

We have covered many different names and titles ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament so far, including: Jesus, God, Son of God, Lord, Man, and Son of Man. In this lesson, and the next, we will be learning the meaning of the grand title: the Christ, or the Messiah. Although “Christ” is most associated with Jesus’ name, it is a title that many people are not familiar with, partially because we do not use it in our everyday conversations.

Read Matthew 11:2-6. **“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”** In this passage, John the Baptist has been thrown in prison by king Herod for speaking against Herod committing adultery. As the prophet sits in prison, he hears about what Jesus is doing out in Israel and begins to wonder if Jesus really is the Christ. So, John the Baptist sends some of his own disciples as messengers to Jesus to ask him if he really is the Christ. Jesus tells these messengers to report back all the miracles they are seeing as proof that he is truly the Christ.

Notice two things that should stir our curiosity: that Jesus is called “the Christ” and that John asks if he is “the one who is to come.” What do these things mean? The term “Christ” means the same thing as the term “Messiah.” Both Christ and Messiah mean “anointed one.” “Christ” is derived from the Greek word for anointed and “Messiah” is derived from the Hebrew word for anointed. In the Old Testament, anointing was the process of pouring oil onto the top of someone’s head, signifying that the person was set apart for a special God-given task or role. After Moses built the tabernacle in the wilderness, he poured anointing oil on it, consecrating it as the holy and exclusive place of God’s dwelling. Likewise, when Aaron and his sons were designated as the high priests over Israel, they too were anointed with oil, showing that they were the only men who could serve in God’s presence and offer certain sacrifices on the behalf of the people. Saul, the first king of Israel, was anointed as king by Samuel. Later, when Saul committed great offense against the LORD, God rejected him and ordered Samuel to anoint young David to be the new king instead. At this point in the Old Testament, the Anointed One becomes most associated with the king in the line of David.

This background information about anointing in the Old Testament might seem odd and obscure, but it truly is significant. After the reigns of David and his son Solomon, the kings of Israel began to lead the people astray so that, eventually, Israel was full of injustice and idolatry. Because of their lawlessness, the LORD sent prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, *et cetera*—in order to tell the Israelites that they needed to repent lest they be destroyed by God’s anger. The prophets told them that Babylon and Assyria would conquer and enslave them because they had turned away from the LORD. Yet, they also told Israel that God would bring them back into the land after their exile, cause them to worship him alone, and give them one king to rule over all the nations. This one king was to be in the line of David; he was to be the Anointed One (the Christ, or the Messiah). The prophets said many things about what the Messiah would do and what things would be like under his rule. One prophecy from Isaiah foretold that when God restored his people in this way, there would be miraculous and beautiful transformation: **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, / and the ears of the deaf unstopped; / then shall the lame man leap like a deer, / and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. / For waters break forth in the wilderness, / and streams in the desert;”** (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Do you see the connection between Isaiah 35 and Matthew 11? Isaiah’s vision of the restoration that will come when the Christ comes matches the miracles that Jesus was performing in Matthew 11. When Jesus works miracles, he is showing that God is pleased to work through him, since only God can perform miracles. But also, Jesus’ miracles show that he is the Messiah since he is fulfilling these Scriptures.

John the Baptist was in a tragic predicament. He was the prophet sent to prepare the way for the Lord, and while doing his prophetic duty of rebuking Herod, he ended up in prison. There in prison, he was not feeling the power of the Anointed One, Jesus, but he was feeling the power of a wicked king over Israel, Herod. Why was Jesus not storming Herod’s palace or setting up his kingdom in Jerusalem as the rightful and righteous king? If the Christ was to save his people and set up his kingdom, why was he not doing these things? This led John to doubt if Jesus really was the Christ. To John, things did not appear like the coming of God’s kingdom.

Jesus assured John by pointing out two proofs that he is the Christ, as I stated above. First, that he is working miracles, which are signs that God has sent him. Second, that he is working miracles that fulfill the prophecies about the reign of the Messiah. He is telling John that he is the one to come, there is no need to look for another. Although Jesus was the long awaited

Savior, he also was an unexpected Savior. He did not deliver his people and set up his kingdom like John and the rest of the Jews were expecting. Jesus said himself that his kingdom is not of this world. Recall the meaning of Jesus' name: the LORD saves. He was given this name because he was to save his people from their sins. Jesus did deliver his people from a power much greater and more dangerous than any earthly kingdom: sin. He set his people free from their sin and brought them out of the Satan's domain of darkness, by shockingly dying on a cross and coming out of the grave alive after three days. He set up his kingdom in the church, and he will return in order to judge all other rulers and establish his kingdom forever.

At the present, we do not see all of this on earth. At times, we can feel like John and not see Christ's power at work in the world. People remain rude, governments are careless about their people, diseases take away life after life, and the church is sick with sin. We might be tempted ask, "Jesus, are you sure you really are the Savior?" Jesus answers us in the same way as he did John. He sent his apostles to spread their eyewitness report about seeing Jesus work miracles, be crucified, and rise from the grave. These things verify that God sent Jesus and that he is fulfilling the Scriptures in the Old Testament. We must believe these things about Jesus. We must not scoff or ignore what he has to say. When Jesus teaches us something—like how to have eternal life—we must humbly listen and obey him. When we do, we will truly feel his power in this life and in the life to come.