



Christ's Perfect Provision-Part 2

When the World Doesn't Understand Us

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Well, someone introduced themselves this week as a Christian Buddhist. So he said that: "I'm a Christian Buddhist." I mean, I would have laughed out loud were it not so sad that he really thinks those words are not intellectually or theologically incompatible. I had to smile thinking, Wow, you really believe that? And he did. He was dead serious when he said that.

It reminded me of a situation where I was talking with this guy I knew pretty well, and I was sharing the message of the gospel with him and I was talking about Christ. And he stopped me. He said, "You know, this Jesus that you're discussing, I think I already know him." Of course, I knew he didn't, because that's why I was sharing the gospel with this guy. And in his life I was trying to share that he needed to come to repentance and faith. And he said, "No, no, no, I think I already know him." And I'm like, What do you mean? He said, "Well, I have met him while out surfing." I go, Brother, okay, do tell—you met him? He says, "Yes. You know, not physically, but when I'm surfing," he said, "that's Jesus." Oh, brother. Okay, no, it's not. Really it's not.

And another guy just recently last week said Jesus was a man just like us—married, in fact—just like us, a pre-existing spirit who came to earth and took on human flesh and lived here just like us. He lived on earth in the process of becoming a god, just like you should be and I am. And if you think he's just some fringe thinker who's come up with some novel ideas on his own, he has 15 million friends called Mormons. And that's what he firmly believes about Christ.

And if you want to talk numbers, how about this: over a billion people on the planet today will tell you about Jesus. They've got some things to say: He's Jesus, and he's a prophet. He's a prophet just like Noah, just like Moses, just like Elijah, just like John the Baptist. And to quote the Quran, the point of Jesus was to usher in the glad tidings of the coming prophet, the ultimate prophet Muhammad. Jesus came to promote Islam and to roll out the red carpet for the coming of the final and definitive word from God, the prophet Muhammad.

Well, it should come as no surprise that ideas and thoughts and opinions about Christ—there's no shortage of those in our world. We hear them and we encounter them all the time. All you have to do is



talk about Jesus, and you're going to have people that are going to come back to you with all kinds of speculation about Christ. And while that may be easy to imagine as we experience it twenty-one centuries later, you've got to think: in the first century that stuff shouldn't be happening. I mean, Christ was right there. He could present himself, clearly explain himself. But as we'll see in our passage this morning, it really is much like today—everyone seemed to have some opinion about the person of Christ.

And I think what this passage does as we've reached here the ninth chapter of Luke—and today we only deal with three verses, verses 7 through 9—we have a text where, almost as an abrupt intrusion on talking about this mission that the apostles were sent out on to go and promote the kingdom and talk about Christ (and they were even endowed with this, what we call the GT-1 ability to do these miraculous gifts that suspended natural law), they're out there really making a splash in the arena of Galilee. And the opinions about Christ were forming all over the place, even into the halls of government.

Take a look at this text with me and recognize that it stands as an eternal reminder in the pages of the Bible that it's not just the first century; it's the second, and the twelfth, and the twenty-first century that's going to have to deal with everyone's speculation about the person of Jesus. And today as we continue our series on the provisions of Christ—Christ's perfect provision—we'll need to be looking at this text through that prism: what is it that Christ has done to provide for us a way to respond to this kind of thing?

So let's study this text together. Beginning in verse 7—follow along as I read it. Luke 9:7 says, “Now Herod...” Remember there's several Herods in the Bible who play prominently: in the book of Acts, Herod Agrippa I; Herod Agrippa II. The first martyred James and put Peter in prison; the second was the one before whom Paul, in the latter part of the book, chapter 26, is debating with Festus there by his side. The one that you think of most in December is the one that killed the babies in Bethlehem in the nativity story. This is the one though: Herod Antipas. And we've encountered him already in the Gospel of Luke. He's the one that is always the character named “Herod” throughout the Gospels, the one that is dealing with Christ as the ministry of Christ is unfolding as an adult—Herod Antipas.

He's called here the tetrarch. His dad, Herod the Great—his kingdom had been divided up, and they were all managing different parts of it, three of his sons and then another commander. And so here is Herod Antipas, the tetrarch, who had authority over the region that Jesus was in: Perea (which is in modern-day Jordan in the Transjordan area across the Jordan River) and Galilee—that whole area around the Sea of Galilee that you can picture (if not, look at your maps in the back of your Bible). And so you've got Galilee and Perea—that's where Herod Antipas was leading and in charge.



And you know, he's called this, but he also called his brother this: the ethnarch (*ethnos* in Greek)—the people-arch. Every time you see "arch," if it's transliterated from Greek, we're talking about the leader, the ruler—the ruler of the people, the ruler of a part of the kingdom of his dad Herod the Great.

"Now Herod heard about," in verse 7, "all the things that were happening" (and look back up in the first six verses—you remember they're all out there talking about the kingdom, promoting Christ, doing things to authenticate their authority as apostles), "and he was"—here's a word—"perplexed," and his mind is spinning, his gears are turning. Why? "Because it was said by some," bottom of verse 7, "that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen." Herod said—the reason his wheels got turning when they talked about John—he says to himself here, or to others nearby, "I beheaded John. John I beheaded. But who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him.

Now it's interesting that we have all this speculation about Christ, and everyone with these varied opinions about Christ—even Herod Antipas trying to figure out who is this Christ based on all these people saying all these things about Christ—when in reality it wouldn't be all that hard to figure out. Not to get ahead of myself, but Herod Agrippa II, as Paul was addressing him there (and he was in Caesarea, you might remember, under arrest, in prison), he says to his relative Herod Agrippa II, "You know these things—you're familiar with the Scriptures. You believe the Scripture; I know that you do." And all these things about Christ—it hasn't happened in a corner. See, Paul is saying, Listen, don't you know? Of course you know—you know what the Scriptures say. And, of course, the Herod family were very informed. And from this descent, at least in part, they knew the Jewish Scriptures.

And as we started the book of Luke, we recognized that everything that was said about the coming of Christ, whether by Anna or Simeon, or whether it was the angel to Mary—these were all things that were predicated on, founded on, the Old Testament promises about who the Christ would be. And where does that come from? Well, the Bible. And it said very clearly—Isaiah said it very clearly—there would be this one that would come, and he would be the fulfillment of the promises. Jeremiah—he would sit on the throne of his father David. The ideas that we get clearly out of the book of Daniel—that there would be one like a Son of Man (which was one of Jesus's favorite phrases for himself) who would be vested with all authority so that all people should serve him.

I mean, that should be clear. Everyone should know that. And when I think about people telling me recently all their varied views of Christ and think, I don't understand—it's not that hard to figure out. I mean, the book that really is all about him, all you've got to do is open it and see: he's not the things



you're saying. And so I think the first thing for us to do with a passage like this is just to step back and say: Why all this confusion when it's really not all that hard to figure out who Christ is?

Put that down, if you would—number one: we need to understand the confusion. And as I've said many times (and I want to use this text as a cue, just looking through it again), I want to see what things in this text might remind us of why it is that people just don't get it, and people really try to fight it.

Let's start with just the first line here in verse 7. Let's go back in verse 7: "Now Herod the tetrarch." Now again, Herod's family was very powerful. Obviously Herod the Great, as you remember from Matthew 2—he was the king of the region, had much more power than his tetrarch sons and cousins and nephews—all the people that were ruling in this area after he left. And the thing about these kings in the Herodian family is they certainly wanted to keep their power.

You remember what Daddy did—Herod Antipas thinking of his dad—when his dad heard from these Persian scholars, the seminary prophets that came over on their camels, saying, "We heard that there was one born the King of the Jews"? Remember Dad's response to that? Huh. That's not good. And he tries to get these magi to tell him where this child is once they find him. And, of course, they're warned and they go out another way. And he's so livid, so infuriated, ultimately motivated by such a threat in his own life of his leadership and his kingdom, that he goes out and kills all the babies under two years old in Bethlehem. That's the kind of maniacal leadership that the Herodian family had. And it gets much worse. All you've got to do is study this—just do a little bit of research on the Herodian family, and you'll see: any threat to their leadership, they're willing to fight it.

And when I read here as Luke stacks up these words—not, I mean, "Herod"—you could have just left it at that. Everyone knows at this time in the life of Christ who the Herod is. But he reminds us of the word—the leadership title—the tetrarch, the one in charge, in charge of the area where all this stuff is happening. He does not—he's not going to like it. It was like Dad didn't like all that threat to his authority.

I don't want to stretch this too far, but I can tell you that you don't need a crown on your head to feel threatened by the authority that is inherent in the biblical picture of Christ. I've said this a hundred times when it comes to sharing the gospel with people: eventually one of the barriers we're going to hit is the barrier that people have against the authority that is inherent in the biblical picture of Christ. I don't know that I want him to be the King.



Let's put that down letter A, if you would: we need to understand that people prefer that Jesus not be the King—the king figure of the Christ of the Bible. Now remember, “Christ” means one who's been anointed. The anointing means that the oil has been poured on your head. That can be in a non-religious ceremony (which usually is simply for medicinal purposes), and you can use it just as a word to paint things. But when it comes to the anointing of a ceremony, the one big regal ceremony was anointing the king—an authorization of the king. And the king was called the anointed, or the Christ. Even his name—Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah. “Messiah” is the Hebrew form; “Christ” is the Greek form—means that he is the one in charge.

And if you think back to what the Bible said (that Herod clearly knows, and he should have known, and anybody could have cracked open the scrolls), he was in charge of Galilee. If he wanted to tell me more about the Christ, he could read passages like the one I just quoted in Daniel 7. Let me read it for you word for word: he says he saw one coming before the Ancient of Days, like the Son of Man, and he was presented before him, and to him—the Son of Man—was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, all nations, all languages should serve him. Now, you open that up, I guarantee you're going to have a problem that's going to chafe against your autonomy—whether you're a king or just the normal American guy that wants to talk to your coworker about Christ.

“Copilot? I'm fine with that. You want to be a therapist? I got Dr. Laura, I got Phil, I got, you know, Oprah, I got lots of voices. You want to ask Jesus? Fine, I'll have Jesus give me opinions and some advice to live my life.” But you want to present Christ as the Bible presents him—let me read it again—so that he has all this authority, all this dominion, all this glory, so that all peoples, all nations, all languages should serve him. I'm not sure I want to turn my life over to the authority of Christ.

The prosperity gospel will present a kind of Jesus to the masses, and you wonder why they can fill up arenas so easily. Well, because if you strip him of the authority as the Lord of all things, so that he is not here to help me as some kind of guru to better my life, but he is the King and I am called to serve him—if I understand 2 Corinthians 5:15, that the call of a Christian is to know that the one who died for us and rose again did that so that I would no longer live for myself but for him—then I know I'm going to have an issue. Just like all of you sitting here, if you're a genuine Christian, you had an issue at one point of thinking: Really? He's going to be the King? He's going to be the Lord? I'm not going to let him climb into the passenger seat and be my copilot. I'm basically saying, Take the wheel. You're in charge.



We're going to struggle with that, and the world is going to struggle with that. And you don't have to be Herod Antipas to struggle with that. Talking about people without crowns on their heads—how about Adam and Eve in the garden? Let's just make this really simple. Adam and Eve in the garden—what was the temptation? “Did God really say you can't have that? Don't you want that? Look at it, take a good look at it—it's good for food, it'll make you wise.” Now who should be calling the shots for your afternoon here—God? Or should you have what you want? I mean, God's rules—come on. You be in charge. You direct yourself here.

I mean, that's so fundamental to everything about fallen humanity. We don't want, as Jesus put in this parable, this man to rule over us. We don't want that. We want to call the shots. You want to put it poetically—for you ladies in our women's Bible study in Judges—here's the recurring line: “And there was no king in Israel, so everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Remember that line? That's more than a political statement; that's a commentary on our problem. We want to do what's right in our own eyes.

By the way, what does 2 Timothy 3 say? Only going to get worse in the last days. Here's the list—first on the list: men will be lovers of themselves. And it ends with this: they will love pleasure rather than loving God. That's what we'll be known for. So if I can have a kind of religion that denies its power, I'll take that. But you're presenting to me a Christ that wants to be the driver and leader and captain and pilot of my life? I don't know about that.

You know that's an inevitable train wreck in verse 7—when you get a king wondering about the King of kings. You know that's going to be a train wreck. And it's a train wreck for us. You want to talk to your neighbors about Christ—just know, the preference of fallen human hearts is: I don't want him to be the King.

Secondly, middle of verse 7: “He was perplexed.” Now, here's the description: because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead. Now why would that get your wheels turning? Well, we learn in verse 9 (which is the first time we learn it in the Gospel of Luke) that he beheaded John. Now that one liner can just go in one ear and out the other. But you have to understand: the thing that got his attention was that people were saying about this person that everyone was going around preaching about is perhaps the reincarnate or resurrected John the Baptist.

Now why was that going to get his wheels stirring? Why would that make him perplexed? Well, because that beheading was a pretty dramatic thing. And if you knew the circumstances of that



beheading, perhaps you'd realize the problem that went on in the heart and conscience of Herod Antipas.

Take a look at it with me, if you would. Keep your finger here in Luke 9 and turn to Mark 6 with me. Mark 6—a rather lengthy passage, but it is dramatic, and it is worth us paying some attention to here—verses 17 through 29. Let's start in verse 17:

“For it was Herod”—again, this is Herod Antipas—“who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison.” Now when we were studying Luke so far, we already got that information. We know we even pictured it on the map over there in modern-day Jordan: you have a place where he lives, one of his winter palaces there out in the desert. And that's where he had him bound up in prison. But here's some data we didn't get all the information on: he says the reason he's in prison is for the sake of Herodias—now follow this next phrase carefully—“his brother Philip's wife.” Okay, well, why would your sister-in-law be the reason? Well, keep reading: “because he had married her.”

Don't think about that too long, but think about that. Your brother's wife is now your wife. And there's lots of problems with that. And in verse 18 it says, “John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.’” That's wrong. And the details of that historically are—it was, you know, a really bad thing on several levels. And John, who we know wasn't just about preaching indicatives—he's about preaching imperatives—and he got in people's lives and meddled around. And he was like, “Hey, Herod, that's wrong. Unlawful. You shouldn't do that.”

And you know what? That made his wife really angry. “Herodias had a grudge against him,” verse 19, “and wanted to put him to death.” Now someone has said something so bad about you—I'm sure you've had the feeling, I wish that guy were dead. You might think that. But if you are Herodias—the wife of the leader of the region—this is a real possibility. You might be able to pull that off. That's what this text is all about. “But she could not.” Now let's understand this: why couldn't she get him killed? You're powerful, girl. You're the queen of the area. Why? Come on—kill him. No, she couldn't. Why? Verse 20: “For Herod feared John.” Now underline this: “knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.” Now put that—log that into your brain. Herod Antipas, the one that is known for killing John the Baptist—right here we have from the Scripture a clear designation and commentary that he knew he was a good guy: righteous and holy. “And he kept him safe.”

“And when he heard him”—think about this, he's a preacher—“when he heard him, he was greatly perplexed,” (different Greek word here, same English word, same idea—his mind was going; his gears



were spinning), “and yet he heard him gladly.” You ever met people like that? I mean, they’re engaged in the preaching. They’re interested. They’ll come back. They don’t buy it. They don’t agree with it. They’re not willing to submit to it. But man, it’s interesting. This guy’s got passion. This guy’s got conviction. He’s got resolve. John the Baptist—the ultimate preacher—and he’s engaged, and Herod Antipas’s mind is like, Ah, I want to hear another sermon from this guy.

Verse 21: “But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias’s daughter came in”—now follow this, it doesn’t say Herod’s daughter, Herodias’s daughter—this is probably Salome. Salome was the daughter of Herodias and Philip. So this is your stepdaughter. This is your wife’s daughter. You’re the stepdad. And she comes in and dances at your birthday party. And you can assume here—fill in the blanks—a lot of alcohol flowing at this point. “She pleased Herod and his guests. And he said to the girl”—here’s why I know alcohol was involved, look at this next stupid line—“Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.”

How big is that? Verse 23: “And he vowed to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.’” Right? I mean, you can just see that you are not in your right mind right here. This birthday party is way too crazy. You should never have had this much alcohol. What are you thinking? Now remember, this is your stepdaughter. Always tension between dad and stepdaughter. Take a look at this: “And she went out and said to her mother, ‘For what should I ask?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist.’”

“I hate that guy. Preacher guy drives me crazy—always saying I’m a bad person for divorcing Philip and marrying Antipas. I want that guy dead.” Now, I don’t know why she was quick to respond to this. Maybe she was a stronger-willed woman than we think. Maybe—“I don’t want you thinking, Mom; she’s been crazy ever since John the Baptist got in her head.” I don’t know. But she comes in and she concedes and she says (verse 25), yeah, that’s what I want. “She came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’”

Now note this confliction—a little bit like Pilate, it feels like—“and the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.” Can you see back up in verse 20? He knows he’s a righteous man. He knows he’s holy. And he knows in his own conscience that he did wrong in marrying Herodias. But right now you’re stuck, because after one too many at your birthday party, you made a vow in front of all your guests. And now you’d look like an idiot to bring it back. You’d look weak and pathetic. So you know what? Okay.



Verse 27: “Immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.”

Now, I know Sokoloff and all these guys getting beheaded recently in the news, and I know American journalism—we kind of keep that undercover, and Twitter won’t put the link out there, and people don’t want to see it. But if you’ve seen it (which may not be bad for the psyche of the American populace right now), it is an image that sticks in your mind. You don’t even have to see the head being severed off of a human body; you just have to see the picture after it’s done. And as the ISIS guys like to do—put the head on the torso that’s lying on the ground. When you see a decapitated head, a bloody decapitated head on the back of a human torso—that’ll stay with you for a while. And you’ve only seen it in pictures. He gave the order at his stupid birthday party to have the preacher beheaded. And it was done at your order. And that bloody, dripping head was brought through your palace, and your stepdaughter brought it in to your wife. And then you hear sometime later: a lot of crazy things going on in Galilee; “I think John the Baptist is back from the dead,” someone says. What are you going to feel? Conscience-stricken. Right? That had to affect his conscience. “I killed that guy.”

That scene is dramatic, and it paints a picture for us that makes people sometimes say, Who is this Jesus? Because in Herod’s life it was a reminder of his sin. Now, let me say this—just step out of that scene for a second. If you’re in the Old Testament and you’re going to worship—not quite as joyful and festive as it is right now. Oh, there are songs, and there’s stuff that goes on. But when it comes to really the solemnity of worship—much like Yom Kippur that we just had—and you know all the crowds down the street at Temple Beth-El and all these Jewish synagogues; everyone’s packing in for Yom Kippur. Now think about that. Even Yom—Hebrew “day”—Kippur—“atonement,” the Day of Atonement. Atonement for what, people? For what? Sin. Even the biggest holidays are a reminder that we are sinners.

And on that day back in Israel you’d have to kill these animals and have the high priest walk in where there were barriers that you couldn’t go—to remind you that you needed forgiveness, atonement. See, the priesthood in the Old Testament wasn’t high-fiving the pastor: “That was a great tip to live for Yahweh this week.” It was: you’ve reminded me that I’m a sinner and that my sin requires payment and sacrifice, and I need atonement. See, the priesthood was about barriers and about sacrifice and about the surfacing of the problem of sin.

You know, it’s no surprise that in the New Testament Jesus is called—particularly in the book of Hebrews—our great High Priest. And you want to deal with the biblical Christ? You can’t do it—Osteen’s way—you can’t do it without reference to sin. There is no Christ with any meaning at all that



is not in reference to your sin problem. And that's what people don't want either. Letter B—long time to get there, but let's put it this way: people prefer Jesus not to be the Priest. I don't want a priest. And I'm not talking RC—Roman Catholic stuff. I'm talking about the priest of the Old Testament with blood under his fingernails from killing animals, reminding you that the wages of sin is death. I don't want any reminders of my sin. You can't encounter the biblical Christ without your sins being laid on the table, and you are required then to repent and confess. Even the word “confession”—to agree—that you have a sin problem. You want to share Christ with your neighbors? Eventually you're going to have to deal with the issue of sin, and it shouldn't be “eventually”—it's right there near the top. Jesus is our Priest, which solves our problem with sin. Herod felt it. And when someone attached Christ to a word—“John”—that reminded him of his sin, that had to be a perplexing thought. And it's going to be perplexing to your neighbors, coworkers, and friends as well.

Well, you see the pattern and the paradigm, you know: people prefer Jesus not be the King; people prefer Jesus not be the Priest. Well, you can fill in letter C: people prefer Jesus not be the—what? Sunday school grads? He's the Prophet, Priest, and King. And isn't that what's going on there in verse 8? Some are saying, “Well, he's another voice in the long line of prophets. I think it's Elijah that has appeared.” “No, no—Elijah.” And the promise in Malachi was that there was going to be this great recurrence of the power and spirit of Elijah in someone. And so maybe this is that. Or others were saying, “I don't know—he's one of the prophets of old that's arisen, and that's why he's doing all those miracles—because he came back from the dead—one of the prophets.”

And as I've illustrated with Islam, I don't have any problem with Jesus being one of the prophets. Because the great thing about being one of the prophets is the next prophet can supplant everything the former prophet said. And so I don't have a problem with him being a prophet. But if you're telling me he's the Prophet—well, then I have to research what he said, what he stood for, what he did. That means I have to, as Luke 6:46 says, actually do what he said. Remember that line? He said, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’—why do you call me the pinnacle, the top, the boss? Why am I recognized in your mind as the ultimate Lord, Rabbi—why—if you don't do what I say?” Because that doesn't make any sense if I'm really the Word of God (as John 1:1 says). If I am, as Hebrews 1 says, the actual spokesperson of God—God has spoken through the prophets in many portions and many ways, but in these last days he's spoken to us in his Son—if that's the case, the God of the universe is speaking to us, and the Word of God is the Son of God, then I've got no choice but to do what he says.

By the way, at great consequence if I don't. I just quoted for you Luke 6:46—do you know what verses 47 and 48 say? If you do what I say, you're like a man who builds his house on the rock. If you don't do what I say, you're like the man who built his house on the sand. And the problem is, the storm is going to come against both those houses, and one of them's going to crash. And the one built on the sand that's going to crash is simply the one that did not do what I say. Just gets back to letter A, I suppose—the authoritative Word of God. I don't want a King, and I certainly don't want a Teacher



that's going to constantly tell me I can't do this in my sexual life, I can't do this in my imagination, I can't do this in my business. I don't want someone telling me all of that. And that's what our neighbors and friends struggle with. One voice perhaps—therapist, sure. Counselor, advisor—I can handle that. The Prophet? Struggle with that. And so will everybody you present the biblical Christ to at some point.

Letter D—don't make too much of verse 9, but I know enough about the Herodian family that when Herod said, "Hey, I beheaded John, so I don't know that this could be John; I want to know who this is. I beheaded John. But who is this about whom I hear such things?"—and then he sought to see him—I don't hold out a lot of hope, even if I didn't know the future of the story, that wanting an audience with Jesus is going to change your opinion about Jesus to make him, in your mind, the biblical Jesus. I really think if you're not willing to accept him, you'll make him anything but the biblical Christ. Let's call it that. I know it's a catch-all, but let's put it down this way—letter D: they—the people you and I will deal with—will prefer Jesus not to be who he is. Anything but what he is: the Prophet, the Priest, and the King. They'll come up with any slot for Christ but that. And you know that's what we're fighting.

And I've told you a hundred times: evangelism and apologetics is rarely really an issue of trying to convince people intellectually. The battle is far too profound than just that. It's not convincing people of a body of data that's true. I mean, that's part of it, obviously. But this is a battle of the will. This is an issue of my life. This is not so much an intellectual issue as it is a moral issue. And we need to be ready, understanding that everyone's going to have an opinion about Christ, and they're going to vary wildly from the Scriptures because they want him to be someone else. There are far too many implications for him being Prophet, Priest, and King.

We've got to get there. You have Luke 9 open? Just drop down—we're going to get to this passage, Lord willing, in a few weeks—but verses 18 through 20: "Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'" Well, here it is again: "What's the opinions about me?" And they answered, "John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter speaks up and he says, "The Christos—Mashiach—the Anointed One." Who do you anoint? You anoint not only the King; you anoint the Prophet and you anoint the Priest in the old covenant dispensation—that period of time. That's what you do. And he says, "We know you're that—everything the Bible says you are—we know you're that." We're going to get to this place, and nothing short of this will work. Every other thing—a prophet, a voice, authority, a counselor, a word, a teacher, a guide—all of that: not done; doesn't work if it's not the submission and the concession to the truth about the Christ.



All right, well, there's our text. How do we respond to that—especially with the inviting phrase that ends verse 9: “And he sought to see him.” Now that was a real possibility as the “king” of Galilee. It's possible. But when your neighbor, your friend, your coworker, who has a varied opinion of Christ, is willing to say, “I'd like to see this Christ”—we can't bring him down the road to the synagogue in Capernaum and say, “Here he is—talk to him.” We have to present him. So I do want to show Christ to my neighbors, friends, and coworkers.

I just want to spend the last few minutes we have together—just briefly, with one word per point—I just want to give you four words that will help us, number two: present Christ. That's what we need—to present Christ. How do we do it? This is where now we can get back to the theme of our series. What has Christ provided us that will allow us to present Christ the right way, when the Herod of our life says, “Well, I'd like to know more about Christ”? How do we do it?

Four words. Verse 5 (you might remember) says if you're not accepted, kick the dust off your sandals and move on. That'll be a testimony against them. I'd like to take you to the parallel passage because there's a word given in the parallel passage that I think is helpful and will become our first point—letter A here—Matthew 10:14–16. If you can pull that up real quick—let's go to that text and see how he summarizes the way in which I'm supposed to know when to kick the dust off and when to keep preaching—when to keep talking and presenting Christ and when to back off and move on to better-prepared soils. How do I know that? Here's what he says—he gives us a great biblical word that will help us.

Verse 14, Matthew 10: “If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words”—I say it's the parallel passage because here's the instruction—“shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.” That was that Jewish way to show, “I'm protesting here.” “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” They were notoriously wicked. But here's the thing—you've gone to the normal middle-class Galilean town, but you gave them the truth, and you authenticated it with these miraculous signs. And I'm telling you, man, they're going to be held more responsible, and they'll have more guilt and more punishment because of their rejection of you than even that notoriously wicked pair of towns.

Now, here's the summary: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” Now underline these next five words: “so be wise as serpents.” Okay, there's our word: wisdom. Wisdom allows me to look at a situation and be able to know what to do. It's not knowledge—we need knowledge to share Christ and present him to the world, I get that. But wisdom is different. Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is the data. Wisdom is the ability to know how to apply that data. It's the



ability to know how and when and in what way to strategically give that information. And you need to be wise like a snake—that picture of a slithering animal.

Letter A: you need to share Christ strategically. Let me use that word as a word to represent this idea of wisdom. And I want to talk about you and your Herod in your life. And knowing this: Christ has perfectly provided for you this thing called wisdom that will allow you to speak about Christ in a strategic, very intelligent, very tailored way. If you read about Christ sharing the message of his kingdom to people, he never shared it the same way twice. He's always careful. He's always strategic. He's always tailoring the things and the way he goes about it because he is looking at every situation and applying wisdom.

It's a lot like Colossians 4:5 that says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the *kairos*—the opportunity—and let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Outsiders—the Herods of life—varied opinions of Christ. I need wisdom. Well, is that a resource God's willing to give? Let me quote it for you—James 1:5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask" of God—"who gives generously to all without reproach." God is ready to dispense wisdom. Now again, in James, it says you can ask for wisdom for the wrong things. "I want wisdom on stock market picks this week, God—give me wisdom." No. But you start asking Monday morning, Tuesday morning: "God, today I want to help set the record straight about Christ. Give me wisdom in how I present Christ to my coworkers." You think God's not going to dispense that in generous measure? That's the provision of Christ that is perfect, and it will be supplied to you liberally, generously.

"Wise as serpents." Oh, and by the way, since we use the word "serpent" in verse 16, we don't want to give you any idea that you have some right to be evil—"and innocent as doves." Reminds me of verses like Matthew 7:6, which is just a couple of chapters back, when he says, "Don't give the dogs what's holy, and do not throw your pearls before swine." Certainly reminds me of Proverbs 23:9: "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words." There's a time to not blurt out everything you know about Christ just because you have an open ear. You understand that. There are some people zealous for evangelism—and there—but you have to be strategic. Ask for wisdom. Know when it's time to keep talking. Know when it's time to table the conversation. Know when it's time to change the topic. Know when it's time to work through the elements of the gospel. Present Christ strategically.

Now, this should go without saying. Letter B: you should present Christ biblically. When Herod says, "Hey, I'd like to have an audience with Christ. I'd like to hear him. I'd like to see Christ," you could present Christ—the physical, living Christ—to Herod in his palace in Galilee because he was there



living. Now he's gone, he's ascended, he's at the right hand of the Father. Now, if I want to present Christ to my Herods, how do I do it? There's only one way: the record of the Bible. That's it. That's the only way I can present Christ to my neighbor—by being able to present a biblical picture of who Christ is. That's the accurate Christ.

One passage on this—would you turn there? 1 Peter 1. When it comes—this is great logic for us in the context we're dealing with—when it comes to how you were saved... Now, I have to imagine some people think they're saved in the room that aren't. But for those of us that know that we're Christians, it was only made possible by the presentation—an accurate presentation—of biblical truths. That's the only way it happened. The only reason you say you know Christ—the real Christ—is because biblical propositions and biblical sentences were presented to you accurately. That's the only way it happened. And therefore we can think: that's the way I've got to work when I'm an ambassador, representing Christ to my world.

Verse 23, 1 Peter 1: “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed”—now, the context—this will become clear—“I’m not talking about things that come and go—ideas, opinions, people’s thoughts. No, you were born again of imperishable seed”—and what is that?—“through the living and abiding word of God.” Abiding—never changes, eternal. It’s living—sounds like Hebrews 4—living and active, sharpening—it’s powerful. “All flesh,” verse 24 (now quoting Isaiah 40)—all opinions, all the people’s best thoughts—it’s just grass. “And all its glory”—all of its best works and philosophies and best knowledge—“is like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls.” It’s not eternal; it’s not abiding. “But the word of the Lord remains forever.” “And this word is the *euangelion*”—it is the evangel—the good news; it is the message that was preached to you.” That is, if you’re born again (responding to verse 23), then that’s what you heard—the accurate presentation of the eternal truth of God. And when it comes to Christ, if I’m going to present him, I’d better be biblical.

Put this in the margin: Acts 17:2–3. Paul went to Thessalonica, and as was his custom—love this—he reasoned with the people from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christos”—is the Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King. How did he do it? Reasoning from the Scriptures. You can’t present Christ unless you present him biblically. And we get to reason from the Scriptures with people, pointing them to the abiding and living word of God.

Thirdly, we need to present this rationally. We come to Herod—he wants to see Christ; he wants to get some idea of who the real Christ is. I’d better come—as that text I just read for you (Acts 17:2)—it says he reasoned from the Scriptures. Now that’s one part of it. God has given you a mind and a brain not only to reason from the Scriptures—but let me add this now—to reason through topics scripturally.



I need to reason from the Scripture (and learn to do that—that’s the only way I can present the real saving message of the gospel—through the Scriptures). I need to reason through the Scriptures and say, “Look at this passage”—a lot like Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch—“what does this passage say? What does this mean?” And Isaiah said this—let’s think through this—now Christ fulfilled that. That’s reasoning from the Scriptures.

Then there is—let’s put this down—Acts 24:25. When Paul is standing there with Felix, the Roman governor, it says he reasoned with him about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. Now he’s reasoning through topics. Of course, he’s reasoning through topics scripturally. When we present Christ, there are questions that are raised: “Well, how can this be?” “And then what about this book that you’re reading from—is it even reliable?” “Well, I don’t know—I need to think this; I need to talk this through.” “Well, what about this Christ that you say came to die for sin, and then we still have so much sin in the world—how does that...?” “Reason with me about the reality of sin and evil.” We need to learn to reason through topics—and reason through them biblically.

God has given us wisdom if we ask for it. God has given us his word—we’ve got to use it to present Christ. And God has given you a brain, and he’s given you the ability to reason so that you can rationally present Christ. When the successor of Felix—his name was Festus—cried out in the middle of Paul’s defense to King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa) in Acts 26:24, he said, “You’re crazy. You’re out of your mind. You’ve got a lot of facts in your head, but your great learning has driven you mad.” Paul responds in verse 25 and he says this: “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.” What I’m saying makes sense. We’ve got to speak cogently and coherently about the truth of what we’re presenting. And there are lots of ancillary topics that will always be raised. That’s the whole body of apologetics. And some of you—we’ve got to do some of that work. As I put on the back of the worksheet every week a bunch of books—some of the books we need to start reading are not just commentaries about the Bible, but thinking through topics that may not even be found explicitly in the Bible, and we need to think biblically about those topics. So grab a couple of those titles that relate to apologetics and start digging into those.

Speaking of that word, I’ve got to add one more text: Titus 2:8. This is not just to church leaders; matter of fact, the context is just to the average person in the church. It says, as you teach, as you speak about the truth—do it with sound speech that cannot be condemned. Reasonable, cogent, logical speech, so that no one can say, “Oh, that doesn’t even follow—that doesn’t make sense.”

Lastly—I trust you anticipated this word—we need to present the truth kindly. We need to present Christ and the truth about Christ—the biblical Christ—with kindness. And that’s hard to do. It’s not as easy as it sounds. The text, of course, that you should write down if you haven’t already is 1 Peter 3:15



that says I need to be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks me to give an account for the hope that's in me, yet I need to do it with—do you know the words?—gentleness and respect. Put both of those words under the heading “kindly.” I need to be kind and respectful—dignified decorum with a kind of gentle, gracious respect for the people I’m talking to.

And that's hard. Why? Because you're telling me things that really are like fingernails on a chalkboard regarding the Christ that I love and serve and promote in this world. And you're saying he was a guy like me—married, on his way to godhood. Not true. Makes me angry that you would say that. You're saying he's just one of many prophets that was just sent to earth to bring the glad tidings and lay out the red carpet for Muhammad. You're saying—that makes me angry to hear you say that. That's a lie. And that, in my flesh (as I prayed in the pastoral prayer this morning), can raise levels of indignation in me. And they become at that moment my theological enemies.

I need to be kind though, and that's hard. We learned in the Sermon on the Plain that I will be like God if I can learn to do something extraordinary—be kind to my enemies. He said this: if you're kind to people that are kind to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. When we sit on the patio and talk about our view of Christ and it agrees and we high-five and go home happy—that's not hard. I mean, that's what Muslims and Mormons are doing this morning—high-fiving each other for having the same doctrine. But when you clash with someone over (for us) the most important figure in the text of Scripture—the second person of the Godhead, who is glorified when we give him our attention, according to Philippians 2; whom the Spirit is seeking to promote and bring glory to—when someone disparages him with false doctrine, it makes us angry.

Well, do I have any provision from Christ for that? How about this—Galatians 5: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control. Do those words sound helpful when someone is disparaging the Christ that saved you? I think so. When they're disagreeing and giving you some stupid speculation about Christ in denial of the plain teaching of Scripture—do I need love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control? Oh boy—in large measure. Where do I get that? It is the fruit of the Spirit. God has given you a provision to be like a son of the Most High, that when people are your theological enemies and your blood pressure starts to go up in the lunchroom at work, and they are disparaging the Christ that you serve, you need the Spirit of God to help give you the things so that you can look into the eyes of the last person and act more like Christ, saying, “Here's a sheep without a shepherd. They need the truth.” To reason with them and have as your goal love: I want them to be convinced of the truth because without it, they're like that man who builds his house on the sand.



I don't want us to be argumentative, but I want us to engage in the argumentation. I don't want us to be angry and hostile, but I want us to correct false thoughts—(as Paul said) that raise themselves up against the knowledge of God. I want to destroy those with weapons that are strong for the destruction of strongholds. I want our church to be full of Christian apologists who aren't out there pathetically apologizing, but who are fighting for the truth. But don't do that without making sure you have the resource of the Spirit of God, so that you can look into the eyes of a theological enemy, and—while his statements may make you boiling-hot and angry—your response is one of gentleness and respect. Because the Spirit of God enables you to love your enemy and be kind to those who persecute you.

Well, God's given us wisdom if we ask for it. He's given us a Bible we can use. He's given us a brain that we can think. And he's given us a Spirit so we can control our attitude. But these resources need to be employed. And that's hard in a world that's full of aberrant thoughts about Christ.

I was thinking about that when I ran across some claims on the internet (which happens every five minutes) that you think, Oh, that's nuts. And I thought about what the internet has done. If it's done one thing, it's certainly given people a platform—anybody and everybody—a platform to talk about anything and everything. And you can have people writing about everything and promoting things that are just crazy. So it's not just our Christology, but everything out there—on the internet in particular—that amplifies people's speculations about everything.

You think, Well, it's created in this world of massive opinion a whole genre of websites now— websites that are there just to do the fact-checking for you: Snopes—is that true? Is that an urban legend? factcheck.org; truthorfiction.com; the MythBusters—all these sites out there to do what? To have you look at the plethora of ideas about any given thing and to say, "Well, wait a minute—is that true?"

Now, here's one thing I've learned about all those sites: they're boring. Have you been on them? Oh, I mean, it's no wonder I'm willing to believe the speculation because those are really cool sites to read. But to read the real sites that make the cross references and the references and the footnotes and the books and the original context of this—oh, too much work, man. No wonder no one seems to go and do any fact-checking anymore. And then I think, if they're hard to read, can you imagine writing those websites? Who creates these websites? Boring people create these websites, I'm thinking. And yet—that's your job. That's your job.



In a world of opinion about Christ, we're there to set the record straight. You're going to be one of those boring people that really looks at the claims and goes, "Okay, well, wait a minute—you're saying the Bible is not a reliable document? Okay. We've got to do some work on this. We've got to reference this. We've got to cross-reference this. We've got to show you this. And you're talking about the Gospel of Philip? Let me straighten you out on the gospels. Oh—Constantine and... okay, well, we've got to deal with that. It may take me some time to get my notes."

But that doesn't sound like a lot of fun. Yet if you can remember what's at stake—it's not walking around with the wrong idea about 9/11 or whatever it might be—walking around with the wrong idea about Christ will cost you your soul. So we're there to set the record straight. God's given us wisdom. The Bible. He's given us a brain to reason with people. And he's given us a Spirit so we can keep everything under control with an attitude of gentleness and respect. Eternity is at stake. Let's get out there this week and set the record straight about Christ.

Let's pray. Why don't you stand with me—I'll dismiss you with a word of prayer.

God, we have a world full of opinions about Jesus that seem almost impossible to be believed in the minds of many people at all. And yet there are millions in this case, and billions in that case—people believing all kinds of things about Christ because they just refuse to look at the source and believe the truth. And Romans 1 has promised this—that it will be a perpetual problem for this period filled with fallen human beings—because we love to suppress the truth in our unrighteousness. It's a moral issue; it's an issue of the will; it's rarely just an issue of the mind.

So remind us of what we're up against, realizing that people don't want Christ to be the King, the Priest, the Prophet—they prefer he be anything but that. And let us go out there and set the record straight—to be the MythBusters about Christ, to be the fact-checkers on all the opinions about Jesus. I know that's going to take some work on our part, but make us good students, to be able to reason with people from the Scriptures, and to be able to reason about a variety of topics that relate to it, and to do it scripturally. I know that calls for work, but that's what you've called us to be as ambassadors. And ambassadors aren't just out going to dinner parties—they've got work to do, and policy briefings to sit through, and—God—we've got to know our stuff.

So may this sermon motivate many people who hear my voice right now to represent you this week, asking for those opportunities in the morning: "God, give me wisdom and give me an opportunity to set the record straight about Christ." Let us know when to talk, when to back off, when to keep going,



when to knock the dust off our sandals. Give us clarity, guidance through the process. And let us see some fruit from this because I know we are going to run into a lot of people that just don't want to hear it. But, God, eventually, in setting the record straight, we'll have someone who's been prepped by your Spirit to respond rightly—to the Christ, to the Bible. And in those days we'll rejoice, and the Bible says heaven erupts with rejoicing among the angels when one sinner repents.

So let us have some of that experience, just to remind us that just as we were saved, people are saved when they encounter the living and abiding word of God—the Christ of the living and abiding word. Now release us to that task throughout this week. In Jesus' name, amen.