

The Full Claims of Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 September 2006

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Is the Bible hate literature? It's a serious question. Is the Bible, in particular the Gospels, in particular the Gospel of John, is it an example of anti-Semitic literature and therefore hate literature?

The official body of the Anglican Church in the United States of America at their official convention their highest governing body in their meeting in June declared that the Bible was anti-Semitic or that parts of it were anti-Semitic.

In fact, they were declaring that the Bible was hate literature. I have heard priests in this diocese tell us just very casually that the Gospel of John in particular is anti-Semitic.

In other words, that it's hate literature. I think if you're a Christian just to even hear that somebody would say that that would claim to be a Christian to say that the Bible is anti-Semitic would make you very upset.

It makes me upset. But that is, in fact, what the Anglican Church in the United States has declared at its governing body. The text today, the Gospel text that we look at today, brings this question as to whether or not the Bible is the Gospel in particular is hate literature.

[1 : 2 5] It brings it right to the fore. And some of you who've been here these last couple of weeks, I've been challenging us about how our culture, in fact, is sort of bipolar when it comes to the Bible.

On one level, it wants to treat the Bible like it's a pious book and has problems with it because the Bible's not pious all the time. And on the other hand, there's those in our culture who would gladly agree with what the, in fact, see what Cusa just did in the States as being heroic, to recognize that it's hate literature and our culture is schizoid.

And today we're going to look at the text and see whether or not this is true. In fact, I would suggest, as you would well imagine, that it's not the Bible that has the problem, but that it's us, that we have a hard time accepting the full claims of Jesus.

If what Jesus says is, what Jesus says today in this passage in the Gospel, just as Athanasius pointed out in the 300s, 17 centuries ago, if what Jesus says is true, he can only possibly be God.

And if Jesus is not actually God and he says the things that he says he is, then he's either insane or he's either a terrible charlatan because Jesus makes the deepest claims about himself today.

[2 : 5 0] So let's please turn in your Bibles to page 923. And we're looking at John 16, John chapter 5, verse 16. And those of you who know the Bible well, or those of you who were here last week, know that last week, Jesus did the healing of the man at Bethesda, the pool at Bethesda.

And it ends up with the religious leaders and authorities being very upset with Jesus because he healed somebody on the Sabbath and told the man as a sign of his healing that he was to walk and carry his mat.

And this got them all very upset. And so verse 16 continues on with this conflict with the religious leaders. For this reason, the Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill him because he had done these things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them, My father has been working until now and I have been working. Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill him because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was his father, making himself equal with God.

I just want to pause here. Just notice this amazing claim. Verse 17, My father has been working until now and I have been working. Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill him because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was his father, making himself equal with God.

[4 : 21] Jesus here is making a claim that he is by very nature, his fundamental nature is God. Some of you who have been here for a while know that Lake Lisa is pregnant.

Her baby will be coming within a couple of weeks. Anne is with us this morning. She's pregnant. Her baby will be coming in a couple of weeks. One's due date is the 5th of October. The other is the 7th of October.

Janine, I think your due date's March, is it? Yes. And so we have three people here who, at least three that I know of, who are expecting babies. And, you know, we can wonder whether it's going to be a boy or a girl, but nobody wonders whether it will be a pussycat or a dog or a little pony that will come out of any of these three women.

That human beings give birth to human beings, dogs give birth to dogs, cats to cats, fish to fish. And that's the way the world works.

There's no doubt about that in any of our minds, about what will emerge from the wombs of these three women. And so when Jesus is saying that God is his father, the way that he says it to the religious leaders, they understand that he is claiming to be, in a sense, begotten by God, not made.

[5 : 40] That he is of the same kind. Just as when Louise and I come together and have sexually known each other and Louise gets pregnant, she will give birth.

She will, I begat these sons and daughters and she bore these sons and daughters. They share of the same nature. And what the claim is here being made is that Jesus is of the same nature as God.

And as I said last week, the way to understand the gospel of John is this. John bears witness that God, the Son of God, took on flesh of the Virgin Mary and walked among us.

That God, the Son of God, walked among us. And that not only was he God, the Son of God, the man, Jesus, but he was also the Messiah, the mighty deliverer that had been promised by the scriptures for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

The promises of God, of a mighty deliverer, walked among us. And that, in fact, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world walked among us.

[6 : 50] And John is describing what it is like when the Lamb of God, God, the Son of God, the Messiah, walks among us. And how do human beings react to this unbelievably momentous truth if, like me, you believe that it is true?

And John does. John staked his life, his entire future, on this witness. And so here we see this very, very great claim that Jesus is the Son of the Father.

And the reaction of the religious leaders is that they want to kill him. And in the next five verses, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, is that five? Yes, five.

Jesus, in a sense, makes the claim even deeper. Like, rather than saying, no, no, no, no, no, no, you didn't understand me, I was just using an analogy, I was using a metaphor, it was a simile, it's a bit poetic, you know, come on, guys, get a life.

Rather than doing any of those little dodges, Jesus drives the point home in each of the following verses. Verse 19, Then Jesus answered and said to them, and in the version that many of you are using, it says, most assuredly.

[8 : 05] It can be translated, if you're using the King James Version, it says, verily, verily. It means, amen, amen. Whenever you see this in the Gospel of John, it means the following things should all be written in capital letters and in red letters or pink or yellow or something to make sure you really hear them.

And Jesus says, verily, verily, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he sees the Father do, for whatever he does, the Son also does in like manner.

Verily, verily, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he sees the Father do, for whatever he does, the Son also does in like manner. What's Jesus saying here?

One of the things, first of all, that Jesus is saying here is that the religious leaders knew that God couldn't keep the Sabbath in the way that they wanted human beings to keep the Sabbath.

They knew that God had to work on the Sabbath. Why did they know that? Because it rained on the Sabbath and gravity still worked on the Sabbath and prayers were answered on the Sabbath and all of these things happened on the Sabbath so God obviously had to be active on the Sabbath and Jesus, remember last week I said that Jesus in fact isn't breaking anything in the Sabbath law, he's breaking human interpretation of Sabbath law and Jesus doesn't take this route.

[9 : 26] He says, okay you folks, whatever arguments and whatever passages in the Bible you use to understand that God the Father works on the Sabbath, every one of those arguments apply to me.

It is a very, very strong claim that Jesus is making and he's also making the claim that the Father reveals in complete and utter fullness everything that is in his heart and everything that is in his will.

He reveals fully and completely everything to the Son, to Jesus and that Jesus has just as much power as God because whatever the Father reveals and asks the Son to do, the Son does it with no exception.

That there is no difference between the Father's power and the Son's power. Verse 20, for the Father, and by the way in this text there's a series of four fours which all link this, this spectacular claim that Jesus in a sense, not in a sense, that Jesus is the Son of God and there are linked four fours, F-O-Rs, that link this argument together.

Verse 20, for the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that he himself does and he will show him greater works than these that you may marvel.

[10 : 47] And what this is saying here is that not only is Jesus equal by nature, I am just as human as my son Tosh and as my daughter Victoria, we are all equally human.

And Jesus is not only claiming here that he is just as equally God as his Father is, he is also saying that what characterizes their equality is loving union.

I mean, this is really important because, you know, in our culture and as part of human nature, when do I most want to claim equality? When I want to be independent and out from somebody's power.

If I was to say to the bishop, Bishop, I am just as, I am equal to you. I am in a sense trying to say I'm going to be independent to you. If I, you know, if anybody is making that type of claim, it's very easy for us humanly speaking to think they are claiming to be like almost like a rival and they can be completely and utterly independent.

And Jesus here says, yes, by nature, I am just as much God as the Father is. Yet what characterizes our relationship is the purest possible intimacy and loving union.

[12 : 05] There is no desire for separateness or independence that at the very, very heart of the created order, that that which in effect created the entire created order, the very, very heart, is the relationship of most profound, pure, deep, unbroken love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father.

Verse 21, for as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. And here we see that just as the Father is the only one who can give life, so it is that the Son also has that power which only God has to give life, the power of life.

Verses 22 and 23, for the Father judges no one but has committed all judgment to the Son that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

And here we see the Bible constantly says that judgment is something which only God can truly have, that he is the final judge. And we see here that all of that power of judging has been bestowed upon the Son.

Jesus is making the strongest claim that he is God, the Son of God. And he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

[13 : 31] Now, here we get back to the question of whether or not the Bible is anti-Semitic. You know, it's funny. The Bible has, the Gospel of John has the strongest possible statements of the Jewishness of Jewish, of Jesus.

In John chapter 4, Jesus to the Samaritan woman says to the Samaritan woman, salvation is from the Jews. The strongest possible statement of the fact that the Jewish people were God's chosen people.

All the way through the Gospel of John, Jesus is constantly shown as a devout and observant Jew. Jesus goes to the Passover, he keeps the festivals, he is a devout and observant Jew.

And so, John, who wrote this Gospel, is also Jewish. All of the disciples of Jesus are shown to be Jewish. And so, it's because of that that when we see the phrase all the way through the Gospel of John, the Jews, Jesus can't, John isn't possibly meaning that there's something defective with the Jewish people.

He can't possibly mean that. I mean, he's already said that salvation is from the Jews. He's shown that Jesus is Jewish. He's shown that the God of the Old Testament is the Father of Jesus and that Jesus is the Son of the Father.

[14 : 56] And so, all the way through John's Gospel, the Gospel is inviting us to understand the Jews as being a short form for a spiritual and human reality.

Completely separate from those people that we know as Jewish people. And we see that the Jews are used to understand, they are, they in a sense represent, the religious and spiritual world in rebellion against God.

That's why any one of us can be the Jews. Any one of us can be the Jews. Time after time in John's Gospel, in fact, last week, we looked at the Gospel and we saw how one of the things that Jesus was warning against was the power of a religious spirit.

The fact that there is a way of being religious that in effect creates a force field around us and actually keeps God distant. That there's a way of being religious and a way of being spiritual that in effect immunizes us against God.

And that these are constant spiritual temptations. And so time after time after time that the Scriptures are inviting us to say, not when we read these things, not how bad are these people, but to say to God, Father, may this not be true of me.

[16 : 11] May I not listen to those supposed spiritual truths and those supposed spiritual practices, those supposed religious truths and those supposed religious practices that if I adopt them, it means that I am building a force field against you.

May it not be true of me. Lord, deliver me. Have mercy upon me. The Bible, time after time, using this phrase is inviting us to repent.

And it's also inviting us to understand and to recognize when we see such a spiritual agenda and such a religious agenda, even when it comes to us in the guise that is culturally acceptable and we wouldn't normally recognize it.

Okay. In Canadian culture, it would be easy to think that this spiritual and religious world that in effect immunizes us against God.

It would be easy for us to maybe see it in the worst televangelists or the kookiest fundamentalist types in the states. But the hard part is to recognize it when we see it praised and extolled by the CBC or by the National Post or by the Citizen or by Maclean's.

[17 : 30] Listen to the end of verse 23 again. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. I don't know how many of you last week read The Citizen on Sunday. Somebody asked me about this art interview with Karen Armstrong and The Citizen last Sunday.

I don't know how many of you read it. And Karen Armstrong is a celebrated writer who wrote a celebrated book called The History of God a couple of years ago. I don't know how many copies it sold, but it was a celebrated book.

One of those things that's reviewed by everybody as to how many people read it, that's another question. But reviewers love it and it was a highly, highly praised book. And there's an interview with her in The Citizen last week whereby she says that really religion is just a product of the human imagination, that it's all about keeping, you know, that religions are basically the same, that in fact they're all ultimately about the golden rule and about trying to be good and about the certain types of toxic religious belief and on and on and on and on.

And at the end of the day, all of the things that she said, and I'm not maybe portraying it very well, but it was all just very culturally accepted. The sort of things that if you said it at the Starbucks or at a religion faculty at the University of Ottawa or in the average Anglican church, people would just nod and say yes, yes, yes, yes.

But her entire religious system, her entire spiritual system was a denial of what Jesus has just claimed about himself.

[19 : 03] It is, even though it is couched in spiritual language, in culturally acceptable language, and even though it is highly praised, if you listen to her thought, then what Jesus has just said about himself is completely and utterly impossible.

she is the Jews. I am the Jews. Lord, may it not be true that you and I develop a series of religious beliefs and spiritual practices which lead us to the point where we do not honor the Son and do not receive the Son for all whom he is.

is the Jews. Briefly, just two more things about this text. Let's just continue reading verse 24 because Jesus says something unbelievably astounding in the next verse.

Verily, verily, I say to you, it says most assuredly, but gosh, that's one of the things the King James Version does well. Isn't there something about verily, verily? Verily, verily, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death into life.

Just, isn't that, just read that again. Verily, verily, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment.

[20 : 39] That actually means shall not be judged adversely but has passed from death into life. Just shared that Janine and Anne and Lisa are pregnant and here's another simple lesson from the natural world, folks.

You can't be half pregnant. It's completely impossible. You're either pregnant or you're not pregnant. You can't be half pregnant and it's exactly that idea which is at work here.

Jesus has just said the most astounding thing. He has said to you and me that if you, there is a way of hearing his word and believing in God who has sent Jesus, there is a way of hearing the word of Jesus and believing in God who has sent Jesus that to do this we receive everlasting life, that we will not be judged adversely, and that we have passed from death into life with no middle ground.

That is dynamite. And over the next couple of weeks we're going to continue to look in verse, in chapter 6, Jesus is going to talk more about what it means to believe.

But the thing for us is right, here's the invitation to you folks right now. And God is so cool, he loves this. There's an invitation for you and me right now to say this, Father, whatever on earth that means, may it be true in me.

[22 : 16] Whatever that means, I want that to be true of me. I mean, if you say that prayer to the Father, he hears it and honors it. And to say, Father, I want to know more and more about what that means.

I want that to be more and more true of me, but Father, whatever that means in verse 24, make it true in me. Make it true in me. Help me to hear the words of your Son and help me to believe in you who sent Jesus so that the final word about me is not judgment, but is, well done, now good and faithful servant, come into my kingdom.

That the final word about me is not that I am partial and finite, but that I have everlasting life. That the final word about me, me who aid switches and who can get sick and is finite, that the final word about me is not death, but life.

May it be true of me. Jesus goes on and talks about other things. In fact, there's another very strong claim to divinity there later on where it talked in verse 26 about having life in himself.

The three words could be hyphenated, life in himself, which is a powerful claim once again to the divinity of Jesus. And it goes on then to talk about the different types of witnesses to Jesus that exist.

[23 : 36] And at the heart of all of these different claims is this, that if God actually is your witness, why do you need any human witness ultimately? If God has said you're the one, then what does it really matter whether there's a vote on the planet Earth and what the vote is because you've got the key vote by having God say that you're the one who is my son that has come to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But just one final thing just before we close. Turn, look at verse 39 and 40. And this is part of this Jesus talking about witnesses to him.

And I just want to draw your attention to this. you search the scriptures, verse 39, for in them you think you have eternal life and these are they which testify of me but you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.

I'm going to read it again. You search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life and these are they which testify of me but you are not willing to come to me that you may have life.

what this is warning us of friends is that there is a way of reading the scriptures that completely and utterly misses the point that the scriptures have a point six times in fact in John's gospel this similar claim is made by Jesus six different times in six different places it's the same claim that's made in a variety of ways in Matthew, Mark and Luke and that in every one of these cases the claim is that the point of what we call the Old Testament the point of that entire body of revelation is to point to Jesus and the entire point of all of that is to point to Jesus so that we might believe in him and it is possible for us to read the scriptures and read the scriptures and know the scriptures but completely and utterly miss the point you know one of the things that was really hard for me when I was in my equivalent of seminary is gosh you know I'd be there's this there'd be these professors up front and they'd speak like six languages they could just go from oh yeah this is the Greek and oh yeah by the way this is the Hebrew and then they could say oh yeah and this is Akkadian you know and this is this and this is this and they could do all of these things and they were nicer than me their IQ was probably double my IQ they were probably ten times nicer than me and all of these things but the problem is that I would listen to them and they would deny Christ and if you listen to their teaching it would mean that the that Jesus wasn't who he said he was that he was some type of an example or something that would allow he was some type of being or person or story that would fit within their religious and spiritual system and you know it can be very very

[26 : 32] I'm speaking here especially to you students it can be very very intimidating in the face of somebody who's obviously so much smarter than you and knows so many more languages than you and and seems to be nicer and more together than you and all of those types of things but the fact of the matter is is that they are teaching and reading the Bible in such a way that misses the entire point of the Bible which is to believe in Jesus and to know him in fact one of the great tragedies of the of the statement made by the Anglicans in the south to United States is that to say that the Bible is hate literature how could one possibly want to go to it and read it in such a way that they might have eternal life it in effect is a way to shut the door on Jesus Lord have mercy upon them and Lord have mercy upon us I encourage you folks to read the word of God to read the scriptures to read it humbly intelligently systematically to read it and every day you read it to open it up and say dear father may you show me your son and what it means to know and follow your son as I read your word let's bow our heads in prayer loving father we we acknowledge before you that it is very easy to see a speck in somebody else's eye and to miss the log in our own eye we ask loving father that you might deliver us from systems of religion and spirituality that in effect immunize us against you from religion systems of religion or liturgy or spirituality which create a force field against you from systems that end up making us feel superior to you dear father we acknowledge before you that we can become blind to these processes in our own lives our own lives and we ask that your Holy Spirit would move with power that your Holy Word would move with power in us delivering us from these things that you might grant us humble yearning open hearts and minds hearts and minds which are humble before you and yearn for you and long for you and father we ask that you might so guide us in the reading of your word that more and more and more our whole lives all that is us is a yes to you this we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen you thank you thank you for tuning in this is