

“This is My Body”: Jesus’ Self-Understanding and His Death

Father, today I am reminded that all our lives are about is ultimately the glory that comes to You through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who was crucified and resurrected on our behalf. As we are just a few days away from Good Friday, when we remember the great depth of His misery that was for us, the curse He took for us, the pain, the agony for us. And we remember the redemption and atonement we have, the justification we have, and the adoption as children—for all these things we give You and our Lord Jesus glory. When we think of Easter and the resurrection, which proves Jesus was who He said He was and indicates there is resurrection life for all believers—this gives us an eternal hope, that we too will one day be in resurrected bodies, bringing glory to the Son and the Father. We again would give You glory in this moment. We pray that You would use this lesson, in some small way, to give us insight into the glory that is rightfully Yours. In Your wonderful name we pray. Amen.

Let me ask you, as a rhetorical question, what did Jesus intend to do? That is the question I want to ask today. What was Jesus all about? I want to try to answer that with a mind in part toward the historical Jesus question, and also with a mind in part toward the Gospels themselves and how they represent Jesus’ intentions. I want to look at both of those aspects and bring them together to answer this question, who is Jesus? What did He intend to do?

I want to make four basic points about the intention of Jesus. The first is that He intended to be understood as the Messiah. The second is that He intended to teach. The third is that He intended to die. The fourth is that He intended to rise again. If you get those four points, that is the whole of what this lesson is about.

Let us start off with the first point, that He intended to be understood as the Messiah. Here I would like you to look at Daniel chapter 7. In particular, I am looking at Daniel 7:13f. We should probably look at the context by starting with 7:9-10. Daniel, in the midst of this apocalyptic revelation of who God is, sees the following:

I kept looking
 until thrones were set up,
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
 his vesture was like white snow
 and the hair of his head like pure wool
 his throne was ablaze with flames,
 its wheels were a burning fire.
 A river of fire was flowing
 and coming out from before him;
 thousands upon thousands were attending him,
 and myriads upon myriads were standing before him;
 the court sat,
 and the books were opened.

That is the picture Daniel sees of who God is. Now let us look at 7:13-14:

I kept looking in the night visions,
 and behold, with the clouds of heaven
 one like a Son of Man was coming,

and he came up to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion,
glory and a kingdom,
that all the peoples, nations and men of every language
might serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
which will not pass away;
and His kingdom is one
which will not be destroyed.

Do you remember when, a number of lessons ago, we looked at the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament? Some of what you see here may echo some passages we talked about in that lesson. We have here the phrase, “one like a son of man.” So He is viewed fundamentally as being human in some respect. Then in verse 14 it says, “To him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom.” The word “dominion” should remind you even of Genesis 1 and 2, when God creates humans in His own image. He creates them to rule over, to have dominion over, all the rest of His creation. Thus you see an echo of Genesis 1 even in Daniel, and probably that is intended here. Then it says that He was given “glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve him.” That reminds us of the constant refrain in the Old Testament about “all nations.”

One place we encountered that phrase, “all nations,” was in the covenant made with Abraham—he will be a blessing to all nations. We also see the concept of “all nations” in the book of Isaiah where Israel, and ultimately the servant, is to be a light to the Gentiles. There is this idea of “all nations,” another Old Testament idea that informs this passage in Daniel. “His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” That, in my mind, is reminiscent of the Davidic covenant where God promises to David a child, a son who will have an unending kingdom.

You see this combination of themes that come together here in Daniel, of a universal rule of the true Man, in whom is encapsulated the kingdom promises made to David—particularly the promise of a Davidic messiah. What is striking about His position in this position is not simply the coming together of those themes, but also the material in verse 13: “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.”

Let us picture this for a moment. Here is the Ancient of Days, Lord God Almighty, whom thousands upon thousands, myriads upon myriads of people are currently serving—angelic beings are serving Him. He is in court. He is clothed like white snow, His hair is like pure wool, and His throne was ablaze with flames—and this Man walks up to Him. This is no typical son of man, to stand in that presence. And to walk up to Him and receive this kind of authority from Him seems something that is in keeping with the promises to David but is also beyond them in a certain way.

Where am I going with all this? What does this have to do with the intention of Jesus? Well, what did Jesus frequently call Himself? He called Himself the Son of Man. There are probably multiple dimensions to that title. It could have been perceived in His day, to a certain degree rightly, as a simple claim to being a human being. “I am a son of man,” is like saying, “I am a son of Adam.” But there was always the possibility that it could have these Danielic overtones. It could signify the supreme Son of Man who is exalted beyond any other being in creation so that He is effectively the right-hand agent of the Ancient of Days (to move slightly beyond the language of Daniel itself).

Then you come to Matthew chapter 26, after Jesus has frequently called Himself the Son of Man. In this chapter Jesus is before the high priest. Matthew 26:63b-64 says, “And the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” Here the high priest specifically asks Jesus, “Are you the messiah, are you the Son of God?” What is striking about this is that Jesus does not usually accept the *Christos* title, the anointed one, the messiah title. So this is a very pointed question. The high priest is saying, “Commit to this: are you the Messiah?” Jesus says, “You have said it yourself.” This is a backdoor way of saying yes. Some of the other Gospels, rather than use this idiomatic expression, simply record that He said yes, representing the intent of what Jesus said. But then He continues, “...nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” We just heard this passage. In this response, Jesus combines Psalm 110 with Daniel 7. The discussion of the Son of Man in Psalm 110 thus becomes focused on the Son of Man in Daniel 7. Jesus is connecting these two together. He says, “I have been using this title, “Son of Man,” for Myself. Do you know what I think it means? I think it means Daniel 7 and Psalm 110.” He brings those two together.

I have mentioned before, but it bears repeating that when the priest tears his robes and says, “He has blasphemed!” in the next verse, in this moment I think it is not just that Jesus has claimed to be the Messiah. There were many messianic claims made in the first two centuries AD. Thus it is hard to know if that would be enough for grounds of blasphemy. But here Jesus equates Himself with the One who sits at the right hand of the throne of God (Psalm 110) and the One who approaches the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7). The whole context of both those passages comes to bear to inform you that this is not just another man. This is someone who claims to have the authority of God Almighty. And therefore He is a blasphemer.

That is only to take one title Jesus uses of Himself in the Gospels. There is much more that could be done here, with titles in the Old Testament and titles in the New Testament, especially those associated with Jesus. But if you just take that one title, it is evidenced so frequently throughout the Gospels that even the most skeptical historical Jesus scholar says Jesus called Himself the Son of Man. When you see how that is understood, you realize that is not just a claim to be a messiah but this is the Messiah. This is the Messiah who has the very power of the Lord Almighty at His disposal. Thus we have point number one: Jesus intended to be understood as the Messiah.

Let us move on to point number two: Jesus intended to teach. We have already seen this in Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew in his Gospel gathers Jesus’ teachings into five great discourses. We read parts of the first one, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus did come to teach.

I have some relatives who saw *The Passion of Christ*, which is a movie that portrays the life of Jesus and particularly His final week. These particular family members are not Christians the way we understand Christianity. We talked a couple weeks ago about this movie, and one of my relatives said she thought this movie really missed what Jesus was about because it did not present any of His teachings. *The Passion of the Christ* is principally about the death of Jesus. I am not saying you should see this movie, but it is about the death of Jesus, with occasional little blurbs of teaching brought in. But principally the teachings are brought in as a means of interpreting Jesus’ death. I have to say that my relative, in this respect, is right. The movie does not give a full picture of the ministry of Jesus. As much as we, as people who are reading our Bibles, want to focus on the death of Jesus—especially because of Paul’s emphasis on that—we want to say the ministry of Jesus is about the cross. I want to say no to that. Jesus spent much of His ministry teaching. He could have gotten to the cross much faster if He had wanted to.

He needed to inform the people about what the kingdom is and what was about to come. May I mention the other thing I think is missing from the *Passion of the Christ*? The resurrection of Jesus. There is a very brief scene at the end where He stands up in the tomb. If you already know the Gospels, you could properly interpret that. But I would submit to you that someone who has never read the Gospels would see that scene and say, "What is going on? I thought He was dead, but now He is standing in this strange cave." You have to understand something about Jewish burial practices and the like to begin to understand the scene. I also think the scene is too brief to give full weight to the resurrection. There are other aspects of the movie I appreciate, and others that I would critique. But we have to say that it does not present a full picture of Jesus. He is a teacher. He is one who dies, and He is one who is resurrected. We have to see all of those aspects. These are universally attested to in the Gospels and beyond.

When we talk about the teaching of Jesus, it is principally the teaching about the kingdom of God. Sometimes, for instance in Matthew, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used. I hope you understand that the word "heaven" there is a circumlocution for the name of God. A Jewish person in the first century did not want to say the name of God too often. So he or she would say "the kingdom of heaven" as a way of saying "the kingdom of God," because "heaven" stands for "God" because that is where God rules from. This is one of many instances where a phrase is used to stand for God. Some Gospel authors frequently used "kingdom of heaven." The other Gospels in the same passages will use "kingdom of God." What is going on there? One is writing from a Jewish perspective, and is probably reporting something closer to what Jesus actually said. But we as Gentile readers might not understand that, so the other Gospels are kind to say "kingdom of God," which is what Jesus meant even if it is not exactly what He said in Aramaic.

Let us talk about Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God. There are places where Jesus teaches very directly and overtly about the kingdom. You have that, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches about a kingdom ethic. This is what righteousness looks like from the viewpoint of God. You cannot keep to this, but at the same time, once you are forgiven, this is what constitutes holiness, and this is what you are to pursue. That is the kind of kingdom ethic you have in the book of Matthew. Jesus frequently used parables in His teaching. Thus we need to take a few minutes to focus on that one aspect of Jesus' teaching. Not all of Jesus' teachings were parables. I will be quick to say that. But much of it was in parables, so we need to know how parables work.

If you would turn to Mark chapter 4, we will look at the first parable of Jesus that Mark recorded. I will assume you are somewhat familiar with this parable. It is the parable of the sower and the seeds. The sower goes out and spreads seeds in the soil. But there are four kinds of soil. There is the soil by the road, the rocky soil, the soil with thorns in it, and the good soil. Those are the four kinds of soil. The seed, as you know, responds differently to each of those kinds of soil. It is really only in the last soil, the good soil, that the seed really sprouts. This is followed by verse 10, which says, "...his followers, along with the twelve, began asking him about the parables." You expect Jesus to say simply, "Oh, that is easy. Here is what it means..." And eventually He does explain the parable to them. But before He does, He talks about why He speaks in parables. This is what He says: "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

That last phrase ("while seeing...and be forgiven") is a quote from Isaiah. I want to be careful to say that this is one dimension of reasons for the parables. If you were to go here exclusively, you would get the sense that the parables are for the people outside, so that they really cannot understand what Jesus is about. Notice in Mark, though it is weakened in some of the other Gospels, that the phrase is actually

used in verse 12: “*In order that* while seeing they may see and not perceive...” (italics added). Thus He has a purpose to the parables: to mystify the people who are outside the kingdom of God. Now, that is what I think, even in the context of Mark, is only one of the purposes of the parables. I say that because right after that verse, Jesus goes on to explain this parable to them. This indicates that at least in some respects the parables also inform the people who are in the kingdom of God of what the kingdom looks like. Thus I think we can say the parables have at least a dual focus. For the people who are in the kingdom they become a challenging way to determine what the kingdom is about, an illustration of sorts of the kingdom. But to people outside the kingdom, they become almost a grounds for condemnation. They see what is going on, they hear what is going on, but they cannot fit it all together. This is a very striking aspect of Jesus’ teaching. If your concept of Jesus is a meek and mild, good and kind, welcoming children, teaching nice thoughts and for people to love one another kind of person, then you have missed a whole dimension of Jesus’ teaching. He divided people from one another. There are those who will be in the kingdom and those who will be out of the kingdom. His teaching defines both. You have to understand His teaching in that regard.

Let us go through the rest of Mark 4 and see how Jesus explains this parable of the sower and the seeds. In 4:13 Jesus says, “...Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?” By this Jesus indicates that in this interpretation He is giving them a sort of matrix for understanding parables. He says, “How will you understand the rest of the parables if you do not understand this one?” This is the first of the parables, at least as recorded in the Gospels. This is the one that, if you understand this one you begin to understand the rest. In verse 14 Jesus says, “The sower sows the word.” What is the seed then? The seed is the Word of God, the proclamation of the kingdom, effectively. Then 4:15 and following say:

These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

There is some debate about the meaning of “unfruitful” as it is used to describe the seed in the soil with thorns. Does Jesus mean to say that they will simply be unfruitful members of the kingdom, or that they will not be in the kingdom at all? I would lean toward saying that they will not be in the kingdom at all, because I understand this as them being unfruitful, and that means they are useless and will be cast out.

Now, at the beginning of the Gospel and at the beginning of His ministry, as the Gospel represents it, Jesus is also stating something about his intent and how He perceives His ministry. He effectively is the one who will be sowing the word. And He knows the kinds of responses He will receive will not all be completely positive. His words will separate people. Some will immediately reject His message, some will receive it with joy—but as soon as they see what it is really like to follow the Messiah, they will scatter. You see that in the Gospels. There are many disciples in the beginning of the Gospels, and they keep disappearing as the story continues. Then there is this idea of the deceitfulness of riches and the worries of the world. That of course reminds us of some of the other teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not be anxious for anything,” because ultimately it is God who provides for us. So do

not be anxious for clothes or food or anything else. Your job is simply to follow Christ. I am drawing some correlations there, but that is how I see it. What is going on here is that there are three categories of people who ultimately will not follow Jesus, and Jesus knows it. And He tells His disciples that. It is actually part of His intention that that should happen, because He is after people who will bear fruit. They are who He is after. Thus this is part of the intention of Jesus.

Going back to methodology and trying to understand parables, it is clear that parables are representational. They represent different aspects of Jesus' ministry, the kingdom of God, the life of a disciple, etc. They represent certain things. Thus part of understanding a parable is to properly decode the representations. I would acknowledge that much. However, in the parable of the sower and the seeds, it is almost as if there are four different parables. There are four different characters, four different types of soil. They represent four different people. Coming out of this parable, one is tempted to think, because nearly every aspect mentioned in that parable represents something, that if you go to another parable, everything in that parable is representational. Usually parables themselves make one, maybe two or three points. But they do not make six or 12.

Let me show you what I mean by that. Please turn to another famous group of parables, in the Gospel of Luke—Luke 15. I want to give one example of this in Luke 15:8, and then we will talk about the overall context. Let us go to the lost coin parable. Luke 15:8-10 says, "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Now, Jesus tells you what the parable is about. He gives you exactly what it is about: joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Thus we go back into the parable and look for those three dimensions—joy, angels of God, and the sinner who repents. Who is the sinner? The one coin? Who are the angels of God? The friends and neighbors who rejoice with the woman? Where is the joy? When she says, "Rejoice with me..." That is how you should go in interpreting that parable. That is it, that is all there is there. Do not, DO NOT say, "What about the other nine silver coins? Who are the other nine?" And do not think that when she lights a lamp there is much to do with that. That is just part of the parable. If you are in a dark house you need a lamp to look around for the coin. It is just a detail to make the story more vivid. Do not try to make the lighting of the lamp representational. The same with the sweeping—do not make too much of this. She is simply sweeping to try to find a coin.

In your interpretation of parables, I would suggest a certain amount of restraint in the representations you find. You should not go beyond the representations Jesus explicitly wants you to make. The reason I am speaking this way is because I have heard several sermons in my life (thankfully not recently) where a person makes this one story into a 30-minute-long sermon. Let me just say, if you can make this into a 30-minute-long sermon, you are over-interpreting the text. It makes a very simple point that you can explain in two to five minutes. There may be implications you could draw out further, but if you start interpreting the sweeping, the lamp, and the extra coins, you are missing the point. Stay focused on what the parable is principally about. One of the ways to see what the parable is principally about is to look at who the characters are. If there are people in the parable, usually every major character represents something that we need to take into account, whereas all the other details may be peripheral.

Let us move on to the next parable, probably one of the most famous parables from the ministry of Jesus. This is the parable of the prodigal son. It would take us a while to read through the parable. You all know it, I hope. Let me just remind you of it. There is a father with two sons. The older son is "responsible"; the younger son is not. The younger son goes to his father and says, "I want my

inheritance now.” This was horrible in the ancient world; it was basically like saying, “I want you to die.” The father says, “Okay.” He gives the inheritance to the son. The son goes off and spends it, and ultimately ends up slopping pigs. There he realizes, “I would be better off if I were with my father. My father treats his servants better than I am being treated while I am slopping pigs. I will go back to my father and ask to be his servant.” The father comes running out when he sees that his son has returned. He rejoices to see his son. And then the older son afterward gets upset. That is the parable.

Who are the main characters in the parable? The father, the son, and the older brother. They are the three characters, so we need to view the parable from the perspectives of these three. Certainly, the younger son is the repentant sinner. Although Jesus does not explicitly interpret this parable for us, it is in a sequence of three parables. We just read the preceding one, the one about the lost coin. The interpretation of that parable includes the phrase, “...over one sinner who repents,” in 4:10. But if you go back to the preceding parable, the first in the sequence, 4:7 says, “I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...” You have this series of three parables that are all about repentant sinners. Thus we expect a repentant sinner in the parable of the prodigal son, and we have one—the prodigal son. Who is the father? God. Again, we are set up for that because of the idea that it is God who pursues sinners because of the explicit mention of the angels of God in the preceding parable, as well as the “father” terminology Jesus uses throughout His ministry. Thus we expect the father to be God. Who is the older brother who does not rejoice? The Pharisees. Go back to the beginning of chapter 15, verse 1: “Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’” Then Jesus tells these parables. He is saying, “You think it is bad that I eat with sinners. God Himself rejoices when a sinner repents. I am behaving just as my father does. You are the older brother.”

I would like to note a side-implication of that. We have access to many great children’s books that are Bible-based. Many of them talk about the prodigal son. They almost always end the story with God rejoicing that the prodigal son is back. The father rejoices because the son is back, and that is where they end the story. There are many more verses to that parable. We do an injustice to Jesus’ parable when we stop there. Jesus also intends to say, “If you are a Pharisee, if you look over and say, ‘That person does not belong in the kingdom,’ you are like the older brother. And that is not a position you want to be in.”

Thus there are three applications that come out of this parable: repent, rejoice as God rejoices, and do not be like the Pharisees. Those are the applications. Note that each application is connected with a specific character in the parable. Note that I did not bother to exegete the pigs. So who are the pigs the son was slopping? That is irrelevant. The point is that the main characters give you the points of the parable. Let me also warn you that most parables are much simpler than this one. This parable has three main characters, and they all are very much involved in the action of the parable. Most parables just have one character or one item that is mainly discussed, and these make one main point. So be careful and restrained in your interpretation. That is one important comment with regard to methodology.

The other main point I want you to pick up with regard to methodology in the interpretation of parables is read them in context. What so often happens in our reading of parables is that we just read the parables. We plan to teach on a parable in a Bible study, and in that study we only read the parable itself. We read the parable, talk about it, and then fellowship. When we do this we do not see what comes before it. With the parables here in Luke 15, we would not see the sequence of the three parables coming out of this discussion with the Pharisees concerning the way Jesus eats with sinners. I have found it most useful to read the parables in context. If you do that you are much more likely to get the proper meaning of the parable itself.

Let me say a couple of things in that regard. One is that I think a danger here is that evangelicals in Bible studies tend to only look at the parable and not what comes before and after. You should always, in leading a Bible study, have prepared by at least looking at the chapter that preceded your chapter. You should be prepared to do that as a leader. And you should encourage your people to do that as well, when you lead a Bible study. Let me also say that New Testament scholars also often miss these things because they are working in an historical Jesus framework. This is a much more skeptical framework where the order of the narrative in the Gospel is thought to come from the Gospel writer rather than from the life and ministry of Jesus. Thus they think the order is the interpretive matrix of the Gospel writer rather than of Jesus. If this were true, we would need to read the parable as if there were no context in order to understand Jesus. I would submit to you that this is fundamentally a mistake. When you read the parables, you should always read the context. I may come back to this topic on another occasion and look at Luke 16. Can I encourage you to read Luke 16 before the next lesson? I want to show you how the context is very important for understanding this other series of parables.

To come back to our major points: first, He intended to be understood as the Messiah. Second, He intended to teach. Under that teaching we looked at some of the parables, because that is one of the most complex aspects of Jesus' teaching. The question has been raised, when did the disciples recognize Jesus' deity? At what point, as you go through the Gospels, do they get it? I would argue that the disciples did not truly get it until after the resurrection. Now, I would also argue that they had glimpses that came before. They saw things, they saw Him walking on water and thought, "Who is this who can actually control nature itself?" They were shocked by that and got a little glimpse, but I do not think the pieces all completely fell into place and stuck until after the resurrection.

In response to another question, I would not go so far as to say that Peter did not acknowledge the deity of Christ at Pentecost. I would say there are points where a precise understanding of the deity of Christ comes out more clearly. The other thing I think we have to say is, if you read through the New Testament, you will not find—I am going to say something and then quickly qualify it, so hear the saying and then the qualification—a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity. The qualification is that it is all implicitly there. But no one has sat down to say, "We have one God of one substance who exists in three persons." It took a while for the church to come to the point where they could assimilate all the different teaching throughout the New Testament. Jesus is clearly God and clearly man. How did the two natures work out, God and man? How is it that this God can be the Son of God and that the Holy Spirit is God as well? There is a clear understanding of all that, but the actual working out of it remains a real mystery in Scripture. I think there were some real advances in the discussion of the Trinity in the early church that followed, and that is still helpful. But we also have to say it still remains a mystery even for us. There are parts of that we simply cannot understand. There are parts we can understand, but we are not infinite, divine beings. We cannot understand what it means to be God. Thus I am willing to see in Peter and in the early church an awareness that Jesus is God, but also an awareness that it is difficult to work out all that. I am not sure that I would accuse them of not understanding the deity of Christ in the earliest ministry after the resurrection.

And when I talk about Jesus teaching, I should really say "teaching and healing." Jesus' teaching ministry was not just teaching, but there was a healing component. The healings, though, the miracles, testify to who Jesus is. If you go through the Gospel of Mark, for instance, He starts off with some basic miracles. He heals various diseases in Mark chapter 4. Then a leper comes to Him in 4:40 and He instructs him. These are the basic healing miracles. Then there is the healing of the paralytic, in which context He claims to forgive sins, and His right to forgive sins is displayed by His ability to heal the man. Then He calls the disciples, etc. Eventually you come to the point where He actually stills the sea at the end chapter 4. By the end of this they say, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey

him?” Then He heals the demoniac to show He has power even over the demons. What you see in the ministry of Jesus is that He starts out with base-line miracles—I do not mean to demean these miracles in any way, it is just that these are more simple healings; these are miracles we have seen before. But His miracles escalate to where we see that He has control over all nature, He has control over the demons, and He eventually raises people from the dead. You see this escalation of miracles. That represents the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in Jesus and how great Jesus is. The question the disciples ask in chapter 4 of Mark is the right one to ask: “Who then is this?” Who is this Man who is able to exceed the bounds of anything we know? I would argue, then, that the miracles have a teaching function in the process of this. They are the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, but they do not just exist by themselves. They exist within the context of Jesus’ teaching ministry and vocation.

Now, the next thing I want to convince you of is that Jesus intended to die. In this regard, I am willing even to entertain some of the skeptical presuppositions of the historical Jesus scholar and say, “I think I can still show you that Jesus came to die”—especially if we go to the Lord’s Supper passage.

The Lord’s Supper was certainly understood and appreciated in the early church. Therefore it may not meet the criteria of dissimilarity. But there are multiple attestations to it. It is in all four Gospels, in the first letter to the Corinthians—which is probably one of the first letters Paul ever wrote, and thus preceded the Synoptic Gospels in time. The first letter to the Corinthians came before the Synoptic Gospels. It was certainly written within 20 years after the life of Jesus. But when Paul mentions the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians, he sets it up this way, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread...” He understands this as a tradition that came from the Lord Himself. He is saying the Lord’s Supper antedates this letter. In other words, very soon after the life of Jesus there is explicit testimony to the Lord’s Supper.

The other thing that is striking about this passage, if you lay it out in parallel columns with the accounts of the Lord’s Supper in the Gospels, is that you recognize that the core of the tradition remains the same all the way through. There is a slightly different ordering in Luke, especially as compared to Matthew and Mark, and also in some respects with what Paul does. Now, we can certainly reconcile or harmonize these accounts and see that the Gospels and 1 Corinthians all present basically the same thing, and I am certainly willing to do that. But the differences in detail also help testify to the authenticity of this tradition, for this tradition is so strong that people independently can tell it and yet there is still this core that overlaps between all of them. What I am trying to say is, if you apply some of the tests of the historical Jesus scholars, you still end up with a very secure account of the Lord’s Supper.

One last thing is what we understand to have been the case from other sources. The thing that served as a hallmark of the early church and was also something that was opposed in Greco-Roman society was this idea of eating the body and the blood of Christ. Even in the traditions associated with Pliny the Younger in the early second century, in his letters he writes about these Christians who have weird practices. Later, in certain traditions, Christians have to apologize for this practice by saying, “We are not cannibals.” This was because if you go around saying, “I am eating a body,” what do people immediately think? They have this weird, cannibalistic practice. Then if you also say, “I am also drinking blood,” that sounds weird. Thus there would have been opposition to this in pagan society. That shows all the more that this tradition was so strong, the early church practiced it despite the opposition. Therefore, the Lord’s Supper is a very secure historical event. This is so much the case that there are very skeptical historical Jesus scholars who admit the accounts of the Lord’s Supper are authentic.

What is the Lord’s Supper about? Jesus says, in the context of the Passover meal, “This is my body... This is my blood...” In all the traditions concerning the blood, Jesus is recorded as saying, “This

is my blood of the covenant..." To clarify that, Luke and Paul indicate that this is a new covenant. "This is a new covenant which is made in my blood...poured out for many," as in Mark. It is "...poured out for many for forgiveness of sins," in Matthew. "For the forgiveness of sins" is clearly understood from the context in Luke and 1 Corinthians. Jesus is saying, before He is betrayed, "I intend to die. And I intend for the blood of my death to inaugurate a new covenant." Therefore the intention of Jesus was to die. So there you have this clear intention of Jesus to die, going back to a tradition that I think has to be associated with the historical Jesus Himself.

Now, if you turn back to the key passion predictions in the synoptics, let me just say that immediately, on the skeptical presuppositions of the historical Jesus scholar, they discount these, because all of these texts that I have listed here predict that Jesus will die, and many of them also predict the resurrection. If you do not believe in miracles, and if you are an historical Jesus scholar, then you do not believe that people can predict their own deaths, let alone do you believe that people can predict the resurrection and be right, because you do not believe in resurrections. So therefore they will not accept this kind of testimony.

But my point is that, if you just take the synoptic Gospels, Jesus says over and over again that He is going to die and rise again, clearly showing that He intended to do so. One example of this is in Matthew 16:21, which says, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." That is pretty clear. He knows that He has to go to Jerusalem, He is going to be opposed by the temple elite, He knows He is going to be put to death, and He knows He is going to rise. That same tag line, that He is going to suffer, die, and be raised, happens several times throughout the Gospels. So there is another aspect of Jesus' intention here. One of the most striking ones is in Mark 10:33-34, which says, "'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles. They will mock him and spit on him, and scourge him and kill him, and three days later he will rise again.'" There it is very specific as to exactly what is going to happen. He is going to go, but the Gentiles are the ones who are ultimately going to put Him to death. And they will mock Him and spit upon Him and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again. Matthew summarizes that by saying that they will crucify Him. The point is that Jesus has quite a prescient knowledge of what is going to happen.

What is more striking to me is if you would turn in your Bible to Mark 10 and see how the disciples responded to these things. One of the things that I think makes the reports of these passion predictions all the more believable is that, when Jesus says this, inevitably the disciples do not get it. Jesus says it, and they move on to another topic or something. You see this in Mark 10. So after the passage that we just read, verses 33 and 34, we have verse 35, which says, "James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'" How clueless can you be? Your Lord has just said not only that He is going to die, but that He is going to be beaten and tortured at the hands of Gentiles and that He is going to be killed. And their response is "we want the best position in the kingdom." If you go through all of these passion predictions, you will see that, almost inevitably, the response to Jesus when He says these things is something like that: cluelessness on the part of the disciples. This, I think, is so believable, and at the same time so surprising, that it testifies to the authenticity of the account itself.

In this context, Jesus gives in Mark 10 a matrix for understanding His death and the purpose and intent of His death. He responds to them, basically saying, "Can you really drink what I am about to drink?" And they say, "Sure, we will drink it all," and He says, "No, you really cannot." And then in verse 42

Jesus calls all of them to Himself because by this point they are all disputing and frustrated with James and John for asking to be first. You can just imagine Peter sitting there thinking, “I wish I thought of that!” And so Jesus calls them all together. Verses 42 and following say, “Calling them to himself, Jesus said to them, ‘You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all...’” So He corrects their whole understanding of what it means to be first in the kingdom of God. And then He says, “For even the son of man...” He gives them a way of interpreting His death.

There are two aspects to the interpretation of Jesus’ death. One is “My life is a ransom for many.” Just like in the Gospel account of the Lord’s Supper, He is going to die; He is going to inaugurate a new covenant. What is He going to do with that? He is going to provide forgiveness of sins. Here He is going to provide a ransom. So your good, evangelical understanding of Jesus’ death being atonement for sin goes back to Jesus Himself. Take courage. The intention of Jesus was to die and to be a ransom for your sins. That is one aspect.

The second aspect is that Jesus intends His death to be a model for His followers. Now, there was a teaching in the early church (during the fourth or fifth century) that eventually made it into a kind of Pelagian understanding of the death of Jesus, and that was that Jesus’ death was an example; that was basically all Jesus did. It was just an example of what it would cost to be a follower of Christ. As a result, the church reacted strongly to that teaching by basically saying that the death of Jesus is the very basis for our salvation, for our atonement, for our ransom, for our justification—everything. Jesus had to die so that our sins are dealt with. It is not just an example. There has been, at times, an overreaction in the church to say that Jesus’ death was not an example. It is principally all about dealing with sins. But in Mark 10, Jesus sets it up as both of those things. It is an example because it shows you the kind of servanthood nature of the follower of Jesus because Jesus Himself was an even better servant than you could ever hope to be. He died for the whole Church, and that is what we are intended to be as well.

So there are two applications that come out of this. One, your sins are dealt with. You are forgiven. Two, imitate Jesus and be a servant of the rest of God’s people. So you should be careful to draw both of those out of the passage. And I will argue when we get to Paul that he does both of those things as well. You have the death of Jesus being an atonement for sins and an example for people to follow. So Jesus intended to face the cross.

The last intention of Jesus was to be understood as the Messiah, to teach and to perform miracles as a means of teaching. Third, Jesus intended for His death to be an atoning sacrifice for sins. Fourth, and finally, Jesus intended to be raised from the dead. Now we have already seen that, in these passion predictions, the two that we read, they show that Jesus does not just say that He is going to be killed but that He will be raised again. So He did not anticipate the end of His ministry to be His death but rather He anticipated the end of His ministry to be His resurrected body. Now it is a little bit of an overstatement to say that was the end of His ministry, but He anticipated to go that far at least. Therefore, if you think of Schweitzer and this idea that Jesus just came to bring in the apocalyptic kingdom and that He was mistaken because He thought His death would force God’s hand, that is completely off. Jesus thought that His death was going to produce atonement for sins, and He knew He was going to be resurrected from the dead. So it does not end in the cross. It ends in the resurrection. So we need to claim not just Good Friday, but also Easter.

The resurrection is not normally taught well in the average evangelical church. It usually ends in Jesus died for your sins. But that is not the entire story. The other half of it is that Jesus was raised from the

dead. You need to have both aspects. There is an imbalance in Protestant theology. I want to leave you with this question to contemplate: What is there about the resurrection that you have not thought about enough? Thank you.