

Message in a Bottle, pt. 1: (Christ With Us)

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Today, we begin a four-part series on Jesus Christ. We will call it “Message in a Bottle.” We are Christians. We must never forget that the very center of our faith is Jesus. There are many aspects of His work to deliver us. We will look at four.

First, we will consider Christ’s life. Matthew 1:23 speaks of “God [that is, Christ] with us.” We may learn much of how Jesus actually lived, of His example for us. The second in the series will focus on “Christ for us,” His death substituting for our own. Part three will consider “Christ in us,” the theme of Jesus and His resurrection. The final part will conclude with “Christ victorious,” focusing on Jesus’ ministry for us in these last days in His heavenly sanctuary.

By taking this approach, we will be able to go deeper on the topic of Jesus Christ from a biblical, or Seventh-day Adventist, perspective. This can further equip us to interact with others who might become interested in our faith as we share with them the centrality and significance that Jesus has for us. Let’s leap in!

### **Message in a Bottle**

Most of us are familiar with the old story of the message in a bottle. Someone from a distant land writes a message, rolls it up, pops it into a bottle, seals it with a cork, gives a powerful heave and flings it into the vast ocean. Sometime later, somewhere on a distant continent, someone is walking along a beach, and—surprise!—spots a bottle washing ashore. He investigates, and discovers a bottle with a message in it. He pops the cork out and eagerly reads the message composed for him by someone ages ago across time.

Here’s what he knows for certain about the message in a bottle:

#1: Someone specific, literal, actually existing, wrote it

#2: The message was preserved, perhaps a very long time, until entry into his possession

#3: He is recipient of the message

Now a fact that I find very special. The good news of God's message for man is as if God, someone very specific, literal, existing, wrote a message for you. It was preserved for thousands of years until it came into your hands. You are a quite specific recipient of the message. It is as if God sent each and every person worshipping in this sanctuary a very precious message in a bottle.

What is this message? We can call it the gospel.

Some have a narrow view of what the gospel is. They take a couple of verses here and there from the Bible and call the message of those few verses the gospel. But the whole of the Bible testifies of Christ (Luke 24). Therefore, we cannot limit ourselves to one or two verses, or events, or favorite chapters. If we want to understand the gospel, we must take a larger view. We will use the space of four sermons to offer a concise view of the gospel. God has sent us a message in a bottle.

### **Christ With Us**

Remember, we are only dealing briefly today with the life of Christ. Our primary text comes from Isaiah by way of Matthew. Matthew 1:21 tells us that Jesus is promised to save His people *from* Their sins, and in verse 23 we learn something that will be central to His mission. He will be called Immanuel, which means "God is with us."

It is always God's desire to be with His people. It is His idea. He was the one who came to the garden to visit with Adam and Eve. He was the one who, when He delivered His people from Egypt, asked them to make Him a sanctuary so that He could dwell with them (Exodus

25:8). Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them so that they would always be with Him (John 14:1-3).

God's purpose to be with His people is seen in the gospel of John. After reprising the creation, John immediately speaks of Jesus, the Word, becoming flesh (John 1:14), coming down to *eskeenoseen*, literally tabernacle, dwell, pitch or set-up His tent with us, among us, in our midst. Jesus left heaven and went camping with the earthlings, the dust creatures that He had created. The Hebrew word for ground is *adamah*. Adam means "dirt man." Adam was the first man of dirt; Jesus was the second.

He never ceased to be God, but there were some serious changes He accepted in order to accomplish His mission. Think on some Bible facts about Jesus that we do not often consider.

### **Glory Left Behind**

He came as a helpless human baby. He drank mother's milk from human breasts. Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus, while on earth, was not all-knowing. He increased in wisdom as He grew. Like you and I, His human brain must have reached maturity about the age of 27.

When He came, He had left the glory of His deity with the Father (John 17:5). Apparently, He left behind His memory as well. At His mother's knee, He learned all over again the Scriptures He had before given Israel. He learned that there would be a Second Coming, but knew not when (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). Jesus gained knowledge as we gain it. He studied the Scriptures; He prayed; He communed with His Father.

He did not use His own power to do works, even miracles of mercy. We have this in John 14:10. There, Jesus tells us that it was not He, Jesus, who did the works, but the Father who dwelt in Him. In another place He said that of His own self, He could do nothing (John 5:30).

Not that He did not, as God, have *right* to His own divine power, but that He set that power aside and trusted in the Father's power.

Satan understands this better than many Christians. In the wilderness temptations, He tried to talk Jesus into taking back to Himself His divine power. Jesus refused.

How do we know that Jesus emptied Himself of certain of His divine powers? The Bible says so. Philippians two makes it plain.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

We will not do very much with this passage today, but let's review some items especially pertinent to our subject.

- o We may have "the mind" of Christ
- o Jesus, a person distinct from the Father, was God and equal with God
- o He took upon Himself the form of a servant, that is, He became a man as human as we are
- o He died on the cross

The reality of Christ with us, is especially practical and impacting for us, since in Philippians 2:5 we are commanded to have the mind of Christ. How many squabbles would there be in the church if all truly had the mind of Christ? This experience must be possible, since we are commanded to have it.

## **He Emptied Himself**

Jesus was in the form of God, literally, the *morphee*, the “shape,” we might say. But remember that God is everywhere present, so “shape” is hard to apply to that. Here we have an endeavor to communicate the idea of kind or substance. Jesus was of the same substance of God, at least as much as an incorporeal being can be of substance.

But Jesus entered His own creation. He left behind the form of God and took upon Himself the form of man. That is, He became in substance, in kind, in shape, a human being. Notice here that man is classified as a servant. This is crucial. Jesus took the form of a servant. He came, not as one to be served but as one who Himself served. That is, He did not come to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater God, but to be a servant, to offer the service of a man to God. He came, besides as substitute, to be example. But had He come with a power that you and I cannot have, and exercised that power, His example for us would have been compromised.

That is why, in Philippians 2:7 the Bible says that He

KJV “made Himself of no reputation”

NIV “made Himself nothing”

NASB “emptied Himself”

In this case, the NASB offers the most accurate translation of the biblical language. The text literally says that Jesus emptied Himself. Notice the order. Jesus is God and exists as God, with all His inherent capabilities as God. Then, He, still being God, empties Himself of certain of His aspects of His deity. He places these in the keeping of the Father. And then He becomes a man like us. He lives as a man like us. He lives without sinning. At the last, He offers this pure

life in sacrifice for us on the cross. Only when it is clear that the Father has accepted this sacrifice does He recover to Himself most of His powers of deity, and is exalted.

### **No Form Nor Comeliness**

Consider one incident from the life of Christ, from John 1:35-39. It may seem very mundane. John sees Jesus on the shore. He points at Him, and tells those who are gathered, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John :29). When John said this, Jesus was walking. Two of John’s disciples, at this point, fall in line behind Jesus. Jesus, hearing them following, stops and turns, and asks them what they are seeking. Their response is equally simple: “Rabbi, where do you live?” Jesus then invites them. “Come and See.” They went with Jesus. They remained with Him the rest of the day.

We are not told more. But what the Bible says about Jesus’ life does suggest to us some likely possibilities. One expects that Jesus’ dwelling was very small. Probably, in what little space there was, there was high quality wood furniture that He Himself had made. It must have been an orderly little room. His few possessions were perhaps limited to some scrolls, a few water pots and bowls, some blankets, and a change of clothing. He would have the necessities to sustain life. Where, in 2009 the most common centerpiece of a home might be a television set, for Jesus it must have been the scrolls. We do not have any real details. We can only think that it would be simple, functional, and social. No doubt, there was that kind of undefinable peaceful atmosphere that is present when angels from heaven are lingering by.

What interests us is that there is no machinery here to manipulate or persuade; no long appeals; nothing to excite. Jesus did not do any tricks or turn stones into bread. Every outward appearance showed only what was actually there: a man. Isaiah confirms this: “For He shall

grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:1, 2).

Unless this were true, Jesus’ mission would fail. He had to become human to heal humanity. He Himself had to be able to be authentically and actually tempted as we are, in order to save those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:17, 18); He had to experience the feeling of *our* infirmities (Hebrews 4:15). Because He took our humanity, our liabilities were also His.

### **Christ Lived As and With Us**

When we see Jesus passing from scene to scene, we are seeing the humility of God. Jesus voluntarily set aside His powers and even His memories of Heaven, and entrusted Himself to the Father, and came to the most dangerous place in creation. Here, day by day, in His life, He demonstrated the Kingdom.

He was God with us, but He now, too, became Christ with us. The Anointed One came and lived in His anointing. Jesus came to die, but before that, He came to live. The value of the death was based upon the value of the life. The value of the life was demonstrated in a humanity like our own.

When we begin to doubt that we can live the Christian life, we need to remember Jesus. In the timing of God He came and entered into our situation directly. He experienced that which we experience. And He overcame. He did it without recourse to powers that He could have but that we could not. He overcame by the same methods we are told to employ: by trusting the Father’s love for Him, by believing the promises of God, and by saturating Himself with the Word of God.

He became Christ with us. Although, He knew; although, in the last moments of infinitude, before, for all intents and purposes, He blinked out of existence in order to become a zygote in Mary's womb, He was fully aware that He was entering the path of nails and blood and the spittle of sinners, and an aloneness He had never in all eternity felt. All this, He knew, awaited Him, with, at last, the coldness of death on the cross. Into this torture Jesus came.

### **Conclusion**

Let there be no mistake. His life as God with us was essential to the plan of salvation. What He endured day in and day out was endured for you. No Christian has any business cheapening the life of Immanuel or suggesting that all that Jesus endured was mere melodrama. And so, when you wonder how you are going to get through one of those very hard days, and you feel beset upon and misunderstood or even under attack by a neighbor or even a brother or sister in the church, just stop, and pray, "Dear Father in Heaven, thank you that Jesus knows all about this, and my human tears are all in a bottle with His human tears. Amen."

Here, then is one part of the message in a bottle. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, Christ with us. We are not alone. Not at all!

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.