CHRIST IS KING

PART II — THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

JEROEN SLUITER

Concept & Direction

CHRIST IS KING

PART II

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The King, the Covenant and the Kingdom

CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY

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A Note on Authorship

Christ Is King is a human-directed series that I conceived and directed. Its governing convictions, purpose and intellectual direction are my own. Its arguments, structure and prose were developed through an extended process of dialogue, drafting and revision with artificial intelligence.

I used AI as a research aid, interlocutor, drafting tool and editor, including to produce passages of prose. I determined the series' theological and philosophical position, challenged and revised its arguments, selected and approved the final text, and exercised final editorial judgement.

The AI's contributions do not represent personal beliefs or independent testimony. The positions advanced in these books are those I have chosen to endorse. Responsibility for the published work - including its claims, interpretations and any errors - rests with me.

JEROEN SLUITER

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Introduction — Beyond the Archetype

There are moments in human history when a few words carry consequences far beyond the circumstances in which they were first spoken.

Christ is King.

Three words. An astonishing declaration.

To the modern ear, they may sound like a religious slogan, a statement of personal faith, perhaps even a political provocation. Yet to understand what Christians have meant by these words for nearly two thousand years is to encounter a claim so immense that it reaches into virtually every question humanity has ever asked about its existence.

Who are we? Why are we here? What is good? What is evil? What is death? Is there anything beyond it? And perhaps the most unsettling question of all: what if the universe is not merely a place in which human beings happen to exist, but a creation whose ultimate meaning has already been revealed?

Part I of this series approached Christ through the psychological insights of Jordan B. Peterson. It considered the figure of Jesus as the embodiment of the highest moral ideal: the individual who confronts suffering voluntarily, speaks truth in the presence of power, accepts responsibility and refuses to surrender his conscience even when the consequences are fatal.

There is considerable philosophical depth in that interpretation. One need not be a Christian to recognise the extraordinary moral architecture of the Gospel narrative.

But Christianity makes a claim that reaches far beyond psychology.

It does not merely propose that Jesus represents the highest human ideal. It proclaims that the man who embodied that ideal was God himself, entering human history.

That the creator of the universe became one of its creatures.

That he walked among ordinary people, experienced hunger and exhaustion, suffered betrayal, stood before a Roman governor, and was executed in public.

And that he rose from the dead.

Consider the scale of what is being proposed.

Christianity is not simply offering a philosophy of life. It is making a declaration about the fundamental nature of reality. It claims that history contains an event through which the relationship between humanity and its creator was transformed.

The Christian theologian cannot avoid the magnitude of this proposition. Nor should he diminish it by retreating into abstract terminology.

Indeed, the more carefully one studies the Scriptures, the more remarkable the proposition becomes.

The language of kingship, covenant, sacrifice, redemption and eternal life is not a collection of disconnected religious ideas. These concepts form a remarkably coherent theological narrative,

developed across centuries of Jewish Scripture and interpreted by the earliest Christians through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

To understand that narrative is to discover why the declaration *Christ is King* means so much more than that Jesus was a great teacher, a moral philosopher or even a prophet.

It is to understand why Christians believe that the authority behind existence itself entered history and revealed its character.

Our task is first to understand this belief on its own terms.

Only then can we confront the question that must eventually arise.

What grounds are there for believing that it is true?

1. The King — The Word Made Flesh

Jerusalem. First century.

A city under Roman occupation, governed by an empire whose military and political authority extended across much of the known Mediterranean world.

Rome understood power.

Its legions enforced imperial order. Its governors administered justice. Its emperors commanded allegiance. Rebellion was met with exemplary punishment, and crucifixion was among the most brutal instruments through which Rome demonstrated the consequences of defiance.

It is against this background that we encounter one of the most extraordinary conversations recorded in ancient literature.

A prisoner stands before Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judaea.

His name is Jesus of Nazareth.

He has been arrested during the night. The religious authorities have accused him of offences they consider grave enough to warrant death. But Judaea is under Roman rule, and the execution they seek requires the involvement of the occupying administration.

The situation is politically delicate.

Jerusalem is approaching Passover, a festival commemorating Israel's liberation from bondage. Religious expectation and national memory run deep. The possibility of unrest is never far from the calculations of a Roman governor.

And now Pilate is confronted with a man accused of claiming to be a king.

To appreciate the significance of this encounter, we must understand who Pilate was.

He was not a philosopher conducting an abstract inquiry into religious truth. He was the representative of imperial authority, responsible for maintaining order in a difficult province. The Roman state had little interest in theological disagreements unless they threatened political stability.

A competing claim to kingship was another matter entirely.

Pilate asks Jesus:

"Art thou the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33, KJV)

It is a straightforward question, but it carries the weight of Rome's political order.

Jesus does not respond as an ordinary prisoner might.

He asks whether Pilate has reached this conclusion himself or has merely repeated what others have told him.

The exchange continues until Jesus makes a declaration that transforms the entire conversation.

"My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36, KJV)

Consider what has just happened.

A man without an army, without political office, without wealth or any visible means of exercising worldly authority stands before the representative of the most formidable empire of his age and speaks of possessing a kingdom.

Not a kingdom that Rome has overlooked.

Not a kingdom waiting to be established through military victory.

A kingdom whose origin and authority are not derived from the political order of this world.

Jesus explains that if his kingdom were of this world, his servants would fight to prevent his arrest. Yet no such struggle is taking place.

The distinction is fundamental.

Pilate represents authority exercised through institutions, territory, law and ultimately coercion.

Jesus speaks of an authority that does not originate in those things.

He then declares that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Pilate responds with a question that has echoed through philosophy ever since.

"What is truth?" (John 18:38, KJV)

John does not record Jesus giving Pilate a further answer.

And perhaps the extraordinary power of the scene lies partly in that silence.

For the reader who knows the opening of John's Gospel, the answer is already standing before the governor.

Before Abraham, before Rome, before creation

John begins his Gospel not with the birth of Jesus, nor with the history of Israel, but with the beginning of existence itself.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1, KJV)

The language is deliberate.

It recalls the opening of Genesis: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

John is making a claim about the identity of Jesus that extends beyond the boundaries of ordinary biography.

The Greek term *Logos*, translated as *Word*, carries profound intellectual significance. It can evoke reason, intelligibility and the ordering principle through which reality is understood. Within John's Gospel, however, the Logos is not merely an abstract principle.

The Logos is divine.

All things came into being through him.

And then John writes what may be one of the most consequential sentences in the history of Christian thought:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." (John 1:14, KJV)

Here the Christian claim becomes almost overwhelming in its implications.

The one through whom the universe came into existence entered that universe.

Not as an apparition.

Not merely as an idea communicated to human minds.

As a human being.

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation holds that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human. The eternal Son did not cease to be divine by becoming human. Nor was his humanity merely an appearance.

He entered the conditions of human existence.

He could experience fatigue. He could weep. He could suffer. He could die.

The Nicene tradition would eventually give this belief its formal theological expression, but its foundation lies in the extraordinary testimony of the New Testament itself.

Now return to the room in which Pilate questions Jesus.

The governor believes he is examining a troublesome prisoner.

John invites the reader to contemplate a radically different possibility.

The man standing before Pilate is the Word through whom the world of Pilate, the empire of Rome and the entire created order came into existence.

The contrast could hardly be greater.

One man possesses the authority to condemn another to death.

The other, according to Christian belief, possesses an authority that precedes the existence of death itself.

And yet he does not resist.

Why?

The answer leads us to the very heart of Christian theology.

2. The Cross and Resurrection — The King Who Redeems

The crucifixion of Jesus is among the most familiar images in Western civilisation.

So familiar, perhaps, that we have become desensitised to its extraordinary character.

A man is publicly tortured and executed.

Above his head is placed an inscription identifying him as the King of the Jews.

In Roman terms, the message is unmistakable. This is what happens to those who challenge imperial authority.

The cross is an instrument of humiliation.

It is intended to demonstrate defeat.

Yet Christianity takes this very instrument of defeat and places it at the centre of its understanding of divine victory.

How did such an extraordinary reversal become possible?

To understand the Christian answer, we must return to the religious world from which Jesus emerged.

The promised Messiah

The Hebrew Scriptures contain a developing expectation of a future king associated with the house of David.

In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David that his royal house and throne will endure. The prophets subsequently develop visions of restoration, justice and a renewed relationship between God and his people.

Isaiah speaks of a ruler upon whose shoulders government will rest, whose kingdom will be established with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Daniel describes one like a son of man receiving dominion and a kingdom that will not pass away (Daniel 7:13–14).

These passages have complex histories and interpretations within Judaism. Christianity reads them through the conviction that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Even the title *Christ* is not a surname.

It derives from the Greek *Christos*, meaning *Anointed One*, corresponding to the Hebrew *Mashiach* — Messiah.

Thus, when Christians say *Jesus Christ*, they are already making a theological declaration.

Jesus is the Anointed One.

The promised King.

But what kind of king willingly submits to crucifixion?

The astonishing reversal

The Gospels present Jesus repeatedly challenging conventional expectations of power.

He teaches that greatness is found in service.

He associates with the marginalised.

He forgives those who wrong him.

He instructs his followers to love their enemies.

And when the decisive confrontation arrives, he refuses to establish his kingdom through the violence that ordinarily accompanies political revolution.

This is not simply a different strategy for acquiring power.

It is a fundamentally different conception of authority.

The Christian claim is that God reveals his character not merely through omnipotence, but through self-giving love.

The Cross becomes the supreme expression of that revelation.

Paul writes that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The language of reconciliation matters.

Christianity understands humanity's predicament not simply as ignorance, moral weakness or political disorder, but as a rupture in the relationship between humanity and God.

Sin is not merely the violation of a rule.

It is the disordering of a relationship with the source of life and goodness.

The Christian account of redemption holds that Christ confronts this condition through his own death.

Different Christian traditions have developed different explanations of how the Atonement operates. Some emphasise substitution, others victory over sin and death, others the transforming revelation of divine love. These interpretations are not identical, but they share a foundational conviction.

The Cross is not an unfortunate interruption of Christ's mission.

It belongs to the mission itself.

And yet, if the story ended there, Christianity would be a profoundly moving tragedy.

The story does not end there.

The event upon which everything depends

The earliest Christians proclaimed that Jesus rose bodily from the dead.

We must not hurry past this statement.

It is not merely a claim that his teachings survived him.

Nor that his followers continued to feel his spiritual presence.

Nor that his moral example proved immortal.

The apostolic proclamation is that the man who was crucified, died and was buried was raised.

Paul is uncompromising about the significance of this claim:

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (1 Corinthians 15:14, KJV)

There is something intellectually striking about this admission.

Paul does not present Christianity as a philosophy that remains equally valid regardless of whether its central historical claim is true.

He places the credibility of the proclamation in direct dependence upon the Resurrection.

If Christ was not raised, the Christian proclamation of his victory over death loses its foundation.

But if he was raised, the implications are immense.

Death would no longer represent the ultimate boundary of human existence.

The authority claimed by Jesus before Pilate would acquire a meaning that no Roman governor could have anticipated.

And the inscription placed above the crucified prisoner would take on an extraordinary irony.

The King whom Rome executed would be proclaimed alive.

From the empty tomb to the throne

The Book of Acts records Peter interpreting the Resurrection through the promises made to David.

At Pentecost, Peter declares that God has raised Jesus and exalted him (Acts 2:29–36).

The earliest Christian proclamation thus joins two ideas that might initially appear incompatible.

The crucified man is the promised King.

The man condemned by earthly authority has been vindicated by divine authority.

Paul develops the implications still further.

Christ is described as the firstfruits of those who have died, the beginning of a resurrection that will ultimately encompass those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

He reigns until every enemy has been brought under his feet.

And the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself.

Consider the audacity of this theological vision.

Christianity does not merely promise that individuals may find comfort in the face of mortality.

It announces that mortality itself will ultimately be overcome.

The King is not simply the ruler of a people.

He is the one through whom the final enemy of creation is to be defeated.

We can now begin to appreciate why the words *Christ is King* possess such extraordinary theological weight.

But another question emerges.

If Christ has overcome the separation between humanity and God, what exactly has changed?

The answer lies in the New Covenant.

3. The New Covenant — The Promise Fulfilled

The word *covenant* can sound remote to modern readers.

It belongs to the vocabulary of ancient religion, and its significance is easily lost when reduced to a theological technicality.

Yet covenant is one of the great organising ideas of the Bible.

It concerns the relationship between God and humanity: a relationship expressed through promises, obligations, faithfulness and the possibility of restoration.

The Hebrew Scriptures describe God's covenant with Abraham, the covenant associated with Israel's liberation from Egypt, and the promises made to David.

These are not isolated agreements.

They form part of the developing biblical account of how God relates to his creation and, in particular, to the people of Israel.

But the biblical narrative also confronts a recurring problem.

Human beings fail to live faithfully within that relationship.

Again and again, the prophets describe a people who possess the law yet fail to embody its demands.

The problem is not simply that humanity lacks instruction.

It is that knowledge of what is right does not guarantee the will to do it.

Here the theological narrative becomes remarkably perceptive about human nature.

We may know what is good and still choose what is destructive.

We may understand justice and nevertheless act unjustly.

We may recognise truth and still prefer the comfort of deception.

The prophets therefore begin to speak of something more profound than another external commandment.

They speak of transformation.

A law written upon the heart

Jeremiah announces that God will establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Unlike the covenant broken by their ancestors, this one will involve an inward transformation.

God declares that he will place his law within his people and write it upon their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The significance is profound.

The relationship between God and humanity is no longer described merely in terms of external instruction.

It reaches into the interior life of the person.

Knowledge, conscience, desire and conduct become inseparable from the covenantal promise.

The prophet Ezekiel develops a closely related image.

God will give his people a new heart and place a new spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

These are extraordinary promises.

They suggest that the human predicament cannot ultimately be resolved through legislation, punishment or education alone.

Something within the human being must change.

Christian theology understands the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus as the decisive fulfilment of these promises.

The King becomes the mediator

At the Last Supper, Jesus identifies the cup with the New Covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20).

The Letter to the Hebrews develops this declaration into one of the New Testament's most substantial theological arguments.

Christ is presented as the mediator of a better covenant.

The sacrificial system associated with the old covenant is interpreted as anticipating a more complete and enduring reconciliation.

In Hebrews 9 and 10, the author argues that Christ's self-offering accomplishes what repeated sacrifices could not finally achieve.

His sacrifice is described as once for all.

The consequence is not merely the cancellation of guilt.

It is the restoration of access to God.

The author of Hebrews invites believers to draw near with confidence because the barrier separating them from the divine presence has been overcome.

This is the theological heart of the New Covenant.

The King does not merely issue commands to his subjects.

He opens the way for them to enter into communion with the Father.

It is a conception of kingship almost without parallel in ordinary political experience.

Earthly rulers preserve their authority by maintaining the distinction between ruler and ruled.

The Christian King gives himself so that those who were estranged may be brought near.

The New Covenant is therefore not simply a revised legal arrangement.

It is the promise of a restored relationship.

Grace before obedience

This distinction is essential.

Christianity is sometimes understood as a moral system in which human beings earn divine acceptance by obeying religious rules.

Yet the New Testament repeatedly presents the relationship in the opposite direction.

Grace precedes transformation.

The gift comes before the response.

Faith receives what human effort alone cannot secure.

Obedience becomes the consequence of a renewed relationship, not the price demanded for entering it.

Paul's image of Gentile believers being grafted into Israel's olive tree is particularly instructive (Romans 11:17–24).

The Christian proclamation does not begin by erasing the history of Israel.

It claims that the blessings promised through Israel's Messiah are extended to the nations.

Paul explicitly warns Gentile Christians against arrogance towards the branches from which their spiritual inheritance comes.

This matters historically as well as theologically.

Christianity emerged from Judaism. Its Scriptures, its central concepts, its Messiah and its earliest community belong to that world.

To understand the New Covenant is to understand both that continuity and the extraordinary claim of fulfilment made by the first Christians.

And it leads us to one of the most demanding declarations Jesus makes about himself.

4. The Way — Christ as the Mediator of Salvation

There is a moment in John's Gospel that deserves to be read slowly.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples on the night before his arrest.

He has told them that he is going away.

They are troubled, uncertain and unable to understand fully what he means.

Thomas asks how they can know the way if they do not know where Jesus is going.

Jesus answers:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6, KJV)

Few statements in the New Testament are more direct.

And few are more demanding.

Jesus does not merely claim to know the way.

He declares himself to be the way.

He does not merely claim to teach truth.

He identifies himself with truth.

He does not merely promise a better life.

He presents himself as life itself.

The language is extraordinary.

To understand it, we must remember the theological identity already established in John's Gospel.

The Word was with God.

The Word was God.

The Word became flesh.

The declaration in John 14 is therefore not simply the confident assertion of an exceptional religious teacher.

Within John's theological account, it is the incarnate Word explaining the relationship between humanity and the Father.

The destination is not a place in the ordinary geographical sense.

It is communion with God.

And Christ declares that he is the mediator through whom that communion becomes possible.

The difficulty of an exclusive claim

We should acknowledge that this is a difficult proposition for many modern readers.

Contemporary societies are accustomed to religious pluralism. Different traditions offer different accounts of ultimate reality, salvation and the human condition.

Against that background, the claim that Christ is uniquely the way to the Father can appear uncompromising.

It is uncompromising.

But intellectual fairness requires us to understand the claim before judging it.

Christianity does not present Jesus as one teacher among many who happens to offer a particularly attractive moral philosophy.

It presents him as the incarnate Son through whom God reconciles humanity to himself.

If that premise is accepted, the claim of unique mediation follows from the identity attributed to Christ.

Whether the premise is true is another question.

And it is a question that deserves serious examination.

But we cannot understand Christian theology by removing its most demanding propositions merely because they conflict with contemporary preferences.

To do so would be to study a different religion from the one the New Testament actually describes.

Faith, repentance and the transformed life

What, then, does the Christian response involve?

The New Testament speaks of faith, repentance and obedience.

These are related but distinct ideas.

Faith involves trust in Christ and in the divine promise associated with him.

Repentance involves a turning away from sin and towards God.

Obedience gives practical expression to that changed allegiance.

None of these ideas is reducible to intellectual agreement with a proposition.

The Christian life is presented as a transformation of the person.

And here we can recognise a connection with the psychological argument developed in Part I.

Belief is not merely something a person professes.

It is something that becomes visible in the manner in which that person lives.

Yet Part II adds a decisive theological dimension.

The transformation is not understood simply as the result of human determination.

It is attributed to divine grace and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The person does not merely choose a higher ideal.

According to Christianity, the person is invited into a renewed relationship with the source of life itself.

Which brings us to the Kingdom.

5. The Kingdom — The Promise of Eternal Life

What is the Kingdom of God?

The question is more difficult than it may first appear.

For many people, the word *kingdom* suggests a territory, a government, a political hierarchy or an earthly monarchy.

Yet the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus cannot be understood adequately through any of those categories alone.

It is the reign of God.

It is the manifestation of divine authority.

And according to the New Testament, it has already entered human history through Christ, even while its final fulfilment remains in the future.

This tension between what has begun and what remains to come is one of the defining features of Christian eschatology.

A Kingdom already among us

Jesus begins his public ministry proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has drawn near (Mark 1:15).

The announcement is not simply that a distant heavenly realm awaits the faithful after death.

Something is happening in the present.

The Kingdom is breaking into human history.

Jesus' healings, teachings, acts of forgiveness and confrontations with evil are presented in the Gospels as manifestations of that reign.

The Kingdom is revealed not primarily through territorial conquest but through the restoration of what has been broken.

And yet Jesus also teaches his disciples to pray:

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10, KJV)

The Kingdom has drawn near, but its fullness has not yet arrived.

The Christian understanding therefore contains a remarkable historical tension.

The decisive event has occurred in Christ.

Its ultimate consequences are still unfolding.

The necessity of being born again

John's Gospel offers another extraordinary conversation.

A Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night.

He is a man of religious learning and standing, familiar with the Scriptures and the traditions of his people.

Yet Jesus tells him that unless a person is born again, or born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Nicodemus is understandably perplexed.

How can an adult return to the womb and be born a second time?

Jesus explains that entry into the Kingdom requires birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

Here the promise of Jeremiah and Ezekiel returns with renewed force.

The New Covenant involves more than forgiveness.

It involves regeneration.

A new heart.

A new spirit.

A transformed relationship with God.

The Kingdom is therefore not merely an external order to which one submits.

It is a reality into which one must be spiritually reborn.

This is among the most radical claims of Christian theology.

It suggests that the deepest transformation of human existence cannot be achieved simply by improving institutions, accumulating knowledge or refining moral instruction.

The human person must be renewed from within.

The end of death

The Book of Revelation brings the biblical account towards its extraordinary conclusion.

John describes a new heaven and a new earth.

The former order passes away.

God dwells with humanity.

And then comes a promise that speaks directly to one of the most universal experiences of human existence.

There will be no more death.

No more mourning.

No more crying.

No more pain (Revelation 21:1–4).

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of this vision.

Every civilisation has confronted mortality.

Every philosophy must eventually reckon with the fact that human life ends.

Every generation has buried its parents, mourned its children and watched the passing of those it loves.

Christianity confronts this reality with a declaration of extraordinary hope.

Death is not the final word.

The Resurrection of Christ is understood as the beginning of a restoration that will ultimately encompass creation itself.

The King who was crucified is the King through whom death will be overcome.

The promise of eternal life is therefore not merely the indefinite continuation of individual consciousness.

It is participation in a renewed creation, reconciled to its creator.

And this brings us back, once again, to those three words.

Christ is King.

We can now begin to hear them as the earliest Christians would have understood them.

The Word through whom all things were made has entered history.

The promised Messiah has come.

The King has given himself for his people.

The New Covenant has been established.

The way to the Father has been opened.

The Kingdom has drawn near.

And death itself will ultimately be defeated.

It is an astonishingly ambitious account of reality.

Perhaps the most ambitious ever placed before the human mind.

But ambition is not evidence.

Coherence is not proof.

And the beauty of a theological narrative does not establish that the events upon which it depends actually occurred.

We have reached the point at which admiration must give way to investigation.

6. The Resurrection — The Evidence That Demands an Explanation

Christianity places its central claim within history. It declares that a particular man, executed under a particular Roman governor, was raised from the dead.

Paul understood the stakes.

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:14, KJV)

The truth of the founding event matters to the proclamation itself. The reader is entitled to examine its foundation.

The testimony was there at the beginning

One of the most important pieces of evidence is preserved in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul recounts a tradition he had received. Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to Cephas, the Twelve, a larger gathering, James, the apostles and finally Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

The significance is immediate. The Resurrection belonged to the proclamation Paul inherited. His letter shows that the belief was already central within the apostolic generation. It rules out the suggestion that Christians first celebrated Jesus as a moral teacher and only centuries later added his victory over death.

Paul was also personally connected to named participants in the tradition. In Galatians 1:18–19, he describes a visit to Cephas lasting fifteen days and a meeting with James, whom he calls the Lord’s brother. He also claimed an encounter of his own.

His testimony brings the inquiry into a network of identifiable people who knew one another. The appearance list is preserved in Paul’s account; it supplies no separate surviving statement from every person named. But Paul’s contact with Cephas and James gives the historical question a specificity that a broad appeal to the gradual growth of religious legend leaves unexplained.

What persuaded these people that the crucified Jesus was alive?

James — The brother who came to believe

Begin with the difficulty inside the family. John says that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him during his ministry (John 7:5). James's later allegiance emerges against that background. Then Paul records an appearance of the risen Christ to James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Paul knew him personally and later names him among the recognised leaders of the movement (Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Acts depicts him helping to lead the Jerusalem community through a decisive dispute about Gentile believers (Acts 15:13–21).

Consider the distance between those accounts. A brother belongs to the ordinary world of home and family. A risen Lord lays claim to the meaning of existence itself. To recognise the second in the first would overturn everything familiarity seemed to have settled.

That is the encounter Paul asks the reader to contemplate. The man whose execution should have closed the story appears to his brother alive. If this happened, bewilderment would be inseparable from recognition. James would have to face the possibility that the person he thought he knew had been beyond his understanding all along. The sources preserve the report of the appearance rather than James's own description of it. The Christian interpretation finds here the explanation for his changed allegiance.

The human consequence is extraordinary. James becomes a leader in a movement gathered around the brother whom it confesses as Lord. That commitment places him within reach of the same structures of power that had made following Jesus dangerous. Josephus later records his stoning under the high priest Ananus, identifying him as the brother of Jesus who was called Christ (*Antiquities* 20.200).

Josephus gives no final speech about the Resurrection. He gives the historian the violent death of the man Paul had met. The Christian reader brings that record back to the earlier question. What had persuaded James to give his life its direction around the brother who had been crucified?

Peter — The instinct to survive

With Peter, the instinct for self-preservation stands in full view.

Jesus is under arrest. Those who followed him have fled (Mark 14:50). In the high priest's courtyard, Peter is challenged about his association with the prisoner. He denies knowing him (Mark 14:66–72).

The reader need not approve of Peter's denial to understand it. He wants to live. The men who hold Jesus can seize him too. His teacher is still alive, yet fear is already stronger than his willingness to stand beside him.

Now follow that same man into Acts. Ordered to stop speaking about Jesus, Peter and John refuse. Their answer appeals to what they have seen and heard (Acts 4:18–20). Later, the apostles are flogged, warned again and released. They continue teaching (Acts 5:40–42).

The danger has become a wound on their own bodies. They know what punishment feels like. Yet they return to the proclamation.

What happened between the denial and that return?

If Jesus remained dead, the power that had killed him remained formidable. Silence offered a way to put distance between the disciples and his fate. They could remember his teaching, mourn his death and attempt to resume their lives. Instead, the Christian accounts describe them accepting renewed danger for the claim that he had risen.

Paul brings that cost into his own argument. Having declared that faith is vain if Christ has not been raised, he asks, “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?” (1 Corinthians 15:30, KJV). The question concerns the life he is actually living. Why bear these risks if death has won?

Acts records the execution by the sword of James the son of Zebedee, John’s brother (Acts 12:2). He is a different James from Jesus’ brother. The early Christian letter *1 Clement* 5 remembers Peter and Paul enduring persecution through to their deaths. These surviving accounts give the argument its weight. The risks associated with this proclamation were real.

A martyr’s conviction can be mistaken. Here, however, the men at the heart of the proclamation claimed to have encountered the person for whom they were accepting danger. The question is therefore personal and exacting. What had become so compelling that the instinct which once drove Peter to deny Jesus could no longer keep him silent?

The Christian answer is the Resurrection. Peter could face the possibility of death because he believed he had encountered the one who had passed through it.

What best explains the change?

Paul’s words now carry their full human force.

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:14, KJV)

The costs of that preaching give the admission its edge. If Christ remained buried, the danger was being borne for a proclamation empty at its centre. Paul recognises the possibility and stakes the argument on its opposite. Christ was raised, and that event has changed what death means.

The Christian case asks the reader to take this explanation seriously. Family unbelief gives way to James’s leadership. Peter’s denial gives way to public witness despite punishment. Paul, personally connected to both men, places his own encounter within the tradition he received. These are the human relationships through which the Resurrection proclamation reached the written record.

Any competing account must explain that conviction and its consequences. Conscious fabrication would require people who knew the central encounter had been invented to continue accepting danger for it. Experiences arising from grief or religious expectation would need to account for what the participants understood themselves to have encountered. An explanation based on later legend must reckon with Paul’s contact with people already named in the tradition.

The movement from fear to costly witness gives the Christian argument particular strength. Suffering cannot by itself decide what occurred. But the willingness to endure it belongs within the evidence for what these people believed had occurred and how deeply the conviction had taken hold.

Paul's question remains before the reader. Why stand in jeopardy every hour? The Christian explanation is that the man whom death had seemingly silenced had returned, and those who believed they had encountered him could no longer live as though the grave had settled his claim.

The Shroud — A physical question

The Shroud of Turin brings a surviving object into view. Linen bears the faint image of a man whose wounds STURP interpreted as those of scourging and crucifixion.

The Christian scholar Jeremiah Johnston has drawn renewed attention to the cloth in *The Jesus Discoveries* and in conversation with Shawn Ryan. The question his investigation brings to this essay is whether material evidence could belong to the same history as the written testimony.

In 1978, the Shroud of Turin Research Project examined the cloth directly over approximately 120 continuous hours. In its 1981 summary, the team reported that paint did not account for the body image and attributed its coloration to changes in the linen fibres. It concluded that the image represented "a real human form of a scourged, crucified man", while acknowledging that the complete image-formation process remained unresolved.

These are the findings the team reported at that time. Their continuing significance lies in the observations an adequate explanation must address. Calling the object a medieval picture leaves the physical question of how its image was produced to be answered.

The image is more than an outline

The VP-8 analysis sharpened that question. The instrument converted variations in image brightness into apparent vertical relief. The resulting form led researchers to investigate a relationship between image intensity and the shape of a human body. Jackson, Jumper and Ercoline developed that investigation in a 1984 paper in *Applied Optics*.

The instrument generates relief from the brightness values supplied to it. The significant question is how closely the resulting relief corresponds to bodily form, and what process could produce that relationship on linen. That is a property to explain in assessing image formation. Establishing the cloth's age and identifying the depicted person require further evidence.

STURP's 1981 summary also required an explanation to account for the physical, chemical and other observations together. Reproducing one visible feature may advance an investigation while leaving the full formation problem open. The question remains precise. What process produced this image, on this material, with this combination of characteristics?

What the evidence permits us to argue

The radiocarbon result remains a major challenge to identifying the cloth as Jesus' burial linen. The 1988 measurements, published in *Nature* in 1989, dated the sampled material to AD 1260–1390. Questions about the representativeness of the sample must be answered through further evidence. Establishing a different date would still leave the question of the cloth's connection to Jesus.

The historical testimony exists independently of the Shroud. The cloth enters the inquiry as a potential material witness whose identification remains contested. Its image can demand a physical explanation even while its relevance to the Resurrection remains conditional.

The Christian conclusion

Paul gives this case its centre. If Christ has not been raised, the preaching is empty and the danger borne for it has lost its Christian justification. The case advanced here rests on the testimony of people who claimed that he had been raised and whose lives acquired a different direction around that conviction. His relationships with Cephas and James bring that proclamation close to the people among whom it took shape. The movement from family unbelief and Peter's denial to leadership and costly witness gives the question of its origin a further human urgency. The Christian explanation takes their central claim seriously. They believed Jesus had appeared alive because he had been raised.

This provides a substantial historical basis on which a Christian scholar can argue for belief. The Shroud adds a material inquiry that deserves sustained attention. Any corroborating weight it acquires depends on what can be established about its origin and identity. An unresolved formation mechanism keeps a scientific question open; the historical argument for the Resurrection must still carry its own weight.

The Christian conclusion is that the man who was crucified was raised. If that conclusion is true, the declaration *Christ is King* recognises something that happened and the authority it discloses.

What if it is true? John declares that all things came into being through the Word. Paul writes that all things, visible and invisible, were created through Christ and for him (Colossians 1:15–17). If the man who stood before Pontius Pilate is alive, and is the one through whom creation exists, what kind of reality are we living in?

Continued in Part III — The Metaphysical Significance of Christ Is King.