

Bible Reading Challenge 46: THE CHURCH – CHRIST THE CENTER

We're moving out of the book of Acts this week, and into a section of the New Testament called the "Epistles," or letters. These letters were written to the very first Christians by their pastors and teachers: Peter, James (the brother of Jesus), John, and especially Paul.

We've read the stories of Jesus: how he was born, how he lived, what he did, how he died and came back to life. We've read about the coming of the Holy Spirit and how the church exploded out of Jerusalem and went on to march through the whole world. Farther back, we read the long story of God's people before Jesus came, and we've seen how their failures proved that no man could rescue people from sin. Now we come to the Epistles, which help us answer the question, *What did it all mean?* The story is told; we know it all except the very last chapter. What these writers do, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, is explain clearly what Jesus did for us and what that means for Christians living in the "in-between time" between the end of Acts and the beginning of Revelation. We're going to look at three big ideas over the next three weeks, and the first of those big ideas is this: *Jesus Christ is at the center of everything*--history, creation, the past, the future, and right now.

In order to understand this a little better, we'll look at what Christian writers have called the three "offices" of Christ. Those aren't buildings he goes to answer the phone and work on his computer, but jobs that he does and purposes he fulfills to save people for God. The three offices are **Prophet, Priest, and King**. We saw how the Old Testament provided three great figures in those roles: Elijah as prophet, Moses as priest, and David as king. As we also saw that none of those men were perfect and all of them failed in some way. But they also pointed to Someone who would perfectly do their work, we'll soon see how.

The epistles are so packed with insight and information that it's hard to take it all in with a quick read. Our readings are shorter this week, but they may take a lot more thought.

Reading for this week: I Corinthians 15:1-9, Philippians 2:5-7, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1 and 3
Key verse: He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col. 1:17

Questions to Think and Talk About:

1. According to the author of Hebrews, who are the angels and what is their job?
2. Make a list of everything Christ is and does in Hebrews 1:3-4 and Col. 1:15-20.
3. Why does Jesus "sit down" at God's right hand in Hebrews 1:3-4?
4. What things does Paul say are of "first importance" in I Cor. 15? Why?
5. What does Jesus do as a Prophet? (see Heb. 1:1-2 and Matt. 24:35) What does he do as a Priest? (Actually two things; see Heb. 9:11-12 and Heb. 7:25.) What does he do—and will he do—as King? (see Acts 17:31 and Col. 1:17)
6. Colossians 1 says that Jesus is also the head of the church, his body. This means, among lots of other things, that we represent him on earth. We get to act as prophets, priests, and kings, too! What can we do as prophets? (see II Cor. 5:20) How about priests? (I Peter 2:9, II Cor. 1:11, I Tim. 2:11) And Kings? Really? (see I Tim. 2:11-12a)

Activities:

- Design-a-crown: draw a crown on a large sheet of paper, or cut one out of gold posterboard. Decorate it with "jewels" representing things that Jesus rules over, such as earth, the sky, the stars, the past, every man, woman and child (in other words, everything!).
- Brainstorm among your family about ways you can show your friends and relatives that Christ is the center of your home. How can your church show this in ways it's not doing? Is there any way you can encourage your church to display this truth?
- Play a variation of rock-paper-scissors: the right fist is a hand holding a scepter (king). The right hand pointing is a prophet, and the right hand raised with palm up is a priest. Prophet preaches to king, king rules priest, and priest prays for prophet. Whoever wins each round gets to say one of our key verses for a small prize, such as an M&M.