternal Son; both a creature and the divine Word of God who created all things?

Attempts to answer these questions led to councils (Nicene - 325, Constantinople - 381, Chalcedon -451, et al) which answered the heresies by well intentioned bishop who attempted to answer the questions, but in err.

Docetic Gnosticims could not accept that God would become incarnate, it was inconceivable to them that God would reduce himself to the flesh. Interestingly this heresy persists today in "New Age" expressions of Christianity. Also, the concept of a transcendent deity is more appealing to some communities of faith than engaging Jesus Christ who came in the flesh.

Some examples of heresies:¹²

- **Ebionism** (poor people [Matt. 5:3]) Early heretical sect of ascetic Jewish Christians. It stressed obedience to the Mosaic law and believed Jesus was not divine but became "the Son of God" when the Holy Spirit descended on him at his baptism (Matt. 3:16).
- **Docetism** (to seem) belief that Jesus only seems or appeared to have a human body and to be a human person. The view was founded during the period of the early church among Gnostics, who saw materiality as evil. It was condemned by Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 – c. 107).
- **Gnosticism** (from Greek gnosis, "knowledge") Secret knowledge could free the elect from the limits of the world (spirit from matter, light from darkness) and enable them to return home to the kingdom of light (1 Timothy 6:20) Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus.
- **Sabellianism** - Sabellius was a teacher preacher probably in Rome in the early 3rd century who taught that God has one nature and is one person with three names: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This view of the Trinity was considered heretical by the church, which taught that God is one and that the Godhead consisted of three persons. He preached *modalism* (Latin "mode") it taught that the one God was revealed at different

¹² McKim, Donald [Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms](#)

- times in different ways and thus has three manners (modes) of appearance rather than being one God in the three persons.
- **Arianism** – the teaching of the 4th century theologian Arius (c. 250 – 336) that Jesus is the highest created being but does not share the same substance as God the Father. The Council of Nicaea (325) settled this heresy.

The early church as well as the contemporary church, struggled to make sense of this inconceivable concept of God in the flesh – Jesus Christ.

The early church bishops labored to maintain the integrity of the two teachings of the faith: God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and, the reconciliation (atonement) of God and humanity. This question continues to confront us today. It is the question that Jesus asked his disciples and Peter answered, “Who do they say that I am? Who do you say that I am, Peter?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ”

When we encounter Jesus Christ have we encountered God? Does God reveal his inner self? In atonement – if Christ were not human how could he redeem us and if Christ is not God how can he redeem us?

Answers:¹³

- ✦ Jesus Christ is the Lord, in the mystery of his humanity, fully human, in the mystery of his divinity, fully God; both fully God and fully human who meets us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.
- ✦ Jesus Christ is not the appearance of humanity nor the semblance of the divine, but the divine Word become flesh, Emmanuel – God among us.
- ✦ When we encounter Jesus Christ, we encounter God.
- ✦ God in Jesus Christ became human and in our flesh overcame our sin and conquered death.

Augustine said this about that (flesh and divine), “God is greater and truer in our thoughts than in our words; he is greater and truer in reality than in our thoughts.”

¹³ Jinkins, 118

The Second Helvetic Confession

The word "Helvetic" is Latin for "Swiss." The setting of the Second Helvetic Confession is Swiss-German Reformed Protestantism.

After the great Reformer Ulrich Zwingli died in battle in 1531, Heinrich Bullinger succeeded him as minister of the church in Zurich. Bullinger was a model Reformed minister. A preacher, he expounded Scripture at least twice a week. A scholar, he wrote Latin commentaries on many books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation. An educator, he initiated a system of schools for Zurich and was rector of the Carolinum, a theological academy. A person with ecumenical and political concerns, he was in correspondence with leaders of the Reformation and with rulers throughout Europe. A pastor, he welcomed religious refugees into his own home. When the plague swept through Zurich in 1564, he insisted upon ministering to the afflicted, even though he knew he might become infected and die.

In 1561, Bullinger composed the document that later became known as the Second Helvetic Confession. He intended to attach it to his last will and testament to the Zurich church, but events in Germany soon brought it into the public arena.

The publication of the Heidelberg Catechism created trouble for the man who had ordered its preparation. Lutherans considered it too Reformed in spirit, and they demanded that Frederick the Elector, governor of the Palatinate, be brought to trial for heresy. Not a theologian himself, Frederick turned to Bullinger, who offered Frederick this confession as the basis for his defense. When the Imperial Diet, the ruling body of Germany, met for trial in 1566, Frederick was exonerated.

Meanwhile, the churches of Switzerland adopted Bullinger's confession as their new confession of faith. Soon finding wide acceptance throughout Europe and beyond, it was translated into French, English, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic, and Turkish.

Reflecting the theological maturity of the Reformed churches, the Second Helvetic Confession is moderate in tone and catholic in spirit. From the opening paragraphs it emphasizes the church and its life and affirms the authority of the Scriptures for the church's government and reformation. By including an article on predestination, the confession asks the church to trust in God's free and gracious election of its

membership in Jesus Christ. At the same time, the confession addresses the practical life of the gathered community, detailing matters of worship, church order and conflict, ministry, the sacraments, and marriage.

Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World

5.062

CHRIST IS TRUE GOD. We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world. And we believe that he was born, not only when he assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner. For Isaiah said: "Who can tell his generation?" (Ch. 53:8). And Micah says: "His origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2). And John said in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," etc. (Ch. 1:1). Therefore, with respect to his divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God (Phil. 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but in substance and nature, as the apostle John has often said: "This is the true God and eternal life" (I John 5:20 Paul also says: "He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding all things by his word of power" (Heb. 1:2 f.). For in the Gospel the Lord himself said: "Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). And in another place in the Gospel it is written: "The Jews sought all the more to kill him because he . . . called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

5.064

CHRIST IS TRUEMAN, HAVING REAL FLESH. We also believe and teach that the eternal Son of the eternal God was made the Son of man, from the seed of Abraham and David, not from the coitus of a man, as the Ebionites said, but was most chastely conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the ever virgin Mary, as the evangelical history carefully explains to us (Matt., ch. 1). And Paul says: "He took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham." Also the apostle John says that whoever does not believe that Jesus Christ has

come in the flesh, is not of God. Therefore, the flesh of Christ was neither imaginary nor brought from heaven, as Valentinus and Marcion wrongly imagined.

5.065

A RATIONAL SOUL IN CHRIST. Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ did not have a soul bereft of sense and reason, as Apollinaris thought, nor flesh without a soul, as Eunomius taught, but a soul with its reason, and flesh with its senses, by which in the time of his passion he sustained real bodily pain, as he himself testified when he said: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). And, "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27).

5.066

TWO NATURES IN CHRIST. We therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person—the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent.

5.067

NOT TWO BUT ONE CHRIST. Thus we worship not two but one Christ the Lord. We repeat: one true God and man. With respect to his divine nature he is consubstantial with the Father, and with respect to the human nature he is consubstantial with us men, and like us in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 4:15).

Application

1. In what way can we affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord, today?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:13-16. Does this help answer question #1? Use a study Bible.
3. Pray this prayer each day, Lord, show me what holy looks like; Lord make me holy. Amen.

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