

Who is Jesus? - Union with Christ

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[0:00] So the question, who is Jesus, and the centrality of this, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, the life, the life, no one comes to the Father except by me.

And our life with God specifically depends on Jesus. And we're going to think today about the corporate Jesus, meaning to say, not corporate in the sense of a big company like IBM or Amazon or Coca-Cola, but the fact that the Jesus of the Bible is not in fact simply himself in isolation, but the Jesus of the Bible is a Jesus who incorporates, that's to say, to makes into a body and affects a whole, now the NASUWT, National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, and he said that if I was going to live next door in the house that we then owned, I had to join the NAS.

I think on reflection he was joking, but I took it seriously and joined the... He stands in heaven and says, these may be true, but I demand that the charges be dismissed because they've already been paid for.

And he stands in heaven interceding for us and saying, I demand, I respectfully demand that my client be released immediately from all the guilt, shame, accusations of sin because it's all being dealt with.

So we thank God for the representation of Christ. We thank God that Jesus is our representative. Union goes further than this.

[1:47] Okay, that was representation. Second idea, substitution. Now that's a little bit different. Substitution begins to... ..with the idea of exchange in some shape or form.

So in substitution, we are standing in a certain place and Christ pushes us out of the way and he stands there instead. He substitutes himself.

So you get substitution in football. Some of you know about how it happens, that there's a footballer who, for one reason or another, they say, you can stop playing, get off the pitch, put on a substitute, and the substitute plays instead.

Yeah, that's right, isn't it? The footballer goes off the pitch and the new one plays in that person's place. So again, it is a...

So again, it is a... There's a distance. There has to be a distance. They can't go separated by the process of substitution. And this is one main way of understanding what Jesus did on the cross.

[2:55] In other words, the atonement. And you could work it like this. That in our sin, we push him off the throne because we say we're going to be king of our own lives.

We're going to decide what we're going to do. Just like Ellen was saying, we push Christ off the throne. But Christ pushes us off the cross. We ought to be on the cross.

And he pushes us off the cross and says, I'll go into that place instead of you. He bears the penalty instead of us. And there are many texts that speak in this exchanging, substitutionary way.

So Isaiah 53, 5 says, He was pierced for our transgressions. By his wounds, we are healed.

And you see there's an exchanging process there. The transgressions are ours. But he's pierced for them. And by his...

[3:55] So that's a very powerful idea of substitution. Of course, to be careful and make sure we've understood our sin for a limited period.

But we don't gain his righteousness for a limited period. By his work on the cross. But I would say that union goes further than this.

So let's look at the idea of union. So union. We all share together in a structured way. So we're not a Buddhist sort of mass of everything all in together.

The structure. But you win. That's right, isn't it? They don't each individually have to score the winning goal because they're in a team together.

One person scores the winning goal. They all win. Same sort of thing for a union. A trade union. If a paid goal is struck, then we all benefit.

[5:01] So there's that union idea there. And you think of your own body. You wouldn't get your feet mixed up with your hands, would you?

They're different. Yes? Yeah, that's right. But you know perfectly well you have one body. And there is...

Your body is one. So there's a union there. There is a... So it's all shared. And it's all together.

There isn't a sort of distance thing.

There's a combination thing. And I forgot to look up the exact title of this something limb syndrome.

And there is apparently where... This is when it goes wrong.

Where you don't realize that your hand belongs to you. This seems a rather weird thing. So you're lying in bed scratching the back of your neck.

[5:55] And you think, whose hand is doing that? What? And we instinctively don't have that sense. We have the sense that we all belong together. One united with all.

So that's the union thought. So let's now, having got the ideas a little bit in our heads, we'll go through...

I've got this the wrong... No, I haven't. Right way around. Yes. So let's think... Is this in the Bible?

So I don't want to push it onto the Bible if it's not there.

But now we know what to look for. Let's think, do we have this sort of thing in the Bible? So, let's go right back to the beginning and think about Adam.

So Adam was made in the image of God. So notice there's already some sort of likeness there.

So...

[6:53] No, I have to be careful how I use language here. Adam is made in the image of God. So let's try and use a...

Let's not use a word. That's Adam. God is like a mountain, but only like a mountain.

He is compared to a rock, isn't it? The Lord, our rock. But he isn't a rock. He is like a rock in some ways. And Jesus, says God, is like a hen wanted to gather her chicks.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not. So there's some sort of... I'm trying not to use the word likeness. Okay, there's some sort of a likeness there, but it's not very strong.

But Adam is in a strong likeness to God. Do you see what I'm trying to say here? God's made lots of things, but when he made humankind, there is a very strong likeness between God and himself.

[8:03] When Paul reflects on this, but when Adam sinned, he took his people with him. They were all tied up in a bundle together.

So my favorite illustration of this is bubble wrap. Okay, all of you who have bought anything off eBay have ended up with loads of bubble wrap. Yeah? And it raises the question, if you wanted to buy bubble wrap on, this is the way Jesus is with his people.

It's I and the children you have given me. There's a sort of family grouping there. And if you really want to look into something obscure, if you go into Daniel chapter 7, you'll find the son of man there. And there's a parallel between the individual son of man and the people. Anyway, that one gets a bit into deep water. But there are definitely Old Testament ideas of union.

Yes? Of one person and union. A bit like the tree and the root of the ivy. Okay, now let's come into the New Testament. And all I'm going to do is just pick up some examples, which I hope will help us as we go through.

[9:18] So number one, union. Number one, incarnation. incarnation. Now you might remember that I paused a little bit on this last Sunday. And I said there's more to this than meets the eye.

And I think this is where this is going here. John chapter 1 says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Now what's happening here in those few words is God, the word, entering union with humanness.

The word became flesh. And I'd like to suggest, and I'm suggesting it because the man who wrote the book that I've been reading suggested it. And I think he was on to the right thing. That this is, as it were, the beginning of something really quite remarkable.

That God, at this point, enters union with humanity. And what happens afterwards sort of comes off that first extraordinary step that God comes down to be one with us in some sense.

[10:40] The huge step of joining humanness with divinity, think what this involves, what it leads to, and where it's heading. That was number one. Number two, we've looked at this before, we looked at this a couple of weeks ago, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

So here's another huge step change in the way God relates to people, that he pours out the Holy Spirit onto sinful people, into their hearts, as promised, and God enters relationship with people because of Jesus.

Now that's what happens on the day of Pentecost. I'm not going to go very much further into that. We pick up a little bit on it later on. But here are two huge events that have a bearing on union between God and man.

Christ becoming flesh, the Spirit being poured out on the church. Here's number three.

The bride and bridegroom. Now each of the Gospels, when they start us up on the story of Jesus, mention this quite early on.

[12:16] So you get it in Matthew 9.15, Mark 2.18, John 5.34. Can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?

Do you remember that? It comes, it's on, they're discussing fasting and John the Baptist's track record of fasting and they say to Jesus, why don't your disciples fast?

And he says, ah, the bridegroom is here. How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?

So he flags up at this early stage that he's the bridegroom and that his church is the bride. John 2.1-2.11.

Anybody know what that is? It isn't quite the same, but it's similar. What happens in John 2.1-11? It is the water into wine which takes place at the wedding.

[13:14] A wedding. This seems to me is a new note that is sounded.

We didn't get much about wedding in the Old Testament. It's not entirely absent, but when Jesus comes on the scene, he says, I want us to think about weddings. I want us to think about the bride and the groom.

Now what happens at a wedding? At a marriage, there is a joyful, loving formation of a new unit where two people become one.

So weddings are great. It's a joyful, loving union of two new people. And I know some of you, to some of you, this is a history lesson, but there is a book that was written long ago called *Pride and Prejudice*, and it was on the BBC a long time ago, and also Keira Knightley had a version of it, didn't she?

And it is the story of Eliza Bennett who is financially challenged. Jane Austen didn't put it that way, but that was the situation.

[14:35] And Mr. Darcy, who is basically a multimillionaire and has this massive stately home in Derbyshire called Pemberley. And to begin with, they wouldn't give each other the time of day, but as the story goes through, Eliza realises that she's in love with Mr. Darcy and that she will become mistress of Pemberley Hall.

And all the hearts beat, and they end up being happily married. It's, you see how soppy I am because I quite like this story, but the thought of poor Eliza being wrapped by the arms of Mr. Darcy, played by Colin Firth, I hasten to add, and he endows her with all his wealth, and she was sort of lost, alone, unprotected, unprovided for, and she suddenly becomes ennobled, enriched, loved, valued, cherished by this wonderful husband.

And in marriage, you share together in all kinds of ways. And the Bible says this is a deeply true way of understanding what it is to be a Christian.

It is for us, Eliza Bennett, to find our Mr. Darcy in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is full of protection, and love, and enrichment, and ennoblement, and all of those things, and he takes us up into his estate, if you like.

And when Paul talks about human marriage, he puts in this little bit. This is human heterosexual marriage, I hasten to add, because the Bible's view of marriage is it's two unlike beings.

[16:37] So a same-sex union is not a marriage in this sense. Well, it's not marriage at all. But this is what the Bible speaks of as marriage.

This is a profound mystery, he says, and I'm talking about Christ and the church. There is a profound, true, deep understanding that Christ and his people have a union which we can understand by looking at what marriage is.

And it says, and I'm going to look it up, it's in Ephesians chapter 5, it says things like this about this union.

It says, Christ loved the church, which verse am I in? Can't find it. He loved the church, verse 25, and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless.

And this is Christ, the great husband of the church, loving the church, sacrificially, giving himself to her to take her from the gutter, if you like, and to make her beautiful and clean and wholesome and beautiful and radiant.

[18:11] And this is what Christ does for the church so that he can marry her, to present her to himself as a radiant church. And it speaks about the duty of husbands to nourish and look after their wives.

And in verse 29, it says, this is what we do to our own bodies. We nourish and care for our bodies. You know, we put moisturizing cream on our hands and we shampoo our hair and all that sort of thing.

And he says, that's what you do with your body. That's what Christ does with the church. He nourishes and cares for the church. We are members of his body. So here is number three.

The bride and the bridegroom. This union of love, this union of care, of nourishing and cherishing as of one's own body.

This is what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is wonderful. This is what you don't have if you're not in the Lord Jesus Christ. Number four.

[19:22] This one's a quick one. Family. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray begins. Our Father.

That's right, isn't it? And you just think, what this is saying that we have a share in the family and that as Jesus can call God his Father, he invites us to say, we can, as it were, kneel alongside him in prayer and we can say along with him, our Father.

So there's a union there, a family, which I'm just going to mention and then I'm going to pass by fairly quickly. Number five. Here are some texts where Christ identifies with his people.

This is one that we looked at last week. This is the sheep and the goats. Do you remember this one where the king sits on his throne and has all the nations before him, separates the sheep from the goats and he says, this is the thing I'm going to look for.

Did you do such and such or not do such and such to the least of these my people? And then he says, if you did or didn't do it to the least of these my people, you did or didn't do it to me.

[20:45] And you could easily miss that. But do you notice what he's saying? He's saying that I, the Christ, the king, am in this relationship with my people that if you do something to them, you're doing something to me.

We're sort of like one body. It's a bit like saying somebody bumps into your, treads on your toe and you say, excuse me, you just hurt me.

And they say, I didn't hurt you, I hurt your toe. That's completely different. And you say, no, the toe's part of me. And Jesus is saying, these people are part of me. When the apostle Paul, who was previously known as Saul, was converted, the risen Jesus Christ spoke to him audibly and directly and said to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute?

What's the next word? Me. Same thing, isn't it? But Saul would have said, no, I'm not persecuting you. I wouldn't dream of doing that.

I'm persecuting your people. And Jesus says, no, it's like my toe, that's me. If you're persecuting my people, you're persecuting me.

[22:05] And you might wonder whether that thought so got into the mind of Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the apostle, that he began to generate a whole theology of this, of understanding the relationship between Christ and his people.

Anyway, that's a speculation. What you do to them, you do to me, says Jesus. And I stop just to say, that's so important actually, to do things for Christ's people, just because they are Christ's people.

So it's a very obvious and rather blunt question. Have you, have you done anything for God's people because they are Christ's people? So anything, you know, measurably, measurably done. One obvious thing is to give money. You've done that. given service. Is there any noticeable way in which you put yourself out to do things for the people of Jesus Christ because they're the people of Jesus Christ?

Jesus is not very friendly to consumer Christianity where all you do is take. Is he? He's saying, no, I'm actually looking for people who've done something.

[23:27] If they omitted to do it, well you didn't do it to me. If they did it, they did it to me. So it's a question, isn't it? Do, have you sacrificed anything, put yourself out ever to do things for the people of Jesus Christ because they are the people of Jesus Christ?

Anyway, let's move on. Here's another union classic place in the Bible which is John chapter, it's on the left hand side of the page, it's chapter 15 where Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Now Jesus is contrasting this with the Old Testament version of the vine which would be the nation of Israel. And people would say, I'm in the vine, here's my birth certificate.

which proves that I am ethnically connected to Israel. That's it, that's all that matters. And I think people might still say that today.

But Jesus says, no, I'm the vine. And it's no good looking at a birth certificate, what you need to look at is your connection with me. And in John 14, 29 he says, because I live, you also will live.

[24:55] So the life that Jesus has, the risen life, becomes part of the life of his people because they're connected to him.

And you know this part very well of course where it says, I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you're separated, if you're distanced from Christ, then it does you no good at all. So I ask you again, are you joined to Jesus Christ or are you apart from Jesus Christ?

And there's a wonderful quotation from Calvin which I've completely forgotten where he says something like, if you're separated from Christ, all the promises and all the blessings and all the treasures in him do you no good at all until you are joined to him.

And we're joined to him as we come to him in repentance and faith. So the vine and the branches is about being joined together and if you, have we got any?

[26:02] Are they real? Imagine then a vine, a plant growing with the stems coming off it and the branches live because they are joined to the vine.

So we actually got a Virginia creeper on the other side of our wall and there's one branch that is completely brown and all the leaves are withering because I think it came unstuck from the main thing and it looks as though it's part of it, it's actually dead.

Now Jesus says your and my spiritual life depends on being joined to Jesus Christ and we share in some way which is rather, well it's unseen and therefore I think difficult to measure.

we share a union of shared life like the sap inside the vine an unseen flow of life and Jesus sort of spells things out and he says you need to abide in me so he makes it into a command to remain in me and he talks about remaining in my words.

if you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish and it will be given you so he connects this abiding in terms of words so this is the word of scripture these are the inscripturated words if those abide in you then there's fruitfulness so it's important that we fill our

lives with the words of Jesus and the words of scripture scripture and he also talks about it in if my words remain in you ask what you wish and it will be given you so there's a sort of the sap you can't really see because that's hidden but there's things that are visible like his words prayer and he's also going to go on to say obedience that these things are if you like the responsibility side of this union or the responsive side of this union if you keep my commands you will abide in my love so number six the vine and the branches number seven the head and the body so this is spelt out in detail in 1

[28:55] Corinthians 12 and onwards where it says things like this the body is a unit though it is made of many parts and though its parts are many they form one body so it is with Christ for we were all baptized by one spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks slave or free we were all given one spirit to drink I said I'd come back to the spirit which is mentioned here how is one body sort of maintained and joined well here he says it's the work of the spirit we were baptized sort of plunged by one spirit into one body or if you want to put it another way we all drank the one spirit and there were made one body so there's a sort of inner and yeah I'm going to go with the inner thing that the spirit works within us and thus produces and sustains this union with Jesus

Christ and when he talks about this particular aspect of union he is going to talk about unity and diversity he's going to say that the head is the head stays the head the body is the body so we're not confused with Jesus Christ we don't become him and then he's also going to say that toes remain toes and hands remain hands and your liver and your pancreas remain your liver and your pancreas and they all work in the body the body submits to Christ it comes about by the unseen work of the Holy Spirit and he's going to take this thought on the role that we all play as Christians in the body of mutual dependence we all have something to contribute we can't say to somebody I don't need you he's going to talk about the importance particularly of the weak and unrepresentable so if we were doing a publicity leaflet for the church we would obviously choose to put a photograph on the front of the most glamorous and handsome people and then you think well I don't think I'd make the grade on that and the doctrine of the body says yeah you're the people that Jesus is really interested in there's a special honour given to the weak and the unrepresentable parts because that's the way a body is which is a rather lovely thought I think and he's going to talk about the glue of love that's what he's going to talk about in chapter 13 and he's going to talk about the importance of each playing their part in the whole so that's a quick look at this aspect of union the head and the body number eight Ephesians which we've looked at and I think it would have been Ben that took us through this part of Ephesians talks about the whole Christian life in terms of being in Christ Ephesians chapter one says we're blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ it says we were chosen in him in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ and he says it is to the praise of the glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves and in verse seven it says in him we have redemption through his blood and in verse nine it says he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ and he says his ultimate purpose is to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head in Christ so just doing this ever so quickly and doing very well he encourages us not to think of ourselves as bits of bubble in the bubble wrap he says think of yourselves in Christ because that's the truth about what Christianity is about it's about bringing people into this union with Christ think of ourselves in that context and context is important let me show you here's a picture of somebody lying down on a table having their stomach cut open what should we do bring the police just look at the context pan back a bit they're in hospital they're under anaesthetic this man's a surgeon this person is trying to help this person yeah you look at the individual thing you'd think it was a violent act that somebody needed to be locked up but you look at the context it's a surgery that's fine or think of somebody being insulted and you call the police and then you pan back a little bit and it's on the stage they're doing a play and at the end of it you're going to give them a round of applause the context matters you see and here's somebody giving a cup of cold water and you think well that's completely insignificant cups of cold water are two a penny and you put it in the context that this is in the Lord Jesus Christ this person did this because of Jesus and it takes on a huge new significance here is a scrap of paper that somebody brings to you with a sort of circular scroll and some random

smudges on it and they give it to you what would you do throw it in the bin let me just give you the wider context it's been drawn by a three year old the circle is your face and the smudges are supposed to say I love you you look at it completely differently in that context wouldn't you and we're told that we're to look at our lives in the context of Jesus Christ just not to look at every little thing and evaluate it wrongly but look at the fact that we're chosen in Christ redeemed in Christ forgiven in Christ purposes for us in Christ and so on right number nine the last one is this really the passage that perplexes us

[35:46] I'll just read it and try not to make it any more confusing than it already is shall we go on in sin says Paul that grace may abound and he says absolutely not we oh dear we who died to sin how can we live in it any longer or don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father we too may live a new life if we were co-planted with him like this in his death we will certainly be co-raised with him in his resurrection we know that our old man was crucified with him no longer be saved to sin now if we died with Christ we believe we will also live with him and it seems to me brothers and sisters that this entire passage is to do with union with

Christ it says that the way you to understand how we deal with sin has to be embedded in the idea that we are in Christ or with Christ it's based on union with Christ it's based on union with him specifically in the fact that he died and that he rose and that our union with the Christ who died affects things and our union with the Christ who rose affects things and will affect things so the fact that he died it says at least this the power of his death was an ending and something is terminated in our lives if we are in union with Christ something gets killed there's something that gets killed and just like the leaves on that ivy start to wither they don't do it immediately but they something is terminated in our lives that's the grip of sin on us and his resurrection something is started in our lives a new life starts and risen with him he says this is like ancient history again the road runner does anybody remember that cartoon the road runner and the coyote wasn't it so the road runner was this little bird and he was always having trying to get the better of the coyote what's it the other way around the coyote is trying to get the better road runner so they're on the edge of a cliff and there's an anvil this is a cartoon you have to imagine this and there's a chain and the road runner who's a cunning little bird attaches one end of the chain to the anvil and one end of the chain to the coyote and the coyote doesn't realise this and the road runner goes like that to the coyote to make fun of him and while he does this he pushes the anvil over the edge of the cliff it's got a long chain and the coyote is sitting there going

I'm going to get you and the road runner is going and the coyote says I'm going to get you and what we can see is that the anvil is going down and the chain is gradually running out and in a moment what's going to happen is the coyote is going to go off the edge of the cliff following the anvil yes but there is a time lag and an anvil is a very heavy piece of metal and that's what's going down the cliff and that's what it's like with the resurrection of Jesus sort of in reverse that he's done something and we're connected to him by a long connection and it will take a while before his resurrection brings us into resurrection but it's just a matter of time if we've been raised with if Christ was raised and we belong to him then at some future point we will be raised too it's just a matter while that chain pays itself out and then we'll be raised too in him that was the ninth thing and he says you need to think this think union that's how the

Christian life is lived so the nine things we looked at were incarnation where God took us up into Christ the outpouring of the Holy Spirit where God comes upon and into the lives of his people the bride and the bridegroom where union enriches the bride and makes her beautiful makes her one with the wonderful bridegroom family well the bond of family the things done to them are done to me says Jesus he reckons those people as himself the vine and the branches stay in the vine because that's where the life comes through to to enliven us and the other side of it being to abide in his word to abide in prayer and to abide in loving obedience the head and the body and the implications about submission to the head and the functioning together of the body the fact that we're blessed in

Christ and the matter of how much we've been given the context we're in and baptized into Christ that's the basis for us to live a new life those were the nine things I hope there's something that will

be helpful for us when I was 20 something I did actually join the NSU WT and I probably got my membership card at home in a drawer still it is a far better thing to be joined to Christ be joined to Christ be in on these fantastic things that we've seen this morning if you're apart from Christ they do you no good whatsoever be in him and live it let's sing together 909