

Text: Acts 1.11

Proposition: The Saviour we are waiting for is the same Saviour who left the company of the apostles two thousand years ago.

Happy Easter to all! Our message this morning finds its germinating seed in a book I am reading recently, *Historical Theology for the Church*. The book is a survey of the historical development of theology with a view to benefiting the local church rather than pursuing the aims of scholarship. (That is not to say they are un-scholarly.)

The goal is to emphasize the centrality of the church in God's plan and to challenge the church to be what God planned for it to be.

A recent chapter I read had to do with the doctrine of salvation as developed in the early church (first five centuries, approximately). Near the beginning is this statement:

Christians from the beginning declared the message of salvation found in Christ alone, yet errant views forced early theologians to clarify the unique nature and role of Jesus Christ in salvation. In fact, the driving force of Christian responses to heretical teaching was maintaining the biblical message of salvation found in Christ alone.¹

The battles in the early church at times became very intense. Theological battles today can also be intense. For some people, they are off-putting, even "un-Christian."

Yet the history of the church shows intense theological battles over sometimes seemingly very small matters. One battle during this time involved a fight over the letter "i". Should you include or exclude the "i" in a word describing Christ. We'll talk a bit more about that later.

How does that sound to you, battling over a single letter in a word? It may seem petty and small to you. Sometimes theological battles can be petty and small.

However, today we are gathered to worship the Lord Jesus Christ as our resurrected Saviour and God. We say that he is the only way to eternal life, to salvation. Without him, you can't be born again, you will never see heaven.

¹ Coleman M. Ford, "Salvation in the Patristic Era," in *Historical Theology for the Church*, ed. Jason G Duesing and Nathan A Finn (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2021), 89–90.

If Jesus is that important to our salvation, the battles over his person are most important.

Our text today involves the last “post-resurrection” appearance of Jesus. Perhaps it would be better to call it the “post-resurrection” *disappearance*, because it is the passage that describes Jesus departing from this world.

Read Ac 1.6-11, text 11

Also, KJV:

Act 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? **this same Jesus**, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

I took my title from the KJV of our text, in the NAU, it says “this Jesus.” They mean the same thing, but “this same Jesus” seems to add a little oomph to the importance of the one whose return we are awaiting. (“Oomph” is one of those theological words!)

Proposition: The Saviour we are waiting for is the same Saviour who left the company of the apostles two thousand years ago.

I. The man Christ Jesus

A. The precious doctrine of the incarnation “God made flesh”

To include a few references:

Jn 1.14 ¶ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

1 Tim 2.5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

1 Jn 1.1 ¶ What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life —

B. Threat of Docetism

“The first major threat to the Christian understanding of Jesus in the first and second centuries was Docetism. Docetism

challenged the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the true incarnation of God by denying that Jesus was genuinely human.”²

1. Docetism defined: “to appear, to seem”
2. Taught that Jesus not fully human or only appeared as a man
3. Connected with the Gnostic idea that matter is evil

C. Countered by Ignatius, Irenaeus, and others

“Ignatius argued that denial of the true humanity of Jesus negated the salvation Jesus came to bring.”³

1. John 1.14, “*fully participating* in the realm of creation”; “the eternal Logos became human—truly human”⁴

Jn 1.14 ¶ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. 1 Tim 2.5, Jesus is the mediator between God and man

¹ Tim 2.5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

¹ Tim 2.6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

- a. To mediate salvation, Jesus is “providing salvation manward and facilitating prayer Godward”⁵
- b. Emphasizing his humanity, Jesus stands as the new man, to replace sinning Adam as head of a new, faithful race

² Steven A. McKinion, “Jesus Christ in the Patristic Era,” in *Historical Theology for the Church*, ed. Jason G Duesing and Nathan A Finn (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2021), 24.

³ McKinion, 26.

⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 119.

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Ti 2.5.

3. 1 John 1.1 – John gives personal testimony to his own direct encounter with the *man* who saves us

1 Jn 1.1 ¶ What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life —

The eleven disciples, watching on the Mount of Olives, as the man, Christ Jesus, receded from their view, what could be the object of their resurrection hope but the man, Christ Jesus?

Ac 1.11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

This Same Jesus, the man from Nazareth, will appear at the appointed time, bringing salvation with him.

II. My Lord and My God

A. The doctrine of the deity of Christ

Jn 20.28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jn 1.18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

Col 2.9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Heb 1.3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

B. Long under attack, including in the second century

“A second major threat ... was Ebionism ... The Ebionites believed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah but denied his divinity.”⁶

1. Major figures of the early church who championed orthodoxy
 - a. Justin Martyr
 - b. Athenagoras
 - c. Tatian
 - d. Irenaeus (who also fought Docetism)
 - e. And others
2. They argued for the deity based on
 - a. Apostolic precedent: this is the doctrine of the apostles that persisted to their day (and to our day)
 - b. The notion that salvation depends on “the union of God with humanity”⁷

No eternal life can come from a merely human Saviour; we must have the eternal life of God if we are to escape the death of Adam.

Jn 20.28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jn 1.18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

Col 2.9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Heb 1.3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

⁶ McKinion, “Jesus Christ,” 26.

⁷ McKinion, 27.

Thomas (“my Lord and my God”) standing with the ten, watching on the Mount of Olives, as the Lord Jesus, receded from their view, what could be the object of their resurrection hope but the man, Christ Jesus?

Ac 1.11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

This Same Jesus, the Lord from heaven, will appear at the appointed time, bringing salvation with him.

III. I and the Father are One

A. The doctrine of the Trinity

Jn 10.30 “I and the Father are one.”

Mt 28.19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

B. The challenge to the Trinity

1. An ongoing challenge, even to this day
2. Mixed up with the controversy over the deity of Christ
3. Most well-known opponent was Arius of the fourth century, culminating in the Council of Nicaea
 - a. Arius taught “there was once when he was not” — *i.e.* the Son
 - b. Taught he was like God, but not fully God — very similar to Jehovah’s Witness teaching today
 - c. His term “homoiousios” – “similar in nature”
4. Most well-known champion: Athanasius of Alexandria
 - a. Fought for the term “homoousios” – one letter different, “same in substance”
 - b. When told the whole world was against him, he said, “Then it is I, Athanasius, against the whole world.”

c. Suffered exile from his office five times during his ministry as part of this fight

5. Victory for orthodoxy secured in Nicaea and the Nicene Creed

C. Our salvation rests in the secure arms of the triune God

1. The Father plans and bestows
2. The Son accomplished by his death
3. The Spirit applies its benefits to the heart and life

Jn 10.30 "I and the Father are one."

Mt 28.19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

The eleven, standing on the Mount of Olives, as the Lord Jesus, receded from their view, shortly to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, what could be the object of their resurrection hope but the promise of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Ac 1.11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

This Same Jesus, the Son of God, will appear at the appointed time, bringing salvation with him.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The Saviour we are waiting for is the same Saviour who left the company of the apostles two thousand years ago.

When the apostle John had a vision of the man he last saw on the Mount of Olives, he saw a man, but such a man! Face shining like the sun, feet shimmering like burnished bronze, the resurrected and glorified God-man, the Son of God, who gave us His Spirit, and will return on the day the Father appointed.