

Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology, Session 21, Jesus, Messiah, God, Part 2

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 21, Jesus, Messiah, God, Part 2.

Before moving on to the rest of the New Testament, I want to make a couple of corrections to what I said earlier and what texts I was not able to find.

One of those was in discussing Jesus as the preexistent Son of God. Matthew chapter 23 and verse 34 were the passages I wanted to read, where Jesus says, therefore, I'm sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify, others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue them from town to town.

So again, Jesus being portrayed as someone who sends messengers in the broader context of things seems to suggest that Jesus is outside of, much like the language of Jesus coming to do things may seem to suggest Jesus is outside of the earthly sphere from the heavenly realm. So now Jesus is the one who sends the prophets and teachers and sages that the Pharisees are depicted as rejecting. So that was Matthew 23 and verse 34.

Then, the other one, when Jesus, under oath at trial, claims to be the Messiah, was not before Pilate, but before Caiaphas, the priest. And we find that in Matthew 26:63 and 64, I had 23 and 24, but 63 and 64, the high priest said to him, to Jesus, I charge you under oath by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God. And Jesus says you have said so.

Interestingly, he goes on to quote Daniel in chapter seven and verse 14. So, under oath, Jesus did claim to be the Messiah. But other than that, Jesus' famous favorite designation of himself is son of man, probably because he could avoid misunderstanding and kind of fill it with his own understanding of who he was.

So, I want to move on then to the rest of the New Testament. And we'll again sample a handful, a number of New Testament texts, starting with some of Paul's letters, where we'll look at a handful of texts, two or three major texts, but then look at a couple of other things, references from Paul, pointing to who Jesus was, consistent with Jesus' own portrait in the Gospels. But the place I want to start with is Colossians chapter 1, and verses 15-20, which is probably one of the most exalted, poetic descriptions of the person of Jesus Christ, which also seems to manifest a very high Christology, that is Jesus Christ claiming to be, or Paul presenting Jesus as not just an extraordinary human being, but as a heavenly, exalted being, as nothing less, no one less than God himself.

So, in chapter 1, verses 15-20, The Son, that is, Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him, all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him, all things hold together.

Then it goes on and says; He is the head of the body, the church, he is beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. And I'll stop right there. But in this text, Paul is probably also using, or maybe using, wisdom concepts.

That is, wisdom was also seen as the agent of creation. Wisdom was also seen as the image of God in Proverbs and in Jewish literature outside of the Old Testament. Jesus' wisdom was also seen as the firstborn.

So, it's possible that Paul may also be suggesting that Jesus, the wisdom of God, is now fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, in the Son. But we've already discussed the notion of the image of God, probably suggesting not only Adamic ideas but now Jesus Christ is the one who reveals God, the very revelation of God himself. Jesus is the agent of creation.

Jesus is also the firstborn. As we said earlier, the terminology of firstborn does not suggest Jesus as a created being, which would be in conflict with the rest of these verses, where Jesus is the agent of God's creation, the creation of everything. Everything owes its existence to God's creative activity through Jesus Christ, excluding Jesus himself from being a created being.

Jesus then is also the one, starting in verse 18. Jesus is also the one, through his resurrection, who inaugurates a new creation. So, Colossians chapter 1 and verses 15-20 manifest a very high Christology. That is, Jesus is identified with God himself, the one through whom God creates, the one who is the very image and revelation of God himself, the one who is the firstborn.

That is, firstborn means he is highly exalted; he has a status of supremacy and superiority over the first creation, and he is the one who now inaugurates a new creation. So, Colossians 1 demonstrates a very significant text in Paul's and the early church's understanding of who Christ was. Philippians 2:6-11, another text that resembles Colossians 1:15-20, there's a lot of debate as to whether these are hymns or whether Paul wrote them, and I'm not interested at all in getting into that.

I'm more interested in what they express about who Jesus is and what Paul and the early church thought about Christ. Colossians 2:6-11, I will read, "...who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own

advantage, rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross." Now, let me stop here. Verse 6 begins by describing Jesus as being; some translations may say, in the very form of God.

The 2011 NIV that I just read translates it, "...who being in the very nature of God." So, the idea of form is not just that Jesus looks like God or has the appearance of God, though he may not be, but that Jesus in his very being is God himself, as the rest of the hymn, I think, demonstrates, especially in a section we'll look at in just a moment. And as verse 6 suggests, he did not consider equality with God something to be used for his advantage. So, it appears that his equality with God, the fact that this may not be specifically addressing that he is equal in essence or being, but certainly in glory and status, Jesus is equal with God, but clearly, the first part of the verse, being in the form of God, suggests that in his very being he is equal with God as well, chooses not to use this to his own advantage.

I think that is the correct translation of this. Some translations say he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped as if it's something he did not have and he decided not to grasp for it, or something he had that he gave up and lost. Instead, I think the idea is that he did not use it for his own advantage but decided to give up that position of glory.

As the rest of the text says, the way that he did not consider equality was by making himself nothing and taking on the nature of a servant, being found in human likeness. Notice again, in verse 7, the NIV says he made himself nothing. That may sound different than some translations you've seen.

It literally says he emptied himself. But if we start to ask, what did he empty himself? Did he get rid of some of his attributes? Probably, this phrase, he emptied himself, was metaphorical for making himself of no reputation or making himself nothing. That is, although he was in the form of God and shared in the very being of God, he shared the exalted status and glory of God and was equal with God in heavenly splendor. He decided not to cling to that or use that to his advantage, but just the opposite.

He decides to make himself nothing by now taking on the nature and form of a servant and being found in human likeness and humbling himself all the way to the point of death, even the humiliating death on a cross. So, verses 7 and 8 describe what it means that he emptied himself. He didn't lose something, but instead, he took on something.

That is the nature of a servant, becoming a human being, humbling himself to the point of disgusting, humiliating death on the cross. That's certainly a demonstration

of the extent to which he did not consider his situation, his equality with God, and his being in the very nature of God as something to be used for his own advantage. But what is crucial is verses 10 and 11.

Verses 10 and 11 say, starting with verse 9. Therefore, God exalted him after he humbled himself, even to the point of death. God then exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, so that in the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess or acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. Interestingly, a term often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to God, to the glory of God the Father.

Now, what I want to draw your attention to is this language in verses 10 and 11, which comes right out of the Old Testament. If you turn back to Isaiah chapter 45, Isaiah chapter 45 in verses 20 and following, Isaiah 45 verses 20 and following. And interestingly, this is in the context, and this is in the context of Israel's idolatry and avoiding idolatry.

Verses 15 and 16 of chapter 45 of Isaiah, truly you are a God who has been hiding himself the God and Savior of Israel. All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced. They will go off into disgrace forever.

Now, let me start with verse 20 of Isaiah 45. Gather together and come assembled, you fugitives from the nations, ignorant and those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to God, to gods, plural, that cannot save. So again, in the context of idolatry.

Declare what is to be, present it, and let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago? Who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, said the Lord? So what distinguishes one thing, God from idols, is his ability to declare and bring about in the present what he declared in the past. Verse 22: turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

Idols can't compete. To declare, to praise and worship anyone else but God, to turn to anyone but God is idolatry. Verse 23: by myself, I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked.

Before me, every knee will bow; by me, every tongue will confess. They will say of me, in the Lord alone, our deliverance and strength. And now, in Philippians 2, it is in the name of Jesus Christ that salvation is found.

It is by confessing Jesus Christ that salvation is found. And it is Jesus Christ to whom every knee will bow on heaven and earth, and every tongue will confess that he is Lord in fulfillment of Isaiah 54. So, you could not have a text that is any clearer, as

this is a very exalted, high Christology where Jesus Christ himself is portrayed as God and as the sovereign Lord to whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

And that it is only in Jesus Christ that salvation is found, Jesus as Lord. And what is startling about that again is in Isaiah 54, which is in the context of idolatry. To look to anyone else, to look anywhere else, to worship anyone else is idolatry.

Now, this language, though, gets applied to Jesus Christ without calling into question the uniqueness of God as the Lord of the universe, the only one deserving of worship and the only one in whom salvation is found. Now, that is applied to the person of Jesus Christ. Numerous times, we find in Paul's letters that Jesus Christ is designated as Lord.

And again, we won't look at all of those, but just as a couple of examples, we looked at Philippians chapter 2 in verses 10 and 11 already. It's in the name of Jesus that every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. Again, the significance of that is that Jesus is identified as a term that is used for God in the Old Testament.

And now Jesus is the Lord. And especially in Philippians 2, in the context of a quotation from Isaiah chapter 45, a quotation of a text that refers to God as the exclusive Lord over against all other claimants, over against all other idols. Romans chapter 10 and verse 13 is another one.

Romans chapter 10 and verse 13. I'll back up and read 12, for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Interestingly, another quotation from the Old Testament that Paul now takes refers to the person of Jesus Christ.

So, Jesus is identified as Lord through quotations from Old Testament texts referring to God. And so, the title of Lord in Paul's letters is probably to be taken as a title of deity and sovereignty, and he is to be identified as the Lord of the Old Testament. He is the exclusive Lord that is deserving of our worship.

The sovereign Lord over all of creation. To go back to another theme in the Gospels, Paul also seems to pick up the servant language from Isaiah 52 and 53 when Christ is the one who dies for the sins of his people. He is a substitute for his people.

He dies, according to scripture. That's an interesting phrase in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 at the very beginning when Paul says, I pass on to you what was passed on to me that Christ died for our sins and was buried and rose again. May be an allusion to

Isaiah 52 and 53, the suffering servant text, as finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But certainly, the references over and over in Paul that Christ dies for the sins of his people, that he is a substitute for his people, that his sacrifice is a substitute for the people probably alludes to Isaiah 52 and 53 in particular and the servant passages from Isaiah.

The fact that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah probably at least some of that reflects the Davidic covenant language now applied to Christ. We've already noted that in terms of the Kingdom of God theme and the covenant theme, Jesus is the Messiah in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises made to David. While it's difficult to say if all of them are, it's unlikely that when Paul refers to Jesus as Christ, he always uses that as a name.

Like we might say, David Mathewson, so Jesus Christ, that's just part of his name. Instead, it may be that, and I think one could argue that in at least some of the instances, if not many of them, when Jesus is called the Christ, this is a title. The title Messiah designates Jesus Christ as the Messiah in fulfillment, the anointed one in fulfillment of the Davidic promises in the Old Testament, as we find Jesus portrayed in the Gospel.

So again, Christ may not just be a name, but in numerous places, it could be a title of Jesus as Messiah. To move outside of Paul's letters, there's much more we could say, but certainly Paul has a very high Christology of Jesus as the one who reveals God, as Jesus who is God, the very image of God, God's agent in creation, the firstborn over creation, the one who brings about God's salvation, the one whom everyone will confess Jesus is Lord, the one who is worthy of worship, the one who comes to deal with the sins of the people, to die for the people's sins as their substitute, to die according to Scripture, the Messiah, the Christ who comes in fulfillment of Davidic promises. All of those, I think, are but the tip of the iceberg for Paul's understanding of who Jesus Christ is, as once more the fulfillment of God's intention to come to his people and to bring his salvation.

When one moves outside of Paul's letters, the next natural stopping point is probably the book of Hebrews. We've appealed to this book several times in connection with other themes, but Hebrews chapter 1 and verses 1 through 3 demonstrate right up front the author's understanding of who Christ is so Hebrews 1 verses 1 through 3, In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, in the time of fulfillment, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. So, notice the connections between Colossians chapter 1 and John chapter 1, where Jesus is now the final revelation of God. God has now spoken through his Son, who is the heir of all things and through whom all things are created.

He was, again, reflecting on John 1 and what Paul says in Colossians 1:15-20. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. So, the Son reflects God's glory, the Son reveals God's character, his very being, again, a very, I think, in my opinion, a strong statement of Jesus' deity. But again, we're not just trying to proof text to prove Jesus' deity, but trying to understand biblically, theologically, how Christ is consistently present.

So once more, God's revelation of himself to his people climaxes in the person of Jesus Christ. Who better is equipped to speak God's word, to reveal God, to be God's final revelation and speech to his people than the one who is the exact representation of his being, the one who is a reflection of God's glory, the radiance of God's glory and his character. Again, glory is often used in the Old Testament in reference to God's presence with his people, his manifestation of himself.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. So, we've already seen all these themes connected with Philippians 2 and Colossians 1, as well as John 1 in the Gospel. So, the themes of God, Jesus being God's final word to his people, his revelation of himself, the one who reflects God's glory, the one who shares in God's being in essence, is able to reveal who God is, and also his connection with creation.

It's through Jesus Christ that God has brought all things into existence. So, the author then sets his readers up for how he wants them to understand his presentation of Christ in the rest of the Gospel, in the rest of the book of Hebrews. In chapter 1 and verse 5, we find that even, interestingly, over all the angelic beings, Jesus Christ holds a unique place in chapter 1, verse 5. He is the unique Son of God.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son, today I become your father. Or again, I will be his father, and he will be my son. We saw earlier quotations from Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7, the Davidic Covenant formula.

So, as the unique Son of God, Jesus now fulfills the promises made to David. And we won't develop those any further; we develop those in connection with the Kingdom of God and the Davidic Covenant. But even beyond just these texts, the entirety of the rest of Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills all of God's previous revelation under the Old Covenant.

We already see that in verse 1. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times in various ways. So, it is kind of a summary of the way God had revealed himself under the Old Covenant. But now, in the last days, in the period of time of fulfillment, God has now spoken through his Son.

Then, throughout the rest of the book of Hebrews, the author will consistently compare Jesus Christ to various persons, institutions, and events under the Old

Covenant. So, Jesus is compared to angels in chapter 1, he gets compared to Moses, he gets compared to Joshua, he brings a superior rest than Joshua did, he gets compared to the Old Testament priest, and he's found to be greater because he's after the order of Melchizedek. We find that Jesus Christ is compared to the Old Testament sacrifices, the covenant that Jesus, the new covenant that he inaugurates, is greater than the old one, he serves in a greater temple, he's even a greater example of faith.

As great as the heroes of faith are in Hebrews 11, in chapter 12, fixing your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. As great as the examples of Hebrews 11, Jesus is even a far superior example of faith. So, all of God's previous revelation under the Old Covenant is now eclipsed by the person of Jesus Christ, with God speaking through Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ accomplishes all of God's purposes of salvation so that they are no longer found or associated with the Old Covenant sacrificial system. But now, what those pointed to has reached its climax in the person of Jesus Christ. So, once again, I think Hebrews have fairly high and exalted Christology.

By presenting Jesus as the climax of God's revelation, as the climax of God's redemptive activities, all of God's purposes of salvation, which were expressed in the Old Covenant sacrificial system and priesthood and temple, are now found in the person of Jesus Christ. Another stopping point could be James's book. And I just want to mention a couple of things very briefly.

Interestingly, in James chapter 1 and verse 1 and chapter 2 verse 1, James is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And notice chapter 2 and verse 1. My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. So, Jesus seems to be associated with the glory of God in the Old Testament.

So, the glory of God from the Old Testament in Exodus, for example, now gets associated with the person of Christ in the book of James. But furthermore, chapter 5 and verse 7 and following of James. Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You, too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. Interestingly, the first six verses of chapter 5 condemn the wealthy and demonstrate verse 4 because the wealthy are hoarding their riches and they're oppressing the poor. Verse 4 says, the wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you.

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. Probably all these references to the Lord Almighty, who is about the coming of the Lord, should be understood in light of chapter 1, verses 1 and 2.1, where the Lord is Jesus Christ. So now we see Jesus Christ coming as an eschatological judge in chapter 5 to come and execute God's own future judgment.

Again, this is a startling statement, I think, in light of the Old Testament, where it's God who will come to judge, where we expect the coming of God in the future and judgment to be executed by Him. Now we find Jesus Christ, the Lord, the Lord of Glory, coming in the future as the eschatological judge to execute God's own judgment. So, in this section of the New Testament as we saw in the Gospels, we find Jesus Christ more than just drawing on snippets of text to prove Jesus did or to prove this about Jesus or prove that about Jesus.

Instead, we find Jesus Christ consistently accomplishing all the activities attributed to God in the Old Testament. What God does in the Old Testament now is provide forgiveness of sins, the presence of God with His people, bringing about the New Covenant, giving the Holy Spirit, coming to judge in the future, and executing judgment as an eschatological judge. We find all of those roles now accomplished and enacted through the person of Jesus Christ.

Creation, we find that now creation is accomplished through Jesus Christ. He is God's agent in creation, and we've also seen, therefore, New Testament writers talking about Jesus in terms of being the image of God, in the form of God, equal with God, the exact representation of God's glory and being, the radiance of God's glory, again terminology applied to God now resident in the person of Jesus Christ. So, it's as if the New Testament writers are trying to get us to see who God was, and what God was to accomplish as promised in the Old Testament has now taken place is now revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

God has now revealed Himself ultimately in the purpose of Jesus Christ. All of God's purposes for bringing about salvation are now being accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ. It seems to me the Gospels and the Pauline literature and the sampling of literature outside of that that we've looked at in the New Testament are consistent in testifying to that.

What I want to do then is end by looking at the book of Revelation, and that is because, as I mentioned earlier, I think Revelation has one of the richest Christologies in all of the New Testament, and unfortunately, whenever we think of Revelation we think of eschatology and end times and we use it basically to contribute to our understanding of what's going to happen in the final wrap up of history and indeed Revelation does do that. Certainly, reading especially chapters 19 through 21, no one would deny that Revelation records the wrap-up of God's plan for

history, the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for all of history, and the climax of his redemptive dealing with his people throughout history. However, if all we do is restrict Revelation to eschatology and end-times stuff, I think we miss the fact that Revelation contributes to almost every other significant biblical theological theme, especially Christology.

Revelation, as I said, contains one of the richest Christologies in the entirety of the New Testament. That starts in the very first chapter of the book of Revelation, and a description of the exalted Jesus Christ is given by John. Look at chapter 1 and verses 12 through 16. John says I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me, which he describes as a voice like a loud trumpet back in verse 10 I turned to see that voice, and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest the hair on his head was white like wool as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire.

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand, he held the seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead, and he placed his hand on me and said do not be afraid. I am the first and the last; I am the living one. I was dead, and now I am alive. I'll stop there, but I wanted to notice a couple of things about this description of the exalted risen Christ that John sees. First of all, is Jesus is once more presented as the exalted son of a man in Daniel chapter 7, and what makes that clear is the rest of the description of his robe and the hair and his head is white as wool, white like snow but what is intriguing is the rest after he describes him as the son of man John draws on chapter 7 of Daniel, but he uses language from the one seated on the throne the ancient of days. If you go back to Daniel 7, it's the ancient of days who has hair white as wool on his head, so John combines both of those. Jesus is not just a heavenly exalted son of the man. He's the ancient days as well, and now John describes him combining both figures in Daniel 7 to make clear exactly who Jesus is.

He also, notice some of the descriptions of the fact that his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, his voice like the sound of rushing water, so clearly this exalted figure, but his face shines, was like the sun, shining in all its brilliance. You get this picture of this being reflecting the very glory of God as the Ancient of Days, as the Son of Man. He also has a sword coming out of his mouth, again suggesting judgment.

This is the one who executes God's own judgment upon people. So, at the very beginning of this vision, once more, John has almost set you up for how you're to understand Jesus Christ and the rest of his book. This is the exalted Son of Man.

This is the Ancient of Days. This is the one who shines with the brilliance of God's glory. This is the one who executes God's judgment on the earth.

Yet, all of this is wrapped up in the vision of Jesus Christ that John sees. And to make clear that this is Jesus Christ, in verse 18, he says, I am the living one, I was dead, but look, I am now alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. So, at the very beginning, we find an exalted portrait of Jesus Christ in his full glory.

The next stopping point would be chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation. Chapter 4, and actually, the two go together. Chapter 4 begins with a vision of God. Although he's not described, only his throne is.

A vision of God seated on his throne, the sovereign ruler, judge, and creator of all things. He stands exalted above all creation. The throne is a symbol of his sovereignty and his rulership, perhaps the fact that he's a judge as well.

Chapter 4 ends by, well, first of all, you also get this picture of the throne standing at the center of all things. In broadening concentric circles, you have four living creatures, 24 elders, and angelic beings. And I'm not going to go into detail and describe who those 24 elders and four living beings might be.

I take it that they are angelic beings whose function is to worship God, who is seated on the throne. And so, at the end of chapter 4 you find these hymns that these beings sing. It says, in verse 8, that day and night, they never stop saying that the four living creatures are holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

Now, notice what we find in verse 11. Then 24 elders fall down, and they sing in verse 11, You are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they are created and have their being. So you get this picture of God as the holy, sovereign Lord of the universe, the Lord God Almighty, who stands above his creation.

Yet, chapter 5 shows that he's very intimately involved and concerned because he will reach down to intervene, redeem it, and rescue it. But that brings us to Chapter 5. John is still in this heavenly throne room scene, but now he introduces another figure, and that is the Lamb. This Lamb that as the shoot of Jesse and fulfillment of Old Testament promises, as the root of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he will now accomplish God's purposes as embodied in the scroll to redeem his creation that has been affected by sin.

And he does so as the Lamb who appears as to be slain, the Lamb who was slain. Now what is interesting is when you get to the end of chapter 5, well first of all you

get this picture of the Lamb who walks up and takes the scroll out of the right hand of God. The right hand of God is a symbol of authority and power.

And already you raise a question: what kind of being, what kind of person can just walk up to the throne and take a scroll out of the right hand of God? That suggests this is no ordinary being. This is no ordinary... Notice John has looked; John searches all through heaven where there are all these exalted angelic beings, and not even one of them is qualified to just walk up to the right hand of God and take the scroll. Who is it that can just approach the throne of God and snatch the scroll out of his right hand? So, already, it gets you thinking, what kind of figure is this? Well, chapter 1 is giving us a hint: this is the exalted son of man, the ancient of days, the one who radiates God's glory, who executes God's judgment, who conquered death and has come to life. But now, chapter 5 ends very interestingly because you have the Lamb of God receiving the same worship and praise that God did in chapter 5. So, notice verse 9: you are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain.

Verse 12, worthy, is the Lamb who was slain to receive the same thing God did in chapter 4, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. And then all of creation joins in, to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Interestingly, notice now that God and the Lamb occupy the same throne and receive the same worship.

How can this be? In the context of the book where John bows down in chapters 16 and verse 22, he bows down to worship an angelic being, and the angel tells him, don't do it; worship only God. In that context, how can you have the Lamb receiving the same worship God did and sitting on the same throne if the Lamb is not somehow God himself? So now we see kind of almost the fullest expression of the theme we saw in the Gospels; we're beginning to see of the early church and Christians giving worship, the same worship that belonged to God, the same devotion, now giving that to the Lamb as well. So that their understanding of God, without violating monotheism, their understanding of God is now expanded to include Jesus Christ.

So that Jesus Christ is God himself. Jesus Christ somehow shares the very being of God. And I say somehow because the authors are not yet describing it in terms of the later creeds and confession of the church.

But certainly, John is quite comfortable in equating and identifying Jesus Christ as God himself and sharing in the very being of God, who is deserving of the same worship and the same glory and the same praise that God is. Without violating monotheism, in a context where only God can be worshipped, to worship any other being, angelic or human, is tantamount to idolatry. Yet Jesus Christ is worthy of the same worship that belongs to God.

Another interesting reference to Jesus Christ is the fact that he walks in the midst of the churches. In chapter 1, Jesus is portrayed as walking in the midst of the lampstands, walking in the midst of the churches. Read chapters 2 and 3 sometimes.

He is the one who searches out minds and hearts. Again, he does what only God can do. He knows what only God can know.

Chapter 5 and verse 6, the description of Jesus Christ, Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, could also reflect the servant songs of Isaiah, that Jesus now is the slain lamb, the servant of Isaiah chapter 53—two other significant features of Revelation. One of them noticed this phrase, and we began to see it.

That is alpha and omega, first and last, or beginning and end. Probably, those are all three ways of saying the same thing. Sometimes, they are all three combined.

Sometimes, you only find one of those. Sometimes, you find two of those. The Old Testament background of that phrase, especially first and last, and then I think beginning and end, and alpha and omega, referring to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, beginning and end, and alpha and omega, are simply ways of expanding first and last.

And first and last comes right out of Isaiah chapter 44, where God is described as first and last. He is described as first and last in the context of idolatry, that no one else is worthy of worship. To worship anyone else is idolatry.

To rely on anyone else for your salvation, anything else is idolatry. All the idols are shown to be false gods. But God, the true God, is the first and the last.

So, this description, first and last, beginning and end, and alpha and omega, the two expansions of first and last, rely on Isaiah chapter 44 and descriptions of God as first and last. So, for example, in Revelation chapter 1 and verse 8, God speaking, I take it God speaking, says, I am the alpha and the omega, says the Lord God. There it is.

Who is and was, and who is to come, the Lord God Almighty. So, God is the alpha and omega. Again, alpha and omega are expansions of first and last.

So when you hear any of those three or combinations, first and last, beginning and end, alpha and omega, they're basically saying the same thing. God stands at the beginning and the end of all things, and he's everywhere in between. God is sovereign over all things.

Now, what is intriguing is, when you start reading the text with chapter 1, verse 8 in mind, where God claims to be the alpha and the omega, what happens when you get to chapter 1, verse 17? John says, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead,

and he placed his hand on my right hand, and he said, Do not be afraid, for I am the first and the last. Again, which comes right out of Isaiah 41, 44.6 would be the verse, and 41.4 as well. The first and last in Isaiah 41 and 44 are applied to God.

Now, Jesus Christ is claiming to be the first and the last, especially when, just a few verses earlier, using its expansion, God has claimed to be the alpha and omega. And now Jesus claims that. But if we skip to the very end of the book, chapter 22 and verse 13, I'll back up and read verse 12, so it's clear that you understand Jesus is speaking.

Look, I am coming soon. My reward is with me. I will give to each person according to what they have done.

I, Jesus Christ speaking, I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. All three titles are now applied to Jesus Christ. Again, this stems from an Old Testament background in Isaiah 41 and 44, especially in the context of exclusive worship of God over against idols. So, John is quite comfortable in taking a title, and it's interesting, not just a name, but a title expressing God's sovereignty over all things, His preexistence.

He stands at the beginning and the end of all things and everywhere in between and now applies that to Jesus Christ. Again, this a title that was in the context of the futility, in fact, the outright idolatry, of acknowledging and worshiping anyone else but God himself in Isaiah. Now we find Jesus Christ taking upon himself that role and that designation of the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

And again, what is astonishing is that John doesn't just take a designation from the Old Testament and apply it to Christ. He takes a designation from the Old Testament that applies to God and applies it to God and Christ in the book of Revelation. To me, John could not be more clear as to what he thinks of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the very God himself, the one who comes to execute God's plan of salvation, to execute God's judgment, and to bring about God's salvation for his people.

The other thing, too, is that we find, interestingly, Jesus Christ coming, as we've seen in other texts; we see Jesus Christ coming to perform divine activities in the book of Revelation. That is, activities and things that were associated with God or were God's prerogative and role in the Old Testament, and we find now Jesus Christ accomplishing that in the book of Revelation, such as bringing forgiveness of sins, redeeming people and forgiving their sins, chapter 1 and verses 5 and 6. But over and over again, Jesus is seen as performing the role that is used to designate God's activity in the Old Testament. But once more, what we find Revelation doing, that you don't always find other New Testament authors doing, is that he takes roles and

designations for God in the Old Testament, God's activity in the Old Testament, and applies it to both God and Christ in the book of Revelation.

So go back again to chapter 1 and verse 4. This is interesting. Chapter 1 and verse 4. Let's see. In part of John's greeting, his epistolary greeting, he says, John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia, grace and peace to you from the one who is and who was and who is to come.

Notice then he goes on and says, and from the seven spirits and from Jesus Christ. So grace comes from all three, which is almost an implicit Trinitarian type of statement that John would associate the three so easily as grace and peace coming from them. But there's something more significant here.

God is described as the one who is and who was, probably a development of or a take on the description of God from Exodus, the I am statement when God tells Moses, tell them that I am has come to you, I am has revealed himself to you, and now it is I am who will save his people. So, the one who is, who was, and who is to come is probably an expansion of that description of God from Exodus. But what is interesting is the fact that it is God who is to come.

So this phrase demonstrates not only God's eternity but the fact that he is to come in the context of Revelation; Revelation suggests it is God who is going to come in judgment. It is God who is going to come and bring salvation to his people. It is God who is going to come and intervene on this earth and bring about both judgment and salvation.

But lo and behold, what we find when you read further is that, for example, in chapter 19 of Revelation, starting with verse 11, and I am not going to read the whole thing, but this is where John sees a vision of heaven standing open, and there is a rider and a white horse, and then it says, verse 11, with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire. On his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but himself.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God. And as the rest of the text goes on, he fights a battle, an end-time battle, which really isn't a battle at all, because Christ simply comes down and with a sword protruding from his mouth, he slays his enemies. But what I want to emphasize is that in this text, we find Christ himself coming as judge.

That is, Jesus Christ comes to fulfill chapter 1, verse 4. God is the one who is and who was and is coming. That is, he is coming as judge. Now, Jesus Christ comes as a judge to execute God's eschatological judgment.

So, it's intriguing that in the book of Revelation, we have both God coming to judge and Christ coming to execute his judgment. Once more, this suggests John was quite happy to take that which was a divine prerogative, that which belonged to God. In fact, some of these descriptions of Jesus Christ in chapter 19, he judged with justice, he judges and makes war, and his robe is dipped in blood, come out of Old Testament text referring to God as a judge.

Now, they're applied to Christ. So now John is quite comfortable in taking a prerogative that belongs to God as judge, the one who will come, and applying it not only to God as the one who was and is coming, but now it is Jesus Christ who comes in judgment. Perhaps that's why we should read several references in chapter 22.

When Jesus says, look, I am coming soon, a reference to his second coming. And then, at the end, verse 20 of chapter 22, he who testifies to these things says, yes, I am coming soon. Amen, come to Lord Jesus.

So, Jesus coming to bring both judgment and salvation fulfills God's prerogative in chapter 1, verse 4, the one who was and is and who is coming. Now it's Jesus Christ who comes to fulfill God's plan of bringing salvation and judgment. So let me make two summary statements of what we've seen about Jesus Christ so far, as far as the New Testament's biblical theological emphasis on Christ.

First of all, as the climax of God's revelation to and dealing with his people, Jesus acts on God's behalf. He accomplishes God's purpose. He reveals God fully because Jesus Christ himself shares in the very eternal being of God.

Jesus comes to accomplish all of God's purposes for salvation, what God promised he would do in the Old Testament, now Jesus Christ does in the New Testament. And because of all that, he is also worthy of the same praise and devotion and worship as God himself is. Second, the Old Testament then looks forward to someone who will represent the people of God.

We have seen this several times in the servant language and even in the son of man language, as well as the corporate and the individual language. The Old Testament looks forward to someone who will represent the people, who will live under the covenant in perfect obedience to it. This is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Humanity's representative and head. So, those two statements hopefully capture what I see as some of the dominant emphases, theological emphases, as the New Testament portrays the person of Jesus Christ.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 21, Jesus, Messiah, God, Part 2.