

The Unique Christ: The Unique Pattern of Christ
By Jason Huff
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Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Psalm 132:10-12; Hebrews 3:1-6

Friends, our final Scripture reading today is Hebrews 3:1-6. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.”

Around this time of year, we start to think about winter weather, which makes me think about snowflakes. Every snowflake is unique...no two are exactly alike. I'd heard that said, but I kinda doubted it, so I did some research. It's a statistical certainty, but no one has examined every snowflake, and to the naked eye, a lot of snowflakes look similar. (They look similar enough when I have to shovel a ton of them off of my driveway!) But it's true that one of the simplest, most fleeting things God creates is absolutely unique in and of itself. It's one of the reasons why I chose the graphic for this month's series that you'll see on the bulletin or our Facebook page or our website. Snowflakes may be lovely or frustrating depending on how you feel about snow, but they are unique.

This month, in our Advent study, we're going to focus on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Some of the ideas will relate directly to Christmas; some won't. But all of them will point to the fact that Jesus is unique in special ways that lead us to believe Him, love Him, and worship Him as our Savior. Seeing the uniqueness of Christ gives us hope in a time where hope is hard to come by.

Before we dive in, let's talk about ways that Jesus isn't unique so that they don't throw us off from the truth. I've known friends who have been thrown when they assumed Jesus was unique in a way that He wasn't, and that shakes their faith. But when we realize these aren't so important, we have a more firm foundation.

First, Jesus was not unique in the way that He looked. In fact, we have virtually no physical description of Jesus at all in the Bible. Because He was Jewish, He had a beard. But the only physical description we have of Jesus comes not from those who met Him or saw Him but from ancient prophecy long before He was born. Isaiah 53:2 says the Messiah “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.”

This is such a contrast for us from our depictions of Jesus. Many of our films make Jesus look like He's from Europe, not from the Near East. And Jesus is always tall, taller than the apostles. Even in *The Chosen*, the great new television series about Jesus where Jesus looks Mediterranean, Jesus is still really tall.

But if we're talking about Jewish men in the first century, they were closer in height to Catha than myself! And Jesus is smiling and winsome, usually strikingly handsome. But the real Jesus was none of these things. Jesus was strikingly ordinary for His time, enough that no one thought to describe how He looked. Even John the Baptist gets a bigger description of how He looked than Jesus!

But that's the point. It was Jesus' teaching and healing and miracles that got attention, not how He looked. In a time where everyone tries to be photogenic all the time, because you never know when someone might be taking a picture for Instagram, we assume that you only get noticed when you look good. Jesus made waves because of who He is, what He says and does.

Jesus also wasn't unique in the story of His divinity. Other cultures had stories of gods and deities that died and came back to life, though in very different ways than Jesus. Other cultures occasionally had stories of virgin births and messiahs. It's not as if these ideas only and exclusively belong to Jesus. We shouldn't ever be shocked when we learn that other cultures have bits of mythology similar to what we hear in the Gospels.

The key difference here, the thing that makes Jesus unique, is that His story is historical. It involves real people and happens publicly. Unlike mythologies, everything about Jesus was well-attested. Shepherds, Mary His mother, relatives could and would be interviewed; companions and friends questioned; even secular history and Jewish history acknowledged who Jesus was and who He claimed to be. We'll talk about this more in the weeks to come, but we should recognize that it's not the claims of virgin birth and resurrection that make Jesus unique; it's that they happened in real, honest-to-goodness history.

Last thing that doesn't make Jesus unique: His teachings. Jesus had many teachings that were in fact His own, that made Him stand out. But many of His most famous teachings, such as the "Golden Rule," have been echoed in various ways by other teachers throughout the centuries. Respected moral teachers outside of Judaism teach about moral conduct long before Jesus.

But we remember that humanity was made in God's image, and despite our fall into sin, the marred and broken image is still there. So we aren't surprised when Siddhartha or Confucius or Socrates teach similar ethics and morality to Jesus. What continually amazes the people around Jesus is how He teaches with authority – He is not discovering morality as other teachers did, but He alongside the Father and Holy Spirit is the author of morality. God created morality; Jesus teaches that morality in its purest form; other teachers, as good as they may have been, are still working with echoes and shadows of that morality.

So now that we've gotten those out of the way, let's look at many of the things that does make Jesus unique. There are enough that it will take four weeks to cover them! And the main idea that I want us to cover today is this: *Jesus is part of a unique heritage of saviors that points to His being the one true and prophesied Messiah over all people.*

We often think of Judaism in terms of a people who followed a system of law delivered by God to Moses. But even before the law, Judaism was a faith based on God saving His people through a messiah or christ, both of which mean “anointed one.” The idea of a savior who rescues or delivers his people, is as old as time itself. But Jesus’ heritage is unique in that, as an ancient Jew, He belongs to a people who are rescued time and again by people God has chosen and anointed to save them.

From literally the start of Scripture, Genesis 3 on, God rescues His people time and again. Adam and Eve were told that they would die the day that they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their lives were forfeit due to their sin. Despite that God exiles them from the garden of Eden, God clothes them with animal skins. It’s not explicitly mentioned in Genesis 3, but it’s clear that death has entered the world – those animals had to die in order for Adam and Eve to have clothing.

But it’s not just death that makes its first appearance. Salvation has come as well. Adam lives another 930 years after the fall into sin. It’s because God provided a sacrifice for them to cover their sin through those animals. God did not end His relationship with humanity or destroy humanity before it barely begins; God saves our ancestors from the death they had rightfully earned for themselves. Not only that, but God promises that one from Adam’s race will eventually crush the head of the wicked serpent that tempted them. A savior will come to make right what they in their decision have made wrong.

God provides rescue throughout Genesis. When God floods the world due to humanity’s great wickedness in Genesis 6, He nevertheless rescues Noah and his family. Noah builds the ark, but God brings the animals, seals the ark, and provides for their safety. While many ancient Near Eastern cultures have stories about the flood and an ark, only the biblical records shows that God was responsible for preserving humanity through it.

God rescues Abraham’s line by giving him a son, Isaac, in his old age. God rescues Jacob by allowing him to escape from his brother Esau and making a way for Jacob to make peace with Esau return many years later. God rescues Abraham’s great-grandsons and their whole families through Joseph, who after many hardships was put in charge of Egypt’s resources before a great famine hit – and thus he saves the lives of the brothers who sold him into slavery well over a decade earlier. From the earliest pages of Scripture, God establishes this pattern.

But God is just getting started. In God’s most famous rescue and the most famous messianic figure before Jesus, God rescues Abraham’s people from slavery in Egypt. God saves Moses from an early death and puts him in the hands of the daughter of Pharaoh, who raises him. God eventually uses Moses to lead His people out of captivity and to the edge of the land God had promised to Abraham’s descendants. Despite their ungratefulness, God preserves the people for the sake of His promise.

After the Hebrews settle the promised land, they forget about God, but God does not forget them. Over the course of 400 years, God sends twelve judges to rescue His people when they cry out to Him after being oppressed and downtrodden by local kings and tribes. We see the pattern, right? God is in the habit of saving His people through unlikely leaders He chooses.

At the end of the age of the judges comes the story of Ruth the Moabitess. She's a young widow who, despite not being Jewish herself, moves to Israel with her mother-in-law. Without Ruth's husband, they are penniless. Naomi's relative Boaz helps them, and Ruth appeals to Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer – someone under the law of Israel who could act on behalf of a relative who's in trouble. Boaz willingly takes Ruth as his wife, and their great-grandson will be none other than King David. The story of Ruth shows that the idea of a redeemer, a savior, a protector coming to the rescue, was built into the law God had established for Israel.

And King David becomes the king under whom all of Israel is united and flourishes. King David is so much a man after God's own heart that God promises that his descendants will sit on the throne forever, and the one true pure messiah, the Savior of all saviors, would come from his line. Though many of the Davidic kings are pretty poor, God keeps His promises still, and God's people wait for the man from the line of David who will set Israel on top of the world.

Even during Israel's lean years, messianic figures pop up. God uses Esther, a young woman brought into a foreign king's palace as queen, to save the Jews from genocide. Later, in the period between the Old and New Testaments, God uses Judas Maccabeus and his brothers to rid Judah from the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes who had overtaken the kingdom and desecrated the temple.

Why does all this matter? Why the gigantic history lesson? Ultimately, it's to increase our faith and hope in Jesus. Because all this backdrop tells us that Jesus was far more than a good teacher or a holy man. Jesus is unique because He was expected and prophesied, and He came from a people who had seen God rescue them throughout time through messiahs He had raised up for Himself. God established a pattern of messiahs throughout His people's history, and in Jesus, that pattern finds its ultimate fulfillment. But unlike all those God had used as saviors of His people before, Jesus' arrival had been foretold in part over 4,000 years before, with details about Him filled in over the millennia by many different prophets.

Jesus is from a people of messiahs, in a certain sense He meets expectations, but at the same time He also breaks all the expectations. He fits the pattern, but He also departs from it in incredibly important ways. The most important one is that Jesus has no sin. From the moment Jesus takes on a human nature and becomes human in Mary's womb, He is totally obedient to the Father and without moral blemish in any way.

When we look at the historical Christ figures in Jewish history, what stands out is how flawed most of them are, some significantly. It's sometimes very difficult to get to the truth behind the legends in ancient history because ancient kings didn't write up a list of their character deficiencies. The way to get yourself beheaded was to write ill of the king. And so ancient history is full of lists of tribal victories, glories won and treasures acquired, where even catastrophic failures get spun into noble efforts. It's what has kept historians from fully believing the story of the Hebrews leaving Egypt – because no Pharaoh would ever record in their history books a disastrous slave revolt.

In comparison, Jewish history is a “warts-and-all” account of their greatest leaders. No one comes out of the Bible unscathed by their own sin. Because the Bible isn’t interested in making legends out of mere mortals – the Bible presents God’s faithfulness in comparison to the unfaithfulness of even the most righteous people who ever lived. The greatest people in the Bible are far from perfect, often committing sins that would warrant the death penalty – but the greatest people are great because they continually turn to God, trusting in Him rather than themselves, repenting of their evil deeds and turning back to God.

We can trust that Jesus is sinless because in the over 4,000 years of history the Bible records, Scripture never attempts to portray anyone else that way. Scripture is honest about the foibles and failures of everyone. So when Scripture presents Jesus as perfect in every way, we believe it. The writers of Scripture, inspired by God, write down the good with the bad. And yet in Jesus, they find no flaw. That’s a pattern that Jesus breaks.

He also breaks the pattern in that He is the spiritual, eternal Savior of His people, bringing a once-for-all salvation for all of God’s people throughout history. Every other messianic figure in Israel’s history, through the work of God’s Holy Spirit, saved the Hebrew people from physical danger, oppression, and subjugation. But because they were still sinners, they couldn’t offer eternity; they could offer protection for a season, but death still cast a shadow over those in their care. No amount of sacrifices or righteousness could stop death’s march.

Jesus, on the other hand, is God’s own Son, able to save us from ourselves, from the sin nature that has pinned us to the wall ever since Adam and Eve. He offers a permanent solution – eternal forgiveness with no further need for sacrifices in the temple to get right with God. Through His life, death, and resurrection, we live on even though we die. All of us who believe and trust in Jesus, living for Him, have a home in God’s Kingdom. Jesus was rejected in His own day because His people expected another savior in the order of Moses, who would throw off their Roman oppressors and lead Israel to its rightful place over the nations. But Jesus offers us far more than any other messiah could – He offers us eternal life. He is unique because He doesn’t promise us earthly safety and security. Instead, through Him we no longer fear death. We have hope. Because in Him, the gates of heaven open wide.

Because the New Testament starts with the birth of Jesus, it’s easy to think that’s the beginning of the story. But Jesus is actually the culmination of the centuries, the promise finally come true after generations of longing and hoping and praying. When we think about the coming of Jesus during this season, we shouldn’t just start with the manger. We travel back in time through the history of Israel to know that Jesus has been God’s plan from the start to redeem His people, hinted at through the people of Israel throughout the ages. He is not the first Savior; He’s the Savior above all saviors, the only one through whom we can have eternal life.

Next week we’ll look at the unique nature of Christ – who He was and is. Please join us then. For this week, may we live in hope, knowing that our Christ Jesus comes from a long line of faithful messiahs God has used – knowing that He is unique in bringing us new life and making us new, bringing us into the glorious Kingdom of His wonderful Father.