

A Kingdom of Priests

Book of Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 61:4-9

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If you will, look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 61. And I want to speak with you from verses four through nine about the kingdom of priests. I know that is an unusual title, perhaps, but a very important one, particularly when we consider the work of Christ in establishing his Church even as we have just sung about the Word of God incarnate and the reason he came was to build his Church and establish his kingdom.

I know there is a lot of debate today about the kingdom and what type of kingdom it will be. There are a lot of prophecy conferences that attract a lot of attention and there are a lot of preachers running to and fro getting people excited about end times and seasons and that sort of thing. Not anything I can identify with, not how the Lord has been pleased to teach me, especially in light of what I am going to be preaching from this text today to cause you to see that there is already a kingdom established of which this world knows nothing of. And it is not in religion. It is not in politics. It is not in reformation. It is not in education, but it is in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this was foretold.

Now when people say they have the Bible and they read it, but if they are reading it with their eyes darkened and whatever light is in them is darkened, how great is that darkness? It takes, even as Paul wrote to the Corinthians as the Scriptures are read, the veil being removed. That veil is only removed in the Lord Jesus Christ and by his Spirit. And so this portion here in Isaiah 61 that we have taken some time just getting through the first three verses points us to the great work of the Lord Jesus Christ and what he was to accomplish in coming into this world. There were many in his day that read the Scriptures every sabbath day, but that veil was over their hearts. They were looking for a political kingdom. They were looking for an earthly kingdom. And, therefore, missed not only the kingdom but missed the king. And so in reading here I will begin in verse one and read down to verse nine.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for

ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them. For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.¹

Someone evidently didn't get the memo that was written here by the Spirit of God, particularly in religion today, because there is a hierarchy of clergy and laity. I really hate those two terms. But nonetheless we have to deal with them in our day. You won't find them in the Scripture. You will find them in men's organizations, but neither is legal nor is it biblical.

As a result of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has made of his people a kingdom of priests. And that is not a title that is reserved just for a special few, especially in our day when men like to dress up differently and wear their collar around backwards and people call them father, but they can't have any children. It is a charade to put it mildly, particularly because it is taking something that belongs unto Christ alone and making a mockery of it. I will just say it that plainly. And it also takes away from what the Lord has accomplished.

I will tell you that the only reason I stand up here is to be able to have a place to be able to declare this gospel unto you. I have never liked, every since the Lord taught me of the gospel to have a platform or to be seated up facing a congregation somehow to where it is elevating the preacher among or above the people. I can understand needing to see the person that is speaking and so in some circumstances it may be necessary to have a platform or a stage to speak from, but never for the purpose of exalting the preacher. John the Baptist said:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”²

¹ Isaiah 61:1-9.

² John 3:30.

And when I tell you that I am a sheep just like you are, that is the truth. Any position I have is not a position other than being low at Christ's feet. It is certainly not a position of being exalted above the people. I have often thought about that even in the term clergy, why they put them above the laity. Laity means people. So I have often wondered, are they not people? Are they somehow self appointed angels or some other creatures than being among the people?

I will tell you what. As I stand here today and declare unto you this gospel, I do as a sinner saved by grace just like any one of you sitting there that the Lord has redeemed. And when we are done I will need this gospel more so than anybody, because not only have I read it for you, but I have preached it for you. And, therefore, I take that as a great accountability. But I do so as a sinner in need. I do so as one who before the Lord is who he is only by the grace of God. By the grace of God I am what I am.

And so that is what we see here in this particular portion of Scripture, this kingdom of priests, verse six, that the Lord has named and who would be called ministers of our God. And you see that word minister, again, I fear that religion has sullied our thinking. As soon as you see it you are thinking in terms of some sort of man they call a preacher or pastor or unfortunately reverend. That is a term that should never be used of any man that belongs unto Christ alone. But, no, I want you to see here when it says:

“But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles.”³

You have to go back to the context, all the way back to verse three. The ye has to be in the context of those that are:

“...called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”⁴

So I ask you. Are you one of these trees of righteousness? Have you been planted of the Lord in his death? Have you been raised in his resurrection? If he is your substitute, if he is your mediator, then this addresses you. This is not a special pastors conference being addressed here. This is the people whom the Lord has redeemed. And you see in verse four how it says:

“And they shall build the old wastes...”⁵

See, the Jew reading this would look at this as far as being Jewish and seeing this somehow related to those who were Jews. But all the way through here we can see that that is not who is being addressed. Notice in verse nine:

“And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles.”⁶

³ Isaiah 61:6.

⁴ Isaiah 61:3.

⁵ Isaiah 61:4.

⁶ Isaiah 61:9.

In other words, this kingdom or this planting or this building, however you want to put it with regard to the temple of God is not something physical. It is not something racial. It doesn't pertain to anyone particular nation as far as a geographical political nation. No, it is spiritual. And it is made up of both Jew and Gentile.

“And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.”⁷

So we are talking about here an eternal, an everlasting work, even as it says in verse seven:

“...everlasting joy shall be unto them.”⁸

And verse eight:

“...an everlasting covenant with them.”⁹

The them, again, being these who are planted of the Lord and they are called trees of righteousness, not for any righteousness in themselves, but the righteousness of God imputed, accounted to them upon completion of Christ's work that he accomplished. And so we see it in this portion of Scripture, really, three thoughts that I want to underscore for you. One, this priesthood prefigured in verses four and five. Secondly, this priesthood prophesied in verse six. And then, thirdly, this priesthood proclaimed in verses seven through nine, just a simple little outline to help us perhaps retain some of these thoughts.

But, first of all, the priesthood prefigured. Again, there is a connection in all these verses. When it says in verse six:

“But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD...”¹⁰

It relates back to those that would build the old wastes. Now historically after Israel was brought back from Captivity in Babylon you could look at this and say, “Well, that is when it was fulfilled historically, the old wastes were rebuilt. They rebuilt the temple, that land that had been so desolated by the Babylonians, well, first by the Assyrians and then later by the Babylonians. It was left a place of desolation. And then when the Lord brought the people back after 70 years of captivity they repaired the waste cities and the desolations that had been there for many generations, 70 years. I don't know what they count a generation. I think we count it about 20 years. So many generations in that sense. And, historically, that was so. But everything that took place in history as we read in the New Testament pertaining to Israel was for our learning. It was for our exhortation. And so what we see here, even as the Lord brought back national Israel at that time and

⁷ Isaiah 61:4.

⁸ Isaiah 61:7.

⁹ Isaiah 61:8.

¹⁰ Isaiah 64:6.

restored them back in the land and brought the worship back in the temple, Zerubbabel's temple was rebuilt and it was that temple that was there when Christ came to this earth and he entered in there, but he said one stone would not remain upon another. Everybody was marveling at the glory of that temple. And Christ warned his disciples not to put any confidence in that physical temple. Why? Because the day would come when all of that would be destroyed. That economy would be done with. All that would be put away. Even the economy of having priests would be done away. And that its he relationship that we see in this particular portion. He was going to raise up a whole kingdom of priests unlike any that had ever been before. And you can go and study this in the book of Hebrews. If that priesthood that had been there in the Old Testament had been valid, if perfection could have come through it, then it would have continued. We wouldn't be reading her about some new priesthood being prefigured. But the reality is that anything that had to do with man, those men died because they were sinners. And there wasn't any salvation even in the offering of those sacrifices unto the Lord. It was a picture. It was a type of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that he would accomplish for his people when he would come and lay down his life. And so prophet, priest and king, sacrifices, temple, all of this is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, but prefigured here.

And so when the Lord speaks to Isaiah here that he would rebuild the old wastes, think about the old wastes that there are in Adam. When he fell, we fell in him. You think about the desolation. Adam gave nothing but condemnation to his race and left in him none would be saved. But here the Lord has purposed to raise up a generation, not a physical generation, not a cultural generation, not a national generation, but a spiritual generation in his Son and repair the waste cities and the desolations of many generations. But notice here in verse five that he would do it through Gentile people, because verse five says:

“And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien...”¹¹

That is not aliens as we think of aliens today coming from outer space, but the idea here of an alien is one who is not of that country.

“...shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.”¹²

If we understand this aright, even as it is set forth by Paul in the New Testament it is speaking of Gentiles being grafted in over in Romans chapter 11. I just read it for you in Ephesians chapter two. If you will hold your hand here and come over to Ephesians chapter two once again this is what the work of the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished. Notice Paul in writing to the Ephesians who were not Jewish in their background. As we look at Ephesus that was outside of Israel. And yet the Lord was pleased to raise up a church there in Ephesus and through that to call to himself, through the preaching of the gospel, many who were not Jews. And this is why he writes here in verse 12 of Ephesians two:

¹¹ Isaiah 61:5.

¹² Ibid.

“That at that time ye were without Christ”¹³

You weren't of the circumcision. You weren't Jews. And there is the Word.

...being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace...¹⁴

Normally Jews and Gentiles didn't get along.

“...who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity...”¹⁵

Now you can imagine a Jew, a natural Jew reading Isaiah 61 and thinking, no way. This must be a curse to read here in verse five:

“And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.”¹⁶

You think about standing and feeding the flocks. That is what a shepherd does. You think about being a plowman and a vine dresser. That is what a laborer does. And these were typical of activities that the Jews would do and yet here Isaiah is saying these very strangers that you have been at enmity with now will be one with you. They will be working with you. They will be standing and feeding your flocks, not stealing them. And they will be ... when it says your plowman and your vine dressers, the idea is working together with you. It is not plowing up your field like these enemies that the Lord brought in at one time to punish you, you know, there is going to be a oneness. So that is why I say what we have here is a work prefigured in what we read here of a kingdom that Christ would come and establish, so making peace. And that is what we see in Ephesians two here.

“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”¹⁷

Well, when he is speaking here of ... you are thinking in terms of people feeding the flocks or plowing the field and being vine dressers, that is not just the role of a preacher. When the Lord sent his disciples out into the world, he sent them as redeemed ones. Do you realize that we gather here as a church in order to go back out into this world? I hope you don't have the idea that the only one that can speak of Christ in this world is your preacher, because that is a fallacy. Every one of us takes out into this world the light of

¹³ Ephesians 2:12.

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:12-14.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:14-15.

¹⁶ Isaiah 61:5.

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:16.

this gospel. If the Lord has chosen us and redeemed us and the Spirit called us, then we are the light of the world. That is what Christ said of his disciples.

Now that doesn't mean we have any light in us. It is like that moon that has been rising, that full moon I saw the other night just coming up over the horizon just sitting there. As bright as that moon is, it has not light in itself. It reflects the light of the sun. That is who we are as we go into this world.

“For who maketh thee to differ from another?”¹⁸

It is not anything in us, but it is that light that God in his grace has been pleased to manifest in us and shine through us, the testimony of Christ and his finished work for sinners such as we are. That is our testimony, sinners saved by grace. And who do we encounter out here in the world? Sinners. We just find out which ones in time that the Lord has been pleased to save by grace, but we are like that moon. It rises and shines. And we are laborers. Paul speaks of the church there in Corinthians, the Corinthian church being laborers together with God. In what sense? Well, just as we see here.

“And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.”¹⁹

Who is the field? That is the world. What is the vine? The vineyard. Well, that is his Church in the world. Who are the sheep? Well, that is his people for whom he died. And such is the role of everyone that the Lord has redeemed. So we see this prefigured in verses four and five.

And, secondly, we see it prophesied, verse six.

“But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD.”²⁰

Ye, when you see that, that is every one of the members of Christ's body in his true Israel. It is not speaking about a select group of men they call preachers or ministers or pastors. No, each one of the Lord's own is named a priest of the Lord. And you come over here to Revelation chapter one if you just look there with me, briefly. This is what some of the theology books call the priesthood of the believer. In other words, it is what the Scriptures teach with regard to every one for whom Christ has died and laid down his life. And we find them described here in Revelation chapter one. Let's begin with verse four.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of

¹⁸ 1 Corinthian 4:7.

¹⁹ Isaiah 61:5.

²⁰ Isaiah 61:6.

the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.²¹

You think about what the role of the priest was in the Old Testament. It was to minister unto the Lord through the sacrifices. Well, if you are the Lord's that is what you do. You minister unto the Lord through that one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. But also there is a distinction made in the Old Testament between those who were the Levites, the Levitical priests and those who were of Aaron's line, the high priest. There was always that distinction. The Levitical priest was there to serve the high priest. Well, guess what? Nothing has changed. As a kingdom of priests, we serve our high priest. We offer unto God sacrifices, but not animal sacrifices. There is no other sacrifice to be offered because Christ has already offered that sacrifice. But back here in Hebrews chapter 13 if you will look there with me, it says in verse 15 it says, "By him..." And here the context is by our high priest, because back in verse 10 of Hebrews 13 it says:

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."²²

So Christ is the high priest. He is the sacrifice. He is the altar through whom we, whom he has redeemed, come. By him, as priests, verse 15:

"...therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."²³

So the whole idea of any man being a vicar, that is an abominable word. There is only one vicar. Vicar means substitute. There is no earthly man that is Christ's vicar. Again, that is men who have put that title to a man. If the Lord has redeemed us, then we together as redeemed sinners have been named the priests of the Lord and ministers of our God. I hope you see it that way. That is how the Scriptures declare it.

And if you look over in 1 Peter chapter two... so we see this prophesied here. We see it prefigured. We also see it prophesied. Look at 1 Peter chapter two and verses five through nine.

Here Peter addresses believers. He addresses those who are the Lord's people. And he speaks of Christ as the living stone. He came, lived, died and rose again. He ascended on high. He ever lives to intercede on behalf of his people. And it says:

"To whom coming..."²⁴

You see, this is an ongoing ministry. Think of the priests of the Old Testament who were

²¹ Revelation 1:4-6.

²² Hebrews 13:10.

²³ Hebrews 13:15.

²⁴ 1 Peter 2:4.

daily, continually active about the service of the tabernacle for the temple, ministering unto the high priest. Well, that is who we are day and night, this kingdom of priests.

“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men....”²⁵

Speaking there of Christ.

“...but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.”²⁶

This is that spiritual temple, that spiritual kingdom. And notice:

“...an holy priesthood.”²⁷

In the Old Testament the priests were covered with those garments that were given to them that represented holiness. We have in the Lord Jesus Christ, if he has paid our debt, God has imputed to us that holiness, that righteousness, that justice that is equal to God himself and therefore that is our garment. That is what we wear. That is how we enter in and out of his presence.

“...to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”²⁸

You can see how this is set forth in the New Testament but prophesied here in the Old Testament. Ye, coming back to Isaiah 61 and verse six, that is every member of God’s true Israel kingdom, not just pastors, name do the Lord, that shows how it is that they have been so declared and made. And no longer based upon offerings of tithes and other thing that men like to preach up today. You look here in our context it says:

“...ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles [or nations], and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.”²⁹

Even that is typical. The Old Testament priests were to each off of the tithes that were brought by the children of Israel. A tenth of what they grew went to keep these priests nourished. But it was limited. It was a tenth. The word here in verse six of Isaiah 61 is unlimited.

“...ye shall eat the riches...”³⁰

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 1 Peter 2:4-5.

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Isaiah 61:6.

³⁰ Ibid.

Think about the riches of the grace of God. Paul speaks of it, the exceeding abundant riches of his grace and mercy that we have in Christ. And we eat of that, not of something that has been contributed by the hand of man, but by the very riches of God in Christ. And it says:

“...and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.”³¹

In other words, there is going to be one glory. There is going to be one source of riches of which we partake and that is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the last point to bring out here in Isaiah 61 verses seven through nine is this priesthood proclaimed. What a priesthood. I would that the Lord would enable us to enter in just in the brief time that is left to understand just what the Lord has given to us in Christ. I know some people talk about wanting to go back to the old days, not me. I hear some even saying that if we could just get back to the New Testament church... I don't want to even go back there. No, what we have now in the Lord Jesus Christ... notice in verse seven, eight and nine. It is all described in terms of what is everlasting. See, all of those things were temporal. They had a designed end that God purposed, but not the work of Christ. There is here a ministering unto God that endures not just in this lifetime, but throughout eternity.

Do you realize Christ said that?

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”³²

That means that any one of the Lord's that he is pleased to take from this world, they simply it is a transition. They simply continue to worship and rejoice in the Lamb throughout eternity. We think of loved ones who have gone before that the Lord has redeemed and called to himself here and they have gone. We miss them, but we would never want them back. And they certainly never want to be back. I think of some that I with stammering tongue have endeavored to preach Christ to and have sat where you are sitting and listened to this poor stammering tongue that now are around the throne singing:

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”³³

They are not going to want to hear Ken Wimer's voice. As much as they told Ken Wimer that they were comforted by the Word at the time, this pales in comparison to being there and hearing the voice of Christ himself. But that is that ongoing ministry. When Christ had made of us a kingdom of priests, it is forever. It is throughout eternity. And that is what I see here.

Notice in verse seven every one of these represents something everlasting. It says:

³¹ Ibid.

³² John 11:26.

³³ Revelation 5:12.

“For your shame ye shall have double.”³⁴

It doesn't mean you will have double shame, but it means that the Lord would bless you with blessings beyond any shame that you ever could have imagined. And I think about even... talk about going back. Some people say, “Well, if we could just go back to what Adam was before the fall....” I don't even want to go there, because that was a fallible state of being that he was in. he was purposed to fall. Do you realize that we have in Christ a righteousness that is equal to God himself? Do you not see how that is double any portion of shame that we had in Adam? That is what it is talking about here.

“...and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.”³⁵

I know I was a lost sinner, but I don't dwell on what I was before it pleased God to reveal Christ in me, because right now whatever that confusion was, the Lord has given me a portion beyond anything I could ever imagine. And I dwell in him. I rejoice in him. It says:

“...therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them.”³⁶

So that is this priesthood proclaimed. This is one unlike any that they had experienced and known at that point, unlike any that the world has ever known. Right now today, as I speak to you, I read this not too long ago. Israel, you talk about blindness, but they are trying to raise up a kingdom of priest. They have got a school of kids in national Israel that they are trying to prepare for when a supposed Messiah comes back this kingdom will be ready. They are trying to do it and they have got these kids in isolation somewhere and what they are raising is religious lost zealots is what they are doing. They have completely missed God's purpose here.

Now we have already in Christ that kingdom and we have in him that everlasting joy unto us. What did Christ say?

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”³⁷

But a joy, a peace more abundant than anything that we could ever imagine or think. So we see how this priesthood is proclaimed. But, secondly, in verse eight an everlasting covenant. Up there an everlasting joy. Verse eight, an everlasting covenant. Again, the Lord says:

“For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering.”³⁸

³⁴ Isaiah 61:7.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John 14:27.

When he says, “I love judgment,” he loves truth. Where was truth satisfied? Where were mercy and truth, where did they meet together? It was in Christ? Those that continue to think that somehow they are bringing some sort of offering to God, God hates. It is not that they are, as people say, “Well, they are wrong, but, you know, God can turn a blind eye.” No, he doesn’t. He loves judgment. To come in any other way as Cain sought to do, to bring any kind of other offering is to be hated of God. That is what it says here.

“For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work.”³⁹

In other words, every one that Christ has redeemed.

“...direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.”⁴⁰

When did he do that? When Christ died. When Christ gave his disciples that cup and passed it and said:

“For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”⁴¹

That was... this is the everlasting covenant that he came and established in his death. And that is what our priesthood is founded on, this everlasting covenant.

But, third, and finally, we see in verse nine an everlasting seed. It says:

“And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles.”⁴²

In other words, it is a seed, these trees planted, as you see up in verse three, these trees of righteousness, this people, is among all nations.

“And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles.”⁴³

God in Christ purchased a people out of every tribe, nation and tongue.

“...and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.”⁴⁴

A lot of people today trying to find the Lord’s blessing. I will tell you what. It is in Christ and Christ alone. And in him you can’t have a greater blessing. That is why I kind of tell

³⁸ Isaiah 61:8.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Matthew 26:28.

⁴² Isaiah 61:9.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

people, "Leave me alone," when they come knocking on the door wanting to talk to you about some second blessing that you can experience or enjoy. There is no greater blessing than to be in Christ. There is no greater blessing than to be accepted in the beloved. There is no greater blessing than to have the peace and assurance that when he died your sins were put away forever and that the only thing remaining, so complete was his sacrifice, was for God to impute that righteousness to your account. But that is the kingdom of priests. And this is the God that we worship through the Lord Jesus Christ.