

Acts 2:36 & the Christology of Acts

I will answer a few student questions to begin this lecture. They are all very good and I do not know how well I will be able to answer them. First, the question has been asked, “What is the difference between imminent and immediate parousia: anticipation of Christ’s return?” Immediate, I would say, is a time expectation that Jesus comes back today or tomorrow. Imminent may not necessarily be a time reference, but it is the understanding that there is not much more that God needs to do in history before Christ can come again. Imminent means that His return is close at hand but we still do not know when it will happen. I would say—although I have not given much justification as I am jumping into the middle of this issue—that God is much more concerned about the deeds that He has promised to do than about time expanses. I do think He is concerned with the sequence of time, but not as much with time expanses. I think it is good to refer to 2 Peter 3:8: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” I would say Christ's coming is imminent in the sense that there is not much that has to occur before Christ returns, but I would also say that Christ’s return was as imminent at the time of Peter's preaching as it is now. That is why I am saying that we have been living in the end times for quite a while already. In Scripture, there is the expectation that Jesus is near but in God's mercy He is patient with us, allowing times of repentance and turning. His patience and long-suffering is for the sake of mankind. Thus we might as well be busy getting on that train that God is moving forward.

Another question is, “How can we relate the fact that God has been drawing a people unto Himself since the fall with the fact that every man has always been a worshipper?” If you go into various areas of the world, you see worship. I think it is true to say with Augustine that man is a worshipper. The problem is that he is not a worshipper of the true God; rather, he is the worshipper of his god made in his image. Because of this problem I would say that there is still a great difference. That man is a worshipper simply shows that he is made that way, but he cannot find God in and of himself. He needs to be drawn by God to be renewed and worship the true and only God. That is the big challenge I see here. We will probably study this more when we come to Acts 17 where Paul intensively addresses the issue of the worship of God.

This next question is a common concern. If the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit, why are we concerned with the author's motivation and perspective in his writing? The author's purpose for writing may have nothing to do with why God wanted the text written. If you read commentaries on Acts, you may read phrases such as, “Luke intended this,” and “Luke said this; Luke's theology is that.” I have also used this phrase, “Luke's purpose is that,” so I am glad for this question. When I use these sorts of phrases, I am assuming the inspiration of Scripture. But I am also assuming that when I discuss and explore the purpose of Acts, I am exploring the purpose of God's Word with that particular section. I may use these phrases because I see that Luke is the author. In the same way, we might say, “David said.” We can say this, but we need to remember that, as Jesus says in the Gospels, David said this speaking by the Holy Spirit. That is how I understand Acts, so I am very glad for this question. I am not trying to oppose the authors of Scripture against God's purposes. Rather, I am seeing them as servants and witnesses. When I discuss the purpose of Luke and Acts, or the research that Luke did, it is within the confines of God revealing His words to mankind.

We will now move on to lecture nine. I have already discussed this a little and we are now in the position of doing more study. I want to focus on Acts 2:36, the concluding statement of Peter’s Pentecost speech. “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now you may think that the Gospel is a Gospel preached about faith. Or you may think that the Gospel is a Gospel preached about history. Here you have a statement in one

verse that intertwines faith and history—that intertwines the reality that transcends history. The confession of the truth of Christ breaks through the confines of space and time and shows that Jesus is far above these confines. Yet at the same time it maintains that “This same Jesus whom you today confess as Lord and Christ is the one that was crucified.” I think it is very important for us to hold those two elements together: the confession about the greatness of Christ on account of God's deeds, and the simple fact that this same Jesus who is today enthroned at the right hand of God is the very one who was crucified. This one verse shows the deep connection between the life of Jesus and the truth that breaks through the time and space constraint that is placed on our lives. It is amazing how much you have in this one sentence, and how intertwined the death of Jesus is with His exaltation as Lord and Christ.

Let us look a little at verse 36, particularly the reference to Lord and Christ. You may find it interesting that when Paul was converted he went into the synagogues and preached that Jesus was the Son of God and Christ. So we will begin with this reference. I have already made a little reference to Lord; we have taken a little peek into that wonderful sphere. Turning now to the title of Christ, what does that mean? Peter says, “Let all the house of Israel know that God has appointed Him Christ.” What would you say is the allusion here? Peter is alluding to the fact that He is the anointed, the messiah. He is the one who is appointed to be the messianic ruler. Christ, or *Christos*, is a significant reference which occurs rather frequently in Acts. First we notice that this is not a name, rather it is a title. At a later stage in the New Testament, sometimes you will find references to Jesus Christ as a name. At this point you cannot say that this is merely a name. This is a title, as Lord is a title. Both titles, Lord and Christ, refer to what Jesus represents as the messiah. We know from the Gospel of Luke and the other Gospels that the understanding of Messiah has undergone quite significant change.

What was expected of the messiah who is being proclaimed here? The expected messiah was a messianic Davidic royal and political ruler in Jerusalem. But this Christ who is being confirmed and appointed as the messiah is not quite what was expected. You may remember that in Acts 1:6 the disciples asked the question, “When will Israel be restored? When will the throne be restored to Israel? When will that happen?” That was one of the expected functions of the messianic Davidic royal and political ruler. Jesus spoke of the Son of Man and the need for the suffering of the Son of Man to explain to His disciples that their understanding of the messiah was too narrow. Their understanding did not encompass all the truth about the messiah from the Old Testament; they would have to expand their understanding of who the messiah was, both as a suffering messiah and as the exalted messiah. For that to be communicated, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. We could say that what is being confessed here is the Son of Man Christ or the Son of Man messiah—the messiah who would be so low, lower than any human being. He would make Himself a servant of all by giving His life for many. But He will then be so high, He will be exalted. When Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son of Man who will be exalted, He is strongly alluding to Daniel 7:13. It is so majestic how the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 receives power, glory, authority, and dominion for ever and ever from the Ancient of Days. It is amazing how exalted the Son of Man is. Thus the disciples have learned to understand the messiah as much lower than, and also as much higher than, a royal Davidic king—the very Son of God. When Christ is being confessed here, and appointed as the anointed ruler, by using this title the disciples are confessing Him to be the exalted messianic ruler. He is a much greater king than the messiah they were expecting, someone who would reign in Jerusalem, kicking out the Romans and establishing a new theocracy. No, the messiah who is now being appointed is the messianic anointed king of the world. That is how Psalm 110 fits in, which we will look at soon.

Evangelistically, the way Peter, and particularly Paul, proceed is by going through the Old Testament and showing how Jesus is the Messiah. Apollos is known in Acts 17 as the one who eloquently shows from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah. But I believe something happened when these

apostles and messengers spoke in the Jewish Synagogues. They pointed to references that generally would not be known or discussed in Jewish circles—passages like Daniel 12: “The anointed will be cut off,” or Isaiah 53: “The messianic servant of God will be despised and will be sacrificed on behalf of His people. The messiah will be exalted to receive dominion, power, and glory forever.” I am sure that these Old Testament preachers of Jesus as the messiah did not confine themselves to 2 Daniel seven, the reference to the messiah sitting on the throne of David, or even to Psalm two, which could be limited to a messianic ruler, though I think even Psalm two breaks those limits. There is something happening when Jesus is confessed as messiah, the great messiah of God. While I would not say that the messiah whom Israel was expecting would be small, certainly the messiah who is being confessed here—the anointed messiah—is much, much greater. We have been discussing the title of messiah, which is used rather frequently in Acts. Let us now reflect on the title of Lord a little.

We have already entered into this discussion a little. I am convinced that Paul, or rather Saul, the unconverted persecutor of the church, knew that Christians were saying, “Jesus is Lord.” Why would I be convinced of that? Acts does not really deal with that. There are many references to Jesus as the Son of God and as the messiah, but there is no clear evidence that Paul would have known anything about that. But Acts 26:11 has a very interesting reference to Paul’s knowledge of the titles the Christians had given to Jesus. In this passage Paul gives his defense before King Agrippa, and he also gives his testimony. (This is part of the testimony evangelism in front of a court, one of the ways God worked Paul’s arrests for good.) As a part of his testimony, in verse 11, he says, “Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have [the saints] punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.” “Blaspheme” is the interesting term here. What does it mean to blaspheme? Blaspheme can have a milder connotation in some contexts, meaning simply to say something bad. However, if it is in the context of speaking about God, which is the case here, it means to curse whatever you are speaking about. Cursing Jesus would be the antidote to worshipping Jesus, to calling on His name, wouldn’t it? Thus the fact that Saul sought the medicine to “heal” the “evil” of worshipping Jesus indicates to me that the Christians whom Saul was persecuting attributed Lordship and worship to Jesus. That was the reason they were being persecuted; in Saul’s mind they were blaspheming God. The only way to stop it was to force them to do the very opposite of what they were doing. I think this is an indication that Saul knew that the early Christians were calling on the name of Jesus.

This is also indicated in Acts two where it says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Also, in Acts 4:12 it says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [except the name of Jesus Christ] under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Thus if you put Acts two and four together, you have this early Christian confession of praising God and worshipping Jesus as Lord, as *Kurios* or *Adonai*, the one who has been exalted to the right hand of God the Father. Besides Christ and Messiah, the title of Lord, or *Kurios*, is very significant in Acts. Sometimes it refers to God the Father; it is not used exclusively to refer to Jesus. When Saul is confronted with the risen Lord, he says, “*Kurios*, who are you?” I am a little tentative on saying that Saul is attributing this significant weight to Lord as I have just developed. You could say *Kurios* in a certain context as simply, “sir.” Thus I am not sure how much weight to put on this response he made out of shock. But Saul did know that the Christians were confessing Jesus as Lord. However, in this particular context, I do not know exactly how to take this. I have tried to develop how the early Christians came to confess Jesus as the exalted Lord. I see this as being based on Jesus’ self identification as Son of Man, though we do not have the time to go into all of that. But we will look at the references to Lord in Psalm 110:1 and Mark 12:36.

Mark 12:36 gives us a basis of the confession of Jesus as messiah and Lord, and there are parallel passages in the other Gospels as well. I believe that is the inner engine of the missionary expansion. It is

amazing. This mission is so unlikely to succeed because this message of resurrection and exaltation is so hard for the Jews to believe, and it is foolishness to the Gentiles. That message is so unlikely to advance, and yet there is such an inner conviction among the early Christians that this is true. Why? I believe it is the combination of what Jesus taught them—and Jesus was authenticated to render truth and substance to that teaching—and the confirmation of the Spirit of God giving them liberty to testify to this truth. I think it is good to reflect on that very hard aspect of the Gospel, especially if you feel called to pastoral or counseling ministry. In such reflection we get a most intimate insight into the nature of the Triune God Himself, and the collaboration and love and care it took to provide salvation. And yet, there is an enormous amount of collaboration, service, support, and enabling happening within the Godhead on behalf of salvation, on behalf of bringing a people unto Himself. It is amazing and mysterious and the driving force of the early church.

I long, together with you, to not simply hold to the dear, orthodox truth of the Christian faith, as good as that is, but to really recover the inner engine, the inner life of that truth. Doctrine is reality—the reality of God. It is the study of how God has revealed Himself. Thus when we reflect on Christology, which could seem dry and uninteresting at times, we are actually peeking into the very mind and heart and life of the living God who is working out His purposes among mankind. It is amazing and wonderful that it is so rooted in Old Testament Scripture and the apostolic witness. Our study of Jesus is not without context or precedent. Rather, it is culminating and spilling over into this understanding of Jesus as Lord. We have a great treasure as we confess Jesus as *Adonai*, as the one who has been exalted. We are not just making a statement of orthodox truth—we are acknowledging the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God the Father. The resurrection is in anticipation of this exaltation. Christ's exaltation is a great comfort to us, for the Lord we worship and serve has been given a place of authority that cannot be taken from Him. In this way the messiah of God is far superior to the messiah expected by the Jews because that one could be hurt. This Messiah of God has been enthroned in the highest place and there is no one who can make war against Him.

The struggle of subjugation that is described at the end of Psalm 110:1 is what is happening in our lives, churches, and world every day. Philippians 2 says this wonderful thing:

[Jesus] made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 [...] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, [a reference to Psalm 110:1]
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

And this exaltation of Christ that we have been discussing is to the glory of God the Father. It is wonderful how that circle is being closed. The Father exalts the Son and the enemies are put under the feet of Christ. The worship of all the world is, in the end, to God the Father. Thus the entire process of regaining a people unto Himself is, in the end, for the glorification of the Father. It is an amazing dynamic. It is a little bit like when you are involved with two people who relate well with each other. It is a delight to be in their midst because you can tell they have a good relationship. I remember one time when the wife of a colleague of mine in Germany came, as a surprise, to the school where we were teaching. There was such delight when those two met. They were absolutely delighted in a very natural, real, and sincere way, and it was a delight to be part of that. That is what God is doing as the three

persons of the Godhead relate and model for us that loving, serving, and caring relationship. Within the Godhead, God has no need of us; He is completely self-sufficient. But for the sake of our own hopeless lives to be able to reflect that, God models for us that relationship and even brings us into relationship with Him.

As we study Christology by studying what is said about Christ in Acts, we are getting a glimpse of the beauty of the Godhead. I think that was a driving force in this early Church. It was also the unusual manifestation of the Spirit of God, but in the end I think the love that God is pouring out by involving us in Himself and making us partakers of the relational love of God was the main driving force in the early church. Much of what I have shared with you in this lesson I have learned from my wife, from whom I have learned more than my biblical studies. She has been the one who has helped me understand life in relational terms. I do not naturally think in relational terms. But I have seen that her message of the importance of relationship is a deeply theological issue. I tend to think in terms of programs and activities and plans and pursuits. She thinks in terms of relationships. So it was interesting for me to pursue my plans with studying Christology and to learn from that study that there is a wonderful, deep relationship going on. I had to go back to my wife and say, "I think you may be right. This is interesting. I think theology has relational aspects." She was glad to find out about that, and we are still working on having godly relationships.

What communication skills can you glean from the speeches in Acts? We learn to preach within the context of all of Scripture, to be bold and courageous in advancing the Gospel, as well as many other things. There are many aspects that could be said here. As I begin with a question, I will now leave you with it. Why is it biblically legitimate to speak of Jesus as Lord? Perhaps you will confess Him as Lord from now on in a deeper sense as you reflect on that truth and reality.

Let me close in prayer. Shall we pray together?

Father, how wonderful it is for us to be able to reflect on who You are, on who Your Son is, and on who Your Spirit is—how we are taken up into one God in three persons, and how we are brought into that perfect, eternal union and relationship, and how that all bears out in our salvation and justification, in our sanctification and glorification. Lord, we thank You for the privilege of belonging to You. We pray that You will purify us and that we will be happy and spiritually bold to confess You in the places You have sent us to, the people around us, knowing that some will despise us as ignorant. Others will consider us foolish, and yet what is foolish in this world is the wisdom of God. Thank You, Lord, that You help us to understand You a little and to look into the mystery of Your Person, your goodness, and love and care. I pray for each one here, that You will bless them and guide them, and that You will use those challenges and obstacles that each one must have as wonderful ways of establishing Your glory in their lives. May You be blessed and may You bless each one here in Jesus' Name. Amen.