

Church History 101
Lesson 1
Jesus: The Fulfillment

Key Concepts: Where to begin a series about church history is never easy. I have chosen to focus not simply on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but on Jesus as the one who fulfills God's plan for the redemption and restoration of creation.

The Story: The Biblical story is one that stretches from the opening words of Genesis to the closing words of Revelation. It follows a five part pattern. Part one is that God loved the world and created it to be "good." Part two is that human beings thought they knew better than God how to run this "good" world but they did not; and so they brought death and dysfunction into the world. Part three is that God chose a people through whom God would save the world. Part four is that God sent Jesus into the world to bring about that salvation. Part five is that God sent the Spirit into the world in order to apply Jesus' saving work.

Jesus: Jesus plays the central role in this salvation story. His life is documented in the opening four books of the New Testament; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three books (Matthew, Mark and Luke...called the Synoptic Gospels) share the same basic outline of Jesus' life. Jesus is born, teaches, preaches, heals and performs miracles. He calls 12 followers whom he will teach. Few people understand who he is or why he has come into the world. Jesus however understands the role he is to play which is that of the suffering servant in Isaiah who is to die for the sins of the world. After three years Jesus enters Jerusalem, teaches, is arrested, tried and crucified. After three days he is raised from the dead and instructs his followers to go and tell the world about what he has accomplished. Each of the Synoptics add their own small twists. We discover that Jesus is descended from King David, born to Mary and Joseph, is tempted by Satan, that he is baptized by John, that he has great compassion for the powerless, that he preached and taught about the coming Kingdom of God and that he believed he was the one through whom that Kingdom would come.

The Gospel of John is the outlier of the four stories. It casts Jesus as the eternal Word of God that existed with and was God. This Word becomes en-fleshed in Jesus of Nazareth who travels into and out of Jerusalem three different times. The usual stories about Jesus life are missing from this account. Instead Jesus makes it clear that he and the Father are one. The ending of the story is the same. Jesus is arrested, tried, crucified and raised from the dead.

What binds all of these stories together are three central ideas. First, Jesus was born as a human being. He was not a demi-god or a spirit. He was a flesh and blood human being. Second, Jesus died on the cross. Of the few historical records we have concerning Jesus they refer to his having died at the hands of the Romans. Third, Jesus was raised from the dead. This was the proclamation (the resurrection) that formed the basis for the continuation of the Jesus' community. It is the resurrection that forms the core of Paul's theology as well as the other books of the New Testament.

Jesus is written about as messiah, savior, Son of God, Son of David, Son of Man, rabbi. Light, Bread, shepherd and numerous other titles. He is described as having fulfilled the roles of prophet, priest and king. All of these titles point to his role as the one through whom God was going to save the world from the evil that humankind had unleashed upon itself. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God has planned.

Questions:

1. Who is Jesus to you? What roles does he fill in your life?
2. What is your concept of the resurrection? What role does it play in your life?
3. How has your faith in Jesus impacted your life?