

Chain Reference: Jesus Christ

M. W. Bassford

7-20-08

Introduction.

- A. One of the distressing trends in our culture recently has been the decline of Scriptural literacy. Fifty years ago, most people had at least a working knowledge of the Bible. They were able to tell Genesis from Revelation, and they generally knew some things about all the stuff that came in between. Today, that is no longer true. The unchurched among us are clueless about the Bible, of course, but even those who belong to some church often know little about what the word says. This trend is only accelerated by the abundance of false teachers who value charismatic experiences more than Bible study or deny the literal truth of the Bible at all.
- B. In our efforts to save the lost, this state of things presents us both with a problem and with an opportunity. This is a problem because it means that we often have to start at the very, very beginning in the teaching we do, but it's an opportunity in that we don't have to deal with the accumulation of several decades of error as we present the truth. One of the most basic parts of this truth is the Bible teaching about Jesus. Remember, friends, if indeed we are Christians, we need to talk about the Christ. Even beyond that, if those we are trying to save know nothing about Jesus, how can we expect them to have faith in Him?
- C. That makes this a good subject for our final chain-reference study. For one last time, let's go through the way these studies work. On a blank page in the back of your Bible, write the words "Jesus Christ," then next to that, write John 1:1-2, which will be our first Scripture this evening. Once we turn to John 1:1-2 and finish discussing it, in the margin next to that passage, write Matthew 1:21-23, which will be our second passage. If you continue to do this throughout the sermon, by the end, you will have a chain reference on Jesus Christ.

I. The Life of Jesus.

- A. The first thing that anyone needs to know about Jesus is that He is God. Among many other texts in the Bible, we learn this from **John 1:1-2**. As I mentioned just a moment earlier, if you want to mark out the chain reference in your Bible, you need to write this one down next to the words "Jesus Christ" in the back of your Bible, then turn to it with me. In this part of John, he refers to Jesus as "the Word" as a way of illustrating His unique relationship with God the Father. In particular, there are two elements of this description on which we need to focus. First, note that the Word is described twice as being in the beginning with God. This refers back to the first three words of Genesis, before God began the process of creation. Jesus existed with God in that long-ago time before the foundation of the world, and was never a created being.
- B. Second, though, this text is important because it says flat-out that the Word was God. That's the claim that the Bible makes for Jesus from the beginning. There are lots of folks who dispute it. I can think of at least one denomination that teaches that Jesus was just a created archangel. However, in order to prove that, they have to use their own special translation of the Bible that rewrites all of the inconvenient passages—like this one—that make clear that Jesus is deity. Folks, that's exactly the opposite of the attitude that the true child of God should have. Instead of allowing the Scripture to change their beliefs, they start with their beliefs and rewrite the Scripture to match. That road leads to lots of things, but it doesn't lead to heaven.
- C. Although Jesus' spiritual life had no beginning, His earthly life most certainly did. We see this beginning described in **Matthew 1:21-23**. Write Matthew 1:21-23 down in the margins of your Bible next to John 1:1-2, then turn to it with me. This verse describes the virgin birth of Jesus. Instead of being born with two earthly parents like the rest of us were, Jesus only had one. Mary was His mother, of course, but she was caused to conceive by nothing less than the power of the Holy Spirit. This is important for two main reasons.
- D. First, as this text shows, Jesus was born in this way in order to fulfill a prophecy given by the prophet Isaiah 700 years before Jesus came into the world. This is one of the ways that we know Jesus was truly sent from God. The prophecy of Isaiah 7 is only one of hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament that define the life of Jesus in exacting detail. Jesus fulfilled every one of those prophecies, which only the Messiah could do.
- E. Second, this is important because it once again reinforces the divine nature of Jesus. Jesus on earth was not just a good man, as many false teachers through the centuries have argued. Instead, although He was just as human as we are, He was also something more—God made flesh and sent to dwell among us. His miraculous birth emphasizes that something more. It makes Him truly the Son of God.
- F. After His birth, Jesus proceeded to live His life in a unique way. He lived without sin. For proof of this, look at **Hebrews 4:15**. This is our third Scripture, so write it down in the margin next to Matthew 1:21-23, then turn to it together with me. As this passage says, Satan didn't leave Jesus alone during His life on earth. Instead, the devil went after Jesus any way he could, just like he goes after each one of us. Jesus, however, unlike us, was able to resist each temptation. He was able to give Himself over fully to the will of God and never sin even once. This made Jesus perfect, and perfectly suited to be both our example and our sacrifice.

- G. The sinless life of Jesus is enough by itself to prove His divine origin, but it's not all the proof that God offered. Instead, throughout His ministry, which covered about the last two or three years of His life, Jesus traveled throughout Galilee and Judea, working all kinds of miracles. Peter refers back to this in **Acts 2:22**. As always, write this one down in the margin next to Hebrews 4:15, then turn to it with me. This is important, because the miracles that Jesus worked confirmed that He was a messenger of God, and that everything He said was true. There was nothing doubtful about the mighty works of Jesus. He healed men whom everyone knew had been lame. He opened the eyes of others who had been blind from birth. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. In short, He did everything that today's false prophets would need to do to prove that they are from God, but never do because they can't. The record of Jesus exposes those evil men for the frauds they are, and it also gives us, through its careful eyewitness testimony, reason to believe that He is the Son of God.
- H. Naturally, though, if Jesus used His ability to work miracles to confirm the word, He needed a word to confirm. We see a good description of the message of Jesus in **Matthew 4:17**. That means that you need to write Matthew 4:17 down in the margin next to Acts 2:22, then turn to the text with me so that we can read it together. This is just a short little snippet of a quotation, but it still teaches us some crucial things about Him.
- I. First, it shows that Jesus wanted men to repent. This is not a popular notion in today's America. All around us are people who claim to love Jesus, but make it quite evident with their lives that they love sin even more. Brethren, men and women who give Jesus lip service but not life service are nothing more than liars, because Jesus has always demanded far more from His disciples than that. Second, we see Jesus preaching the kingdom of God. This doesn't refer to some patch of land on a map, but to God's dominion in the lives of men. That's what we're supposed to be striving toward: turning our lives away from our own selfish paths, and using them to do God's will instead. As we try to do this, we're obeying the teaching of our Master, Jesus.

II. The Death of Jesus.

- A. Now, a cynical man might imagine that such a potent worker of good as Jesus wouldn't be too popular with the world, and he'd be right. In fact, even though He had done nothing wrong, Jesus was arrested, tried before a kangaroo court, condemned to death, and executed by being crucified. We see the final effects of this attested to in **Mark 15:37**. Be sure to write Mark 15:37 down next to Matthew 4:17, then turn to the Scripture together with me. The death of Jesus is another extremely important event in His life, and there are two reasons why. First, it proves that when 500 people saw Jesus alive after that, they didn't just see a man who had passed out and been revived. Instead, they saw a man who had died and was raised by the power of God. Second of all, the death of Jesus is important to every Christian because Jesus died that death for our sins. We deserved to die because we violated the law of God, just like those who commit first-degree murder under the laws of our nation will often face the death penalty. However, Jesus, because He loved us, took that death sentence on Himself, though He had done nothing wrong. Because He died, we don't have to.
- B. Even though Jesus was just as dead after His crucifixion as any man could be, He didn't stay that way. Instead, Jesus was raised from the dead, as we see the angel testifying in **Matthew 28:5-6**. Once again, write Matthew 28:5-6 down in the margin next to Mark 15:37, then turn to the passage with me. As this Scripture and many, many others throughout the New Testament make clear, Jesus was resurrected by the power of God. Hundreds and hundreds of men who weren't even expecting Him to be raised saw not just the empty tomb, but the risen Lord. Once again, this is an idea with tremendous Scriptural significance. Among other things, it is the final and greatest sign that Jesus was the Son of God. Throughout history, only one man has been raised from the dead by the direct power of God, and that is Jesus alone. This divine affirmation proves that Jesus is everything He claimed to be. Second, the resurrection of Jesus gives us hope for our own resurrection. If God can follow through on His promises and defeat death once for Jesus, He can just as easily do the same for each one of us. The resurrection of Jesus is the seal on God's promise of eternal life.
- C. After Jesus was raised, He only remained on the earth for a period of 40 days. After that, He ascended to reign in heaven. We see His present status described in **Colossians 2:9-10**. For those of you who are good at counting to eight, you've already realized that this is our final Scripture for the evening, so write it down in the margin next to Matthew 28:5-6, then turn to it with me. As this passage makes clear, at the present time, there is no power higher than Jesus. He is above all rule and all authority. Other Scriptures tell us that even God the Father has temporarily stepped aside to allow Jesus to reign over everything, a condition that will last until the end of time, when the Son will return His power back to God. Until then, Jesus is King of everything.
- D. This too is Scripturally important. First of all, it highlights once again something we've discussed in this series. Jesus is not some king-in-waiting who is going to return to earth and rule a physical Israel. Instead, right now, He is all the King He can possibly be, and He has all the authority He can possibly have. That, in turn, tells us all we need to know about how we need to obey Jesus. When I get pulled over by some rinky-dink cop in a town with one stoplight, I'm still VERY careful to do everything that cop says, because he has the law behind him. How much more careful should we be, then, to obey the absolute ruler of heaven and earth? Jesus is no patsy to be dismissed or listened to when we feel like it. He is King, to be feared and obeyed.

Conclusion. If you haven't given your life in obedience to Jesus, tonight would be a good time to start.