

## STUDY THREE

# The Action and Events of Christ—1

### INTRODUCTION

This section is called ‘the action and events of Christ’, rather than ‘the work of Christ’, which is a technical term reserved for the things he accomplished, that is, the fruit of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension. We will deal with these factors later.

It is thought that as we see the events and actions of Christ a true picture will emerge, showing who he was by what he did. There must be a degree of interpretation of those events, but their full interpretation will be left until later when we deal with the work of Christ.

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

We have briefly discussed this. We have described the events which surrounded his birth, such as the predictions concerning John, and John’s birth. We have seen that the events relating to Jesus’ birth make that event unique. From a human point of view there would be no indication

that Jesus was other than truly human. The Word became flesh, and by flesh is meant true humanity. Likewise in Romans 8:3 we read that he was sent ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’. Everyone, then, thought of him as a man. Whatever may have been different in his conception, nothing was different in his birth. Thus he had to be cared for, protected by being taken into Egypt, and was, as Paul said, ‘born under the law’ (Gal. 4:4). He was circumcised, being a Jewish male child.

The event which stands out in his early life is his baptism; however, his experience at Jerusalem as a child of twelve years is quite significant. When his parents finally found him in the temple and chided him, he spoke very directly to them, ‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ (Luke 2:49). He had expected them to know where he would be and come directly there. He also made the unique claim, ‘my Father’, which no Jew would have done. Following that, he was subject to his parents and ‘increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man’ (v. 52). All would have thought of him as truly human.

### THE BAPTISM

Often people wonder why Jesus waited until he was thirty years of age before he began his ministry. John’s ministry was slightly prior to his, and John was slightly older than Jesus. Thirty years was an acceptable age for a teacher, and probably for a prophet, seeing that he too was teaching. Since Jesus had to wait on John’s testimony, this would be one reason. The demand for a man to be thirty years of age before he could teach was to ensure he was

sufficiently mature. A person was not allowed to read the book of Ezekiel before he reached the age of 27 years.

However these things may be, they assure us that Jesus was no prodigy or, as we would say today, no ‘freak’. He showed himself as truly man in what he did. It was in this state that he came to John’s baptism. Matthew 3:11–12 shows that John spoke of one who was mightier than he, and who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. John and Jesus were cousins, but John tells us later (John 1:29–34) that he had been informed by God that the one on whom he would see the Holy Spirit *descend* or *stay*, would be Messiah. At the initial point of the baptism John may or may not have known Jesus to be Messiah. We can conjecture that he did, seeing Mary and Elizabeth had exchanged the information which proved this, but something public had to happen before John could publicly attest.

At all events, Jesus asked for baptism, saying against John’s protest, ‘thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:15). This means, ‘Israel has been called upon to repent, and prepare for the coming kingdom. As part of Israel I, too, must identify with all in this act, and so I do.’ Beyond the technical meaning of this lay the wider principle of doing the will of God to the hilt. His baptism at this point was to be God’s attestation to his Messiahship.

Luke’s account tells us that when Jesus had been baptised and was praying, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove (Luke 3:21–22). Matthew’s account states that the voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased’. Luke’s account says, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’. Incidentally, some early manuscripts of Luke have in addition, ‘today I have begotten thee’, which

is a reference to Psalm 2:7, and we will later examine this (Messianic) Psalm.

Acts 10:38 says of the baptism, ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power . . . he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil’. The attestation of the Father was that Jesus was His Son, and this uniquely. What that would have meant to those who heard it is a matter of conjecture. Psalm 2 speaks of ‘the anointed one’, ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’, and also says, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’.

Jesus describes the significance of the event in Luke 4:17–21. He was reading the lection at the synagogue in Nazareth and said, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ Jesus claimed this Scripture from Isaiah 61:1–2 was fulfilled in him. His claim to be this one—Messiah—was no light claim.

Much of this will be lost unless we understand that in the Gospels the terms ‘Messiah’ (Christ) and ‘Son of God’ are virtually synonymous. Hence in Matthew 16:16 Peter says, ‘You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God’, a concept which is repeated by the high priest in Matthew 26:63, ‘tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God’. This would undoubtedly arise from Psalm 2:7, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’, where it is linked with ‘his anointed’ of verse 1, and also verse 6, ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’. These names, ‘anointed’, ‘king’ and ‘son’, all combine to make a special figure.

Hence the attestation, ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased’ is seen to be from Psalm 2 and also Isaiah 42:1, ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold, *in whom my soul delights*; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations’. These two verses, conflated, leave us in no doubt that the Son is the Messiah, the Messiah the Son.

Thus the importance of his baptism cannot be exaggerated. First Jesus submits to God’s command to Israel. Secondly he is anointed. Thirdly he is received as the Messianic Son, and recognises his commission in the light of Isaiah 61:1–2. He is now the Messianic Son, whatever he has been in himself prior to his incarnation. The practical outcome of this is seen in our quote from Acts 10:38.

If we are thinking in terms of the *work of Christ*, then we must examine Psalm 2 and its use in the New Testament in order to see its implications.

## THE TEMPTATION

From the point where Jesus is attested to be the (Messianic) Son of God, this attestation and Jesus’ claim to it is tested strongly. The final test comes at the crucifixion, but the primary one is the temptation in the wilderness. The primary principle of that temptation is for Jesus to prove he is the Son of God. Satan says, ‘If you are the Son of God, then . . .’—Jesus, of course, does not have to prove he is the Son, for he has just been acclaimed that.

We must notice that it is the Holy Spirit, elsewhere called ‘the Spirit of His Son’ (Gal. 4:4–6), who leads him into this testing (Mark says the Spirit drove him, meaning the Spirit took a strong initiative). Doubtless the testing is

to try him out as Messiah, and in this Jesus proves himself. Satan is seeking to lure him from the path God has set out, and the principles He has given. The three temptations must be seen in this light.

The attempt to lure Jesus away from his close association with God as Father is defeated by ‘It is written’, that is, ‘God has spoken’. Jesus thus affirms his oneness with God, His plan and His principles. Satan proposes a way other than that of the cross. Later Jesus will have to rebuke Peter from trying to save him from the cross, by saying, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men’ (Mark 8:33). Hence we conclude that the one who is Messiah must be tested in accordance with Isaiah 28:16 where the true foundation stone is fully tested.

The details of the temptation are that Jesus spends forty days fasting in the wilderness. We are not aware of the nature of the fasting, but our understanding of it should not be spoiled by seeing it as a grim and fearful event. Jesus shows no signs of being disturbed by Satan. Adam in the beautiful garden falls in the temptation of the serpent. Jesus in a wilderness succeeds. He is the one who is stronger than the strong man (Luke 11:21ff.). Hence, in the test he emerges as stronger than Satan.

The three temptations have been ingeniously compared with the temptation in the garden of Eden where the tree was ‘good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise’ (Gen. 3:6), or the three lusts, ‘the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life’ (cf. 1 John 2:15–17). Doubtless there is much truth in this.

The temptation of the ‘stones-into-bread’ is to test whether Jesus depended upon his Father. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear we should depend

upon God for our material needs. Satan tries to destroy this dependency, saying that Jesus should take the way of materialism to make his kingdom. The temptation to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, which some understood to be a Messianic sign, Jesus rejects as tempting God. The temptation to receive all the kingdoms apart from the cross, to worship (i.e. serve) Satan, is wholly rejected, as one has to worship and serve God alone. We should not think of Jesus being fascinated by the temptations and close to breaking point and ‘just making it’. Far from this he must have seen the whole temptation as evil, wrong and ineffective. He simply proved himself stronger than Satan. Angels ministered to him for all his needs, as in fact they will to any servant of God (cf. Heb. 1:13–14). Jesus emerged triumphant, whilst Satan ‘departed from him for a season’ (AV), presumably to lick his wounds.

What then do we conclude from the temptation of Jesus? We conclude that there is no man in the whole of creation who is ever exempt from temptation. Jesus is not excepted. No man has ever succeeded in fully resisting in the measure that Jesus did. Adam had an opportunity to do so in similar, if not identical, circumstances. Adam failed. The last Adam did not fail. He proved himself stronger than Satan, not because of some special innate strength, but because he refused to be moved from his relationship with his Father. We conclude that the tested and tried cornerstone is also the stronger-than-the-strong-man, and that he is invincible against Satan and, even more, that having conquered in this manner, he is now set to conquer evil utterly and finally.

That he was about such goals is clear from Genesis 3:15, Hebrews 2:14–15 and 1 John 3:8.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF THE MINISTRY

Following on the temptation we can understand the thrust of Peter's statement concerning Jesus in Acts 10:38, 'He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil'.

We will discuss Jesus' ministry further, but at this point we can see that he actually set out to proclaim the kingdom of God as against the kingdom of darkness. He sought to dethrone evil wherever it had gripped men, and to bring men under the sway of the kingdom of God. In fact the first act of the kingdom was to liberate men. If we refer back to Luke 4:17–18 and understand what it is about, we will see that it is to set men and women free. We have a window on this in Luke 9:1–2 where we read, 'And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal'. Here, preaching the kingdom, casting out demons and healing the sick are all the one.

Again, in Luke 10:1–12, the seventy are sent out. Amongst other things he tells them, 'Heal the sick . . . and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you"' . This approximates to Matthew 12:28, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. As we have said, this accords with Acts 10:38, that is, to heal those who are oppressed of the devil is in some cases to heal sicknesses, in some cases to cast out demons, and in other cases to bring forgiveness of sins.

All of this makes sense of John calling for men to repent and to be baptised with a view to the remission of sins: 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 3:2).

It was at hand in the Person of Jesus. Hence in Mark 1:14–15 we read of Jesus who ‘came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel”’. This means that the kingdom came in the person of Jesus Christ. Knowing this throws great light on what he did and said.

This we shall pursue in our next study.

**Note:** Whilst we are objectively studying the actions, events and ministry of Jesus we should be careful to avoid total objectivity. By this we mean that we must understand not only what he did, but also why he did it. To put it another way, we must see the need for it. This involves the initial plan of God for His world. It involves the tragic fallenness of man, the power of evil forces, and the anguish, pain, awryness and disjointedness of sinful man and his universe which has been subjected to bondage. No other understanding will assist us to know the significance and the wonder of the events of Christ. Looked at, other than from this vantage point, they are merely so many incidents. Even understood theologically, but only objectively, the whole wonder of grace is missed by the observer.

THE PERSON & THE MORAL CRISIS