

Foundations of the Faith 103
Systematic Theology
“Christology”
Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King
Pt. 20

Introduction -

“It has been common in Protestant circles since the reformation to speak of the work of Christ under three general heads: prophet, priest and king. These refer to his roles as teacher, Savior and ruler over the universe and the church. It has been objected by some that these roles are not always that distinct, either in Christ’s own ministry or in the Old Testament offices upon which they are built. Priests as well as prophets are found to be teachers. Several kings were recipients of God’s inspired revelation, as were the prophets. Nevertheless, the usual threefold division of Christ’s work has good scriptural support.” - James Montgomery Boice in his book *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, page 295.

1. Luke 24:19, A Prophet
2. Heb. 2:17, A Priest
3. Rev. 19:16, King - “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.”

How this threefold office of Christ applies to human spiritual need.

1. The Need for Knowledge - as Prophet - teacher. He’s the revealer of God.
2. The Need for Salvation
 - a. Offering himself as a sacrifice and so providing atonement for our sin.
 - b. He intercedes for us at the right hand of his Father in Heaven.
3. Our Need for Rule and Guidance - Our lives, church, the world.

Charles Hodge; says summing up the three offices of Christ: “We are enlightened in the knowledge of the truth; we are reconciled unto God by the sacrificial death of his Son; and we are delivered from the power of Satan and introduced into the kingdom of God; all of which supposes that our Redeemer is to us at once prophet, priest, and king. This is not, therefore, simply a convenient classification of the contents of his mission and work, but it enters into its very nature, and must be retained in our theology if we would take the truth as it is revealed in the Word of God.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

I. Christ as Prophet; The Logos of God

A. The Designation of Christ as Prophet

Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22, 7:3; Jesus himself, Matt. 13:57; Heb. 1:1-2

A prophet is one who speaks for another; Jesus like the Old Testament prophets speaks for God.

B. The Manner of Christ as Prophet

One of our Lord’s principal activities while on earth was proclaiming God’s message through preaching (Matt. 4:17) and teaching (7:29). The manner of His preaching and teaching included these interesting characteristics.

1. *It was an occasional thing.* This does not mean He taught infrequently, but rather as the occasion arose. He was always open to opportunities and the variety of situations that presented themselves. He used the synagogue services when possible (Mark 1:21). He preached outdoors if an indoor situation was unavailable (4:1). He seized every opportunity.

2. *It was unsystematic.* This was due to the fact that He took opportunities as they arose, rather than waiting until a planned curriculum could be followed. Think, for example, of where you will find the Lord's teaching on sin; and the answer is in various passages of various types - some didactic, some parabolic. The interpreter of Scripture has to systematize Christ's teaching.

3. *It was profusely illustrated.* And those illustrations were themselves varied and appropriately chosen for the audience (notice an illustration for women and men in Matt. 24:40-41 and Luke 15:4, 8).

4. *It made use of questions.* This was true especially in situations of controversy (Matt. 22).

5. *It was authoritative.* This was probably the outstanding feature of Christ's ministry as a Prophet. His authority stood in sharp contrast to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 1:22) because it probed the depths of the reality of the truth. - Charles Ryrie

6. *Egocentric*

C. The Material of Christ as Prophet

Though much of His prophetic material is scattered throughout the Gospels, there are three major messages preserved for us: the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), the message on the Mount of Olives on Tuesday of Holy Week (Matt. 24-25), and the message to the disciples in the Upper Room on Thursday evening (John 13-16). The teachings of Christ are possibly the most difficult part of the entire Bible to interpret accurately. Why is this so? Because our Lord lived under the Mosaic Law and perfectly kept it; but He also presented Himself to Israel as their King; and when He was rejected as King, He introduced the new part of God's program for this world - the Law, the church, and the kingdom. To keep those strands of teaching distinct and without confusion is not always easy.

1. *The Sermon on the Mount.* Some view this discourse as an exposition of the way of salvation. The problem with such an interpretation is simply that the great salvation words like redemption or justification do not occur at all in these chapters. Also if this is the correct interpretation then salvation is surely through good works.

Others consider the sermon a blueprint for Christian living today. To use it this way would require deliteralizing much of what is taught in order to be able obey it in this unrighteous world. Further, if this is truth for the church, then why did our Lord not mention the Holy Spirit, so important for Christian living, or even the church itself?

Still others understand its primary purpose to relate to Christ's kingdom message. The forerunner, John had announced the kingdom (Matt. 3:2); Christ Himself began to preach that message (Matt. 4:17); now He explained what was involved in true repentance. The kingdom they preached and the kingdom the people expected was that messianic, Davidic, millennial kingdom promised in the Old Testament. Christ gave no indication that they should have understood otherwise by changing the meaning of the kingdom He was talking about. But the people had placed their hopes so much on a political kingdom that they forgot there were

spiritual requirements for even that political kingdom. So the Lord explained what was involved in spiritual preparation for the Davidic kingdom.

Preached in relation to the kingdom, this discourse seems mainly to emphasize getting ready for the kingdom. Therefore, it has relevance for any time that the kingdom is imminent - which includes the time Christ preached it, and the future time of the Tribulation. It also pictures conditions as they will be in the kingdom when it is established. But, like all Scripture, it is profitable for disciples in any age since it is one of the most detailed ethical codes in the Bible.

2. *The message on the Mount of Olives.* By the time this message was given at the end of Christ's earthly life, it was quite clear that the Jewish leaders had rejected the kingdom, and Christ Himself had introduced the church as the coming thing in God's program (Matt. 16:18). Did this mean that the kingdom was scratched from God's program forever? Not at all, and this message details some future events leading up to the return of Christ to establish that messianic, Davidic, millennial kingdom. Matthew 24:4-14 lists details that will happen during the first part of the coming Tribulation period. Verses 15-28 do the same for the second half of that period. Then Christ will return to earth and take the throne of His kingdom (v. 30; 25:31, 34). That this did not occur in the disciples' lifetimes as they expected in no way abrogates the assurance that one day Christ will rule in His kingdom. (Acts. 1:6).

3. *The message in the Upper Room.* The night before His crucifixion the Lord revealed in capsule form a number of things about the new Church Age soon to be inaugurated. He repeated these things in capsule form because the disciples could not yet understand what was really happening (John 16:12). What were some new revelations? (1) He gave a new command - to love each other in the same way He loves us (13:34). (2) He opened up a new hope - a place that He would prepare and take believers (14:1-3). (3) He promised another Paraclete who would minister in a number of new ways: advising, exhorting, comforting, interceding, convicting, teaching, etc. (v. 16). (4) He unveiled new relationships - the Holy Spirit in them, not just with them, believers in Christ and Christ in believers (vv. 17, 20). (5) He established a new basis for prayer in His name (16:24, 26). All of these reveal tremendous differences between the economy then operative and the coming new dispensation of the church.

D. The Authentication of Christ as Prophet

The Law commanded that false prophets be stoned (Deut. 13:5, 10). Of course if a prophet lived to the time when his prophecy was either fulfilled or not, you could easily tell if he were a true or false prophet. If he did not, then it was more difficult. Our Lord's prophetic ministry was authenticated in two ways: by being able to see that some of His prophecies came true, and by the miracles which verified to the people of His day that He was a true Prophet.

The test case is His detailed prediction of His death. He prophesied that someone close to Him would betray Him (Matt. 26:21), that His death would be instigated by the Jewish leaders (16:21), that He would die by crucifixion and that three days later He would come back to life (20:19).

In addition, some of Christ's miracles were directly linked as attesting to His being a true Prophet (Luke 7:16; John 4:19; 9:17).

II. Christ As Priest: The Mediator of God

The prophet spoke to men from God; the priest speaks to God for men. Being of the tribe of Judah disqualified Christ from being an Aaronic priest; therefore, God arranged ahead of His coming for another order of priests, the order of Melchizedek, and Christ is a priest of that order with respect to His person and His work. Yet there are similarities between Aaronic priests and Christ as Priest both in His person and His work.

A. As Aaronic Priest

1. An Aaronic priest had to be a man chosen by God and qualified for His work (Lev. 21; Heb. 5:1-7). Our Lord chosen incarnate and tested, qualified in His person to be a ministering Priest.
2. Aaronic priest served by representing the people to God and especially in offering sacrifices. Their sacrifices were many, repeated, and not in themselves eternally efficacious. They did not make atonement for sin in the context of the theocracy, but the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that they had been able to effect eternal satisfaction for sin there would have been no need for their repetition year after year (10:2-3). In contrast, our Lord's sacrifice of Himself for our sins was a single sacrifice, once for all, and for all mankind. In this, His great work of redemption, He did a work which was foreshadowed by the work of the Aaronic priests, even though He was not a priest after the order of Aaron.

B. As Melchizedekan Priest

The portrait of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20 and Hebrews 7:1-3 seems deliberately limited to those features which liken him to Christ. Features of the Melchizedekan priesthood include these. Melchizedek was a king as well as a priest. The uniting of these two functions was unknown among Aaronic priests, though predicted of Christ in Zechariah 6:13.

“Without father, without mother” does not mean that Melchizedek did not have parents, nor that he was not born or did not die, but only that the Scriptures contain no record of these events so that he might be more perfectly likened to Christ. Aaronic priest depended on their ancestry to qualify. Having no recorded beginning or ending so Melchizedek might again be more like the Lord who is a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Abraham out of whom came the Aaronic order, acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek when he gave tithes of the spoils of the war to him (Gen. 14:20). Levi, though unborn, and all the priests that came from him were involved in this act which demonstrated the superiority of Melchizedek.

In what ways does Christ function as a Melchizedekan priest? Like Melchizedek He is a ruler. He receives our obeisance. He blesses us. And as Melchizedekan offered bread and wine to Abraham to refresh and sustain him after the battle, so our Lord as Priest refreshes and sustains His people. He did this, for example, to Stephen at the time of his martyrdom. Our Lord was standing to sustain Stephen (Acts. 7:55). He does the same today with respect to local churches as He walks among the golden lampstands (Rev. 2:1). His work of redemption is finished, so He is seen seated, indicating He will never have to rise again to do it over or to add to it in any way (Heb. 1:3). But His ministry of helping and sustaining goes on, so He is seen standing to do this. We have a great High Priest standing and ready to come to the aid of those who are tested (2:18) and anxious to give grace to help in the time of need. (4:16).

III. Christ As King

The concept of king includes a wide range of prerogatives. A king in Israel had legislative, executive, judicial, economic, and military powers. The concept of Christ as King may be surveyed around five words: promised, predicted, proffered, rejected, and realized. God's gracious covenant with David promised that the right to rule would always remain with David's dynasty. It did not promise uninterrupted rule, for, in fact, the Babylonian Captivity did interrupt it (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Isaiah predicted that the Child who would be born would establish and reign on the throne of David (Isa. 9:7).

Gabriel announced to Mary that her Baby would have the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob (Luke 1:32-33). Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus' Davidic kingship was proffered to Israel (Matt. 2:2; 27:11; John 12:13), but He was rejected.

The Gadarenes repudiated His claims (Matt. 8:34). The scribes rejected His claim to be able to forgive sins (9:3). Many people in various cities rejected Him (12; 15:1-20; 22:15-23). Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and Jews all rejected Him with finality at the Crucifixion (John 1:11; Acts 4:27).

Because the King was rejected, the messianic, Davidic kingdom was (from human viewpoint) postponed. Though He never ceases to be King and, of course is King today as always, Christ is never designated as King of the church (Acts 17:7 and 1 Timothy 1:17 are no exceptions, and Revelation 15:3, "King of saints," KJV, is "King of nations." Though Christ is a King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31 Rev. 19:15; 20). Then the Priest will sit on His throne, bringing to this earth the long-awaited Golden Age (Ps. 110). - Charles Ryrie

Imitators of Christ!

We to are Prophets, Priests, and Kings.