

Columbus Day

October 12

The Gospel Advances Westward

The Lord has sought for himself a man after his own heart.
I Samuel 13:14

Introduction

Christopher Columbus is well-known as the man who discovered America. However, most people do not know the true version of his story, or of the spiritual side of his life. Christopher means *light bearer* and he lived up to this name because he bore the light of the gospel to others, as he worked with all his heart to accomplish what he believed God told him to do. As is true of all of us, he had his flaws. Columbus was a widower, but had a relationship with Beatriz Enriquez that produced his son, Fernando. If he ever remarried, he did not make it public. He did not possess a Biblical view of slavery. He participated in many of the errors of Roman Catholicism, although he reflected some Protestant themes such as the personal study of Scripture and the fact that laymen could read and interpret the Word of God for themselves. It is easy for us, over 500 years after his famous voyages and discoveries, to concentrate on his imperfections or to judge him by the light that we have today. But as Christians we need to search for God's purposes in the life and accomplishments of Columbus. We must ask, in spite of Columbus's sinful nature, how did God use him to advance the Gospel?

The Chain of Christianity®

One of the themes in the story of Columbus is the westward move of the gospel, also known as the Chain of Christianity. Dr. Carole Adams, President of the Foundation for American Christian Education, defines the Chain of Christianity as "God's use of individual men and nations to move the Gospel westward and to effect internal liberty in the civil sphere."¹ God used this man to advance the Gospel further west and he was a stepping-stone for others in this marvelous plan of God.

Columbus embraced a belief in a sovereign God, the providential view of history and the fact that God was using him for His purposes. Of course those embracing other worldviews do not see it this way. In an ironic twist, the National Council of Churches has declared, "What some historians have termed a 'discovery' was in reality an invasion and colonization with legalized occupation, genocide, economic exploitation and a deep level of institutional racism and moral decadence."² False pre-suppositions will always produce false conclusions.

Columbus never made it to his intended destination, the Holy Land. However, "Columbus's discovery of America was in itself a victory over Islam, for it more than doubled the area of Christianity"³ according to Kay Brigham, translator of Columbus's *Book of Prophecies*. As is true of many pioneers, Columbus did not realize the full significance of what he had accomplished, but he did see it as a victory for Christians and the kingdom of God:

So since our redeemer gave this victory to our most illustrious King and Queen and to their famous realms, in so great a matter, it is fitting for all Christendom to rejoice and make celebrations and give solemn thanks to the Holy Trinity with

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*many solemn prayers for the great exaltation which it will have in the turning of so many peoples to our holy faith, and afterwards for the temporal benefits which henceforth will bring great refreshment and gain, not only to Spain, but to all Christians.*⁴

There is no doubt that Columbus saw this as a missionary and Christian endeavor. He wanted the mission to stay pure, and was on guard against those who would interject other purposes or agendas. On November 27, 1492, writing to Ferdinand and Isabella, Columbus urges:

*And I say that, your Highnesses must not consent that any foreigner set foot here or trade but only Catholic Christians, since this was the beginning and end of the proposition that it should be for the increase and glory of the Christian religion, and that no one should come to these regions who is not a good Christian.*⁵

Twenty-five years after Columbus made his famous discovery, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, starting the Protestant Reformation. God was to bring more light to the world than Columbus had and He was to reserve America for Reformational Protestantism, through the nations of England, Scotland and others.

In the Providence of God we are thankful that Columbus never made it to the mainland of America, and that our nation was colonized by Protestant Christians from England, Scotland and other areas, not Catholic Spain or France. Katherine Dang, President of Philomath Publications, noted:

*Providence kept Latin Christianity from taking claim of North America. All things worked together to divert Columbus from the shores of Florida . . . In the name of Spain, Columbus brought Latin Christianity into the New World and planted it in those lands extending from the Bahamas southward into South America. Spain and Columbus only understood government as despotism. Their fervor for the Christian faith and its propagation took the form of law and militancy. Spain was particularly militant because of her long and agonizing battles with the hated Moslem invaders. Thus, wherever Latin Christianity was extended, despotism and law prevailed.*⁶

Miss Dang makes another excellent observation on the relationship of theology to civil government. Roman Catholicism espouses a top-down view of government. This leads to despotism. Protestant Christianity espouses the Biblical, bottom-up view of government. This is also known as Christian self-government and it leads to Republicanism, a Biblical form of civil government. Liberty is the end result! We must recognize that God wanted the world to see the blessings of liberty demonstrated in a nation that honored Him in their forms of government—individual, family, church and civil.

What Motivated Him?

Let us review the story of Columbus, not with an emphasis of learning all the details, but with an emphasis on understanding the heart and purposes of God, and Columbus's relationship with God. Let us begin by trying to understand what motivated Columbus.

Columbus lived in a pre-Reformational day, when Christianity was largely dominated by Roman Catholicism. Columbus understood Christianity through the lens of the teachings of the Catholic Church. As we know today, Columbus would have been limited in his understanding of Biblical truth because of this. As we study his life, we need to keep this in mind and not judge him according to our understanding of Scripture today, which is far more advanced.

In Columbus's day, Muslims occupied the Holy Land. The Crusades raged until about 1291, as Christians believed that the Holy Land belonged to them, not this pagan religion. Columbus became motivated to personally lead a crusade to the Holy Land, where he would be a great blessing to the Lord and have all of his sins forgiven. He read *The*

Travels of Marco Polo that told him of the Great Khan who lived in India, far to the east. Great Khan wanted someone to come and tell him the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe, thought Columbus, if he went and told him the gospel, the Khan would reward him by giving him gold. Columbus could use this money to finance his crusade. Columbus felt that God told him to sail a ship, not around the tip of Africa, but to the west across the Atlantic, to get to the Great Khan. Columbus went to Ferdinand and Isabella, King and Queen of Spain, to secure the funding for the voyage. After persevering seven years, they finally agreed and they wrote a Credence Letter to the Great Khan. This letter, to be delivered to the Khan, was a greeting and explanation of the gospel.

By listening to the words of Columbus we may discern what his reasons were for this endeavor. Columbus wrote only one book, *Libro de las Profecias* that is now called his *Book of Prophecies*. He wrote it while awaiting orders to make a fourth voyage. In it we find “a careful compilation of all the teachings of the Bible on the subject of the earth, distant lands, seas, population movement, undiscovered tribes, prophecies of the future spread of the gospel throughout the world, prophecies of travel between distant places, prophecies of the end of the world and the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.”⁷ This is part of a letter written to Ferdinand and Isabella:

Most Christian and very high Princes:

My argument for the restitution of the Holy Temple to the Holy militant Church is the following:

Very high Princes: at a very early age I went to sea and have continued navigation until today. The art of sailing is favorable for anyone who wants to pursue knowledge of this world’s secrets. I have already been at this business for forty years. I have sailed all the waters which, up to now, have been navigated. I have had dealings and conversation with learned people—clergymen and laymen, Latins and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and with many others of other sects. I found Our Lord very well-disposed toward me in this my desire, and he gave me the spirit of intelligence for it. He prospered me in seamanship and supplied me with the necessary tools of astrology, as well as geometry and arithmetic and ingenuity of intellect and of manual skill to draw spherical maps which show cities, rivers and mountains, islands and ports—everything in its proper place.

At this time I have seen and put in study to look into the Scriptures, cosmography, histories, chronicles and philosophy and other arts, which our Lord opened to my understanding (I could sense his hand upon me), so that it became clear to me that it was feasible to navigate from here to the Indies; and he unlocked within me the determination to execute the idea. And I came to your highnesses with this ardor. All those who heard about my enterprise rejected it with laughter, scoffing at me. Neither the sciences which I mentioned above, nor the authoritative citations from them, were of any avail. In only your Highnesses remained faith and constancy. Who doubts that this illumination was from the Holy Spirit? I attest that he [the Spirit], with marvelous rays of light consoled me through the holy and sacred Scriptures, a strong and clear testimony, with the forty four books of the Old Testament, and four Gospels with twenty-three Epistles of those blessed Apostles, encouraging me to proceed, and, continually, without ceasing for a moment, they inflame me with a sense of great urgency.

Our Lord wished to perform the clearest miracle in this [matter] of the voyage to the Indies, to console me and others in this other [matter] of the Holy Temple: I spent seven years in your royal Court arguing the case with so many persons of such authority and learned in all the arts, and in the end they concluded that all was idle nonsense, and with this they gave up [the project]; yet the outcome will be the fulfillment of what our Redeemer Jesus Christ said, and had said beforehand by the mouth of his Holy Prophets. And so there is every reason to believe that this other [prophecy concerning the voyage to the Indies] will become manifest; and being sure of what we hope for, if what [has been] said does not suffice, I offer as support the holy Gospel, in which Jesus stated that everything would pass away, but not his wonderful Word (Matthew 24:35); and with this he said that it was necessary for all that was written by him by the Prophets to be fulfilled. (Luke 24:44) . . . I only hold fast the Holy and Sacred Scriptures . . .⁸

At the end of this letter Columbus acknowledges his understanding of the sinful nature of man proclaiming, “I am the worst of sinners. The pity and mercy of our Lord have completely covered me whenever I have called [on him]

for them.”⁹ Again he expressed his faith and trust in God, and his belief in the providential view of life, with these inspiring words:

No one should be afraid to take on any enterprise in the name of our Savior, if it is right and if the purpose is purely for his holy service . . . The working out of all things was entrusted by our Lord to each person, [but it happens] in conformity with his sovereign will, even though he gives advice to many. He lacks nothing that it may be in the power of men to give him. O, how good is the Lord who wishes people to perform that for which he holds himself responsible! Day and night, and at every moment, everyone should give him their most devoted thanks.

The recurring themes in his *Book of Prophecies* are these:

1. The advancement of the kingdom of God; the overthrow of idols and the worship of the God of the Bible
2. The regaining of Jerusalem by Christians
3. The preaching of the Gospel to the whole world

A few passages from this book will suffice to reveal what God placed in the heart of this man:

*The Lord will prevail against them and will completely destroy all the [false] gods of the nations of the earth. And all the islands of the nations, each one from its particular place, will worship him [the true God].*¹¹

*And for that reason he concluded that [the law of Mohammed] would be quickly destroyed and that this was a great consolation for the Christians.*¹²

*The argument I have for the restitution of the Holy Temple to the Holy Church: . . . I only hold fast to the Holy and Sacred Scriptures and to some prophetic authoritative citations from certain holy persons, who have said something about this under divine inspiration . . .*¹³

*All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord and all nations will bow down in his presence, because dominion belongs to the Lord and he himself will rule over the nations.*¹⁴

Motivation Myths

Many interpreters of history assert that Columbus made his voyages for *glory and gold*. We need to examine his words and his actions in this regard. Columbus intentionally expressed his motivations. In a letter to Ferdinand and Isabella he states:

*Let those who have charity, justice and truth weep for me! I did not come on this voyage for gain, honor, or wealth, that is certain; for then the hope of all such things was dead. I came to Your Highnesses with honest purpose and sincere zeal; and I do not lie . . . Christ-bearer*¹⁵

Indeed Columbus did spend much time looking for gold, because he needed it for three legitimate reasons: to support himself, so he could lead a crusade to the Holy Land and so he could pay the high costs of the voyages. There are some that add another reason, believing that Columbus would use the money to buy indulgences and therefore help relatives and friends get to heaven. Whether or not we believe these are proper motivations, we can see that Columbus was not just a greedy man, trying to amass a fortune to spend on his own personal desires.

The Voyage

The year 1492 was momentous, for in January the Spanish had driven the last of the Moors out of their nation. Also, that year they expelled the Jews that lived among them. Finally, the trip to the Orient, led by Christopher

Columbus, was ready to commence. On April 3, 1492, the three ships, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, were ready to sail. All sailors received communion and made their confession. Constitutional attorney John Eidsmoe writes:

*Columbus received the very holy sacrament of the Eucharist on the very day that he entered upon the sea; and in the name of Jesus ordered the sails to be set and left the harbor of Palos for the river of Saltes and the Ocean Sea with three equipped caravels, giving the commencement to the First Voyage and Discovery of the Indies.*¹⁶

The routines of these ships were filled with Christian practices and the seamen of that day were considered the most religious of all professions. As each day began, a young sailor would sing out:

*Blessed be the light of day
and the Holy Cross, we say;
and the Lord of Veritie
and the Holy Trinity.
blessed be th' immortal soul
and the Lord who keeps it whole,
blessed be the light of day
and He who sends the night away.*¹⁷

The Lord's Prayer was then recited followed by the Ave Maria. The final prayer was this:

*God give us good days, good voyage, a good passage to the ship, sir captain and master and good company, so let it be, let there be a good voyage; many good days may God grant your graces, gentlemen of the afterguard and gentlemen forward.*¹⁸

Land Ho!

On October 12, land was sighted. As they prepared to land, his men called Columbus by the title that he had now earned, "Admiral of the Ocean Sea". Columbus disembarked first, carrying the royal standard. He and his faithful crew knelt in the sand and were led in this prayer:

*O Lord, Almighty and everlasting God, by Thy holy Word Thou hast created the heaven, and the earth, and the sea; blessed and glorified be Thy Name, and praised be Thy Majesty, which hath deigned to use us, Thy humble servants, that Thy holy Name may be proclaimed in this second part of the earth.*¹⁹

Columbus named the island San Salvador which means "Holy Savior". He called the people "Indians" because he thought he had reached the Indies. He searched for the Great Khan for a month but could not find him. So he began to teach the Indians about his Savior. Three other islands that he discovered were named Trinidad (Trinity), Vera Cruz (True Cross) and La Navidad (The Nativity). Columbus planted a cross on every island that he discovered, claiming it for Christ and for Spain.

Columbus had some successes and many failures, problems and disappointments. One of his ships sank and one ran away; he found no gold. At this low point the Great Cacique, an Indian king friend, felt sorry for Columbus and told his Indian friends to collect gifts to give him. They brought back enough to fill a chest and it was mostly gold! Columbus was elated because he could now return and fulfill his mission to the Holy Land.

Indians

Treatment of native people was to be a great concern for explorers and pioneers. Columbus was directed by the King and Queen to treat the "Indians" with the greatest kindness and respect, knowing that doing so would result in a greater chance for their conversion. They instructed him before his second voyage:

*Force and compel all those who sail therein as well as all others who are to go out from here later on, that they treat the said Indians very well and lovingly abstain from doing them any injury, arranging that both peoples hold much conversation and intimacy, each serving the other to the best of their ability. Moreover, the said Admiral shall graciously present them with things from the merchandise of Their Highnesses which he is carrying for barter, and honor them much; and if some person or persons should maltreat the said Indians in any manner whatsoever, the said Admiral, as Viceroy and Governor of Their Highnesses, shall punish them severely by the virtue of the authority vested in him by Their Majesties for this purpose . . .*²⁰

As I have stated, one of Columbus's main motivations was to spread the gospel. How then did he look upon the Indians that he came in contact with? Recorded in the log of his journeys we find this entry on Friday, October 12, 1492, the day of first landfall:

*That they might feel great friendship to us [he says] and because I knew they were a people who would better be freed and converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force, I gave them some red caps and some glass beads which they placed around their necks, and many other things of small value with which they were greatly pleased, and were so friendly to us that it was wonderful . . . Finally they took everything and willingly gave what things they had. Further, it appeared to me that they were a very poor people, in everything . . . They must be good servants and intelligent, as I see that they very quickly say all that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily become Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no sect.*²¹

One of Columbus's flaws was that he did hold to the opinion of his day that slavery was an acceptable practice. We must remember, however, that in the New World Columbus only put the cannibalistic Caribs into slavery, and he considered this a just punishment for their crimes.²²

Six years after his discovery and landing at San Salvador, the heart of Columbus still yearned for the spiritual growth of the native people. He wrote, on February 22, 1498, in the *Testament of Founding Hereditary Family Estate*:

*Also I order to said Don Diego, my son, or to him who will inherit said mayoralty, that he shall help to maintain and sustain on the island Espanola four good teachers of the holy theology with the intention to convert to our holy religion all those people in the Indies, and when it pleased God that the income of the mayoralty will increase, that then also be increased the number of such devoted persons who will help all these people to become Christians. And may he not worry about the money that it will be necessary to spend for the purpose . . .*²³

His Character and Relationship With God

Columbus was a man with a deep, sincere relationship with his God. A few statements and prayers of his will suffice in showing his heart toward his Savior:

*My hope in the One who created us all sustains me: He is an ever present help in trouble . . . When I was extremely depressed, He raised me with His right hand, saying, O man of little faith, get up, it is I; do not be afraid.*²⁴

*[O] God, who without ostentatious clamor or effort teaches the hearts of humankind and who makes stammering tongues eloquent and who is ever ready to come near at the opportune time, please consider the thoughts of our minds and be favorably inclined toward our desires. For we, inasmuch as we are limited in human knowledge, have indeed fathomed your power, because, O Lord, blessed is the one you teach and to whom you make known your law. We beseech you, O Lord, to cause us to understand what has been written about you and about your Holy Place: instructions, books, and prophecies, under the inspiration of the Spirit. Amen.*²⁵

Columbus evidenced much Christian character. He has been described by some as a skilled debater, a good conversationalist, having a brilliant mind despite little formal education, tenacious, and a man of great patience and faith. Katherine Dang writes of him, "And what mariner, at this crucial point in time, would have vision so great as to inspire him to literally set his sails westward and to leap into the dark; faith so bold as to courageously defy all

temptation to fear and retreat; conviction, spirit, and hope so indomitable as to endure ten years of overwhelming rejection, disappointment, and ridicule. God prepared such an individual—Christopher Columbus.”²⁶ His son Ferdinand wrote a biography of him in which he stated this:

*He was so strict in matters of religion that for fasting and saying prayers he might have been taken for a member of a religious order. He was so great an enemy of swearing and blasphemy that I give my word, I never heard him utter any other oath than by St. Ferdinand! and when he grew angry with someone, his rebuke was to say God take you! for doing or saying that. If he had to write anything, he always began by writing these words: IESUS cum MARIA sit nobis in via. And so fine was his hand that he might have earned his bread by that skill alone.*²⁷

Conclusion

A person’s last words often reveal their true character as did the last words of Columbus:

*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum. (Into your hands, Father, I commend my soul.)*²⁸

I conclude with the words of Columbus scholar Kay Brigham:

*Indeed, the discovery of the New World was not the result of chance or even the result of the genius of the visionary and tenacious Genoese navigator who dared to challenge the mighty Ocean. The Lord chooses nations and individuals to accomplish his purposes in history. And, without a doubt, Christopher Columbus considered himself a divinely chosen man, predestined to carry out God’s designs, and, according to the word of the Lord, a man to fulfill my purposes (Isa. 46:11).*²⁹

Celebrate Columbus Day with Your Family!

- Read through this chapter as a family; take turns reading one paragraph each.
- Check out a copy of Columbus’s log and read portions of it together.
- Order *Teaching Christopher Columbus, Christ-bearer to the New World* from www.facebookstore.net.
- Tour Columbus’s ships! <http://www.thenina.com>

Endnotes

1. Carole Adams, *The StoneBridge Standards* (Chesapeake, VA.: Foundation For American Christian Education, 2003), 24
2. Catherine Millard, *Christopher Columbus—Christ-Bearer To Uncharted Isles* Christian Heritage News, (Fall 1991), 1
3. Kay Brigham, Translator, *Christopher Columbus’s Book of Prophecies* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: TSELF, Inc., 1991), 21
4. *Ibid*, 24
5. William Roy, editor, *The Log of Christopher Columbus* (Clifton Park, NY: William Roy), 63
6. Katherine Dang, *Christopher Columbus On the Chain of Christianity, The Journal of the Foundation for American Christian Education* (Volume IV, 1992), 75
7. Catherine Millard, *Christopher Columbus—Christ-Bearer To Uncharted Isles*, 1
8. Kay Brigham, Translator, *Christopher Columbus’s Book of Prophecies*, 178–179
9. *Ibid*, 182
10. *Ibid*, 183
11. *Ibid*, 206
12. *Ibid*, 218

13. Ibid, 178–179
14. Ibid, 207
15. William J. Federer editor, *America's God and Country* (Coppell, Texas: Fame Publishing, Inc., 1994), 131
16. John Eidsmoe, *Columbus & Cortez, Conquerors for Christ* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1992), 108
17. Ibid, 107
18. Ibid, 107
19. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1977), 41
20. John Eidsmoe, *Columbus & Cortez, Conquerors for Christ*, 112–113
21. William Roy, editor, *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, 21
22. William Roy, *The Great Missionary Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (Clifton Park, NY: William Roy, 1991), 15
23. Catherine Millard, *The Rewriting of America's History* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Horizon House Publishers, 1991), 3
24. William J. Federer editor, *America's God and Country* (Coppell, Texas: Fame Publishing, Inc., 1994), 131
25. Kay Brigham, *Christopher Columbus* (Barcelona, Spain: M.C.E. Horeb, 1990), 78–79
26. Katherine Dang, *Christopher Columbus On the Chain of Christianity*, 68
27. John Eidsmoe, *Columbus & Cortez, Conquerors for Christ*, 96
28. Ibid, 125
29. Kay Brigham, *Christopher Columbus*, 47