

Fix Your Thoughts On Jesus

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[0 : 00] This month of December, we've had a focus on the person of Jesus Christ, and it's been such a joy. Normally, our method is to work through a book of the Bible, so we'll pick that up in January.

We're going through the book of 1 Samuel and especially seeing how this prepares the way for Jesus Christ, the Messiah, how it points to him. For today, please turn to the Gospel of John.

The Gospel according to John and our sermon passage is in chapter 1. All right, well, for the sermon today, we have a narrow focus, and with God's help, we'll be able to go deeply in just a couple of verses, but I do want to read a broader passage.

So let's do both, so you can know what the focus will be, and then also hear the context. Let's start by reading John chapter 1, verse 14 and verse 18, and that'll be the focus of the exposition of our sermon today.

I'll read this trusting that it's God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient word. It's God's very own word for you and me, his people. John 1, verse 14, and this is in the New King James.

[1 : 14] The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Verse 18, no one has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.

He has declared him. Amen. Now let's hear this in context. Let's read verses 1 through 18 as well. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God, and he was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him. Without him, nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. This man came as a witness to bear witness of the light that all through him might believe.

[2 : 28] He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God. To those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. The glory as of the only begotten, of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bore witness of him, and cried out, saying, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me is preferred before me, for he was before me. And of his fullness we have all received the grace for grace.

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

[3 : 46] The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Let's pray. Lord, we ask that the light of God himself will shine into darkness.

Lord, we pray that you will give us the gift of faith. That faith will be poured out mightily in a powerful way upon your people, Lord. Upon all who hear the gospel of Jesus and the words you've given us.

Please help us to take the faith you put in our hearts and minds and lift it back up to you. As Calvin put it, like a beggar's open hand and freely receive Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

We ask this for your glory. Amen. Neurologists have observed that a person's ability to concentrate is influenced by a complex interplay of factors.

It's hard to fix our minds on even a worthy subject when we are feeling strong emotions, when we are sleep deprived, when we are physically fatigued, or when we have many problems that we're supposed to solve.

[5 : 02] Can you relate to that this past week? It's hard to fix our minds on even a worthy object, isn't it? And these are times when we're also most weak and vulnerable and susceptible to temptations, to attacks, and to sin.

So what do we do? I love the clear, straightforward, encouraging command we have in Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus.

Fix your thoughts on Jesus. That's the title of today's sermon. In centuries past, a fellow Christian like you and me, battling this, exclaimed, Oh, there is a sweet blessedness in contemplating Jesus.

When we meditate on him and his sin-atoning wounds, we are melted in repentance. When we contemplate his righteousness, we are filled with assurance.

When we consider his sovereign reign, we are strengthened with hope. When we behold him coming in glory, we are stirred to holiness.

[6 : 22] Amen. Let's fix our thoughts today on three glorious truths that every Christian must learn to believe about Jesus.

Number one, fix your thoughts on Jesus because he is the eternal word of God. Jesus is the eternal word of God.

What I want to emphasize under this heading is that Jesus is the very creator God himself. He is the eternal word of God.

Please look at verse 14. We're told the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

We don't need to resurrect an ancient heresy, a wrong teaching from past centuries because this is all around us. In this area, there are very, very disciplined, works-based missionaries by a church that is not Christian and it's the Latter-day Saints.

[7 : 33] They go by Mormon. They teach that Christ's divinity was achieved, that God the Son had to achieve, he had to work and eventually accomplish a divine status, that Jesus is not God in the same way as the Father, that he progressed to become God.

They say that all worthy humans have this same potential to achieve a similar, even if it's lower, divine status as Jesus Christ. Christ, this is all around us.

There are many people who think they are Christians who believe that. We must contend for the truths necessarily contained in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 2.13, we are told that what we impart in words, it's not something that came up to us by human wisdom, but it's taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

We need to fix our eyes on the truth that the Spirit communicates through his word to Christians. We read how Jesus is the one who reveals the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

Look back at John 1, verses 1-3. We're told that all things were made through him. Without him, nothing was made that was made.

[9 : 02] This truth is reinforced in Colossians 1, 15-17. By him, all things were created that are in heaven, the spiritual realm, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things. And in him, all things consist.

See, everything that exists in this world falls into one of two categories. Is it creator or is it created? And the person of Jesus Christ is not a created or lesser being.

Jesus Christ is very God of very God. He is God the creator. The divinity of God the Son is absolute and eternal.

There was never a time when the Son was not God. Thomas Watson commented, we must look at Christ not only as the Lamb of God, but as the great God.

[10 : 15] If Jesus Christ were less than God, here's what it comes down to. You and I would still be unredeemed. As God's eternal word, with the human nature, Jesus Christ accomplished all that God requires and all that we need.

That's what's at stake. There's a theological concept used to describe this great mystery. And we don't want to pry in beyond what God has laid before us and revealed.

But we do need to contend for the glory of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. The term of this concept, it helps us to not make errors or make less errors and be careful with our words.

It's called the communication of properties. There's a theologian in the 1600s named John Norton who I found very clear and helpful. He explained how the communication of properties attributes an action belonging to one nature, either his divine or his human nature of Jesus Christ.

And whatever either nature does can be correctly attributed to his whole person. And this is something we can relate to in a way. I would say that this morning, you or I ate a piece of bread.

[11 : 37] It was your person who ate a piece of bread. And we know that the person is body and soul. So even though the soul doesn't have a tongue or a mouth or a stomach, it was your whole person that ate the bread through the body.

Think about how the scripture talks about Jesus Christ. In Mark chapter 1 verse 14, we're told Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven. This means God the Son, the eternal word of God, in his flesh, was preaching.

What a glorious revelation. This is God through the person of the Son with vocal cords and a mouth and lungs preaching truth, full of grace and truth, proclaiming the kingdom of heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 2.8, we're told that the Lord of glory was crucified. The Lord of glory crucified.

This means that Jesus Christ's human body suffered crucifixion. And the scripture teaches us to attribute this to the Lord of glory himself.

[12 : 53] Acts chapter 2 verse 28, one of my favorite verses. We're told that God purchased the church with his own blood. Well, God is a spirit.

He's the creator. He's not creaturely. And blood is a creaturely thing. But it was in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son, our Savior, who truly bled.

And this is attributed to God because Jesus Christ is the eternal word of God. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He is the eternal word of God.

You and I may feel accused right now before the holy God. On the other hand, we may view ourselves as good enough people. But we cannot pay an eternal debt we owe to a holy, eternal God.

We can't do it. We fix our eyes on the only mediator between the eternal God and sinful men like me and you. The blood that ran down the cross of Calvary wasn't the blood of an angel that took on a body or a lesser deity that took on a body.

[14 : 13] Not a man alone as a martyr. It was the blood, as Acts 20 verse 28 says, of God. God. Because Jesus Christ is God, he swallows up the judgment that would have drowned you and me.

And if you are in Jesus Christ by faith alone, because of who he is, your security is ironclad. It can't be shaken.

Do you see who Jesus is? Number two, I invite you to fix your thoughts on Jesus. Not only is he very God, he is uncreated.

He is the uncreated co-equal God. And what I want to emphasize is that he is of the same substance, not in any way subordinate to the Father. The alternative is this, that in eternity past, so to speak, God the Son was in a servant position to God the Father so that they have a different will as God.

Another way that this has been slightly nuanced, twisted is called functional subordination, that God is really a society, and the Father has ultimately more authority than the Son.

[15 : 45] And so when it comes to the decree of God to redeem sinners, the Son really has no will to do so. He's really forced to go to the cross.

That Jesus Christ did not freely choose to take what Philippians 2 tells us, the form of a servant out of divine love, but because God the Father made him to do it.

Jesus is called in our passage today, look at verses 14 and 18, he's called the only begotten of the Father. Verse 18 repeats, the only begotten Son, in some Greek manuscripts have the word God instead, who is in the bosom of the Father.

John Calvin takes a passage like this and says, this is God giving us language to grasp what is a mystery. It's really incomprehensible in its glory.

Calvin called it baby talk. It's God like trying to break it down for his dear children and we don't want to go beyond that but we also have to stand on the shoulders of giants. The church has handed down the correct distinctions over time.

[16 : 58] Not only is our Lord Jesus Christ eternal, he is also uncreated, co-equal of the same authority, the same divinity, the same substance as God the Father.

The term only begotten which we also hear in John 3.16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It compounds two terms *monos* which means only and *genos* and you know that from you can even picture like a species or a *genos* you know and it means he is one of a kind.

that's what the sense of begotten is in this context. It reveals to us God the son is unique. There are no earthly comparisons we can throw back up on a holy God that's a creator.

Our language will always fall short of his glory. But how is the word referred to in relation to God? The word is God we read in verse 14 as of the only begotten of the father.

And this is an allusion back to psalm chapter 2 which we read where God says referring of the son he says today I have begotten thee today. It's also mysterious but it stretches our faith to receive God as he is.

[18 : 22] The word is God and at the same time there is a relation among father son. Today in psalm 2 it means always constantly in the present tense eternally outside of time and space and from God the word God the father the word has eternally proceeded in relation one to the other as a father to the son.

Sometimes what our own language trying to teach clearly fails to do and as I feel like I'm failing right now hymns that the church has received by faith and sung poetically capture it just as well.

Think of this line of the father's love begotten before the worlds began to be he is alpha and omega he the source the ending he of the things that are that have been and that future years shall see.

This is our Lord Jesus Christ the uncreated co-equal same substance God. I'll try one more category to help us and this is learning from centuries past of the orthodox meaning upholding the truth of the Bible church and it's a difference between substance and subsistence.

it's a difference between his essence and his persons. Essence answers the question what is God? What is the essence of God as he's revealed himself in all of scripture?

[20 : 08] One of our catechisms that we use and reinforce with children and grown-ups alike says this answer God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything he is eternal infinite and unchangeable in his power and perfection goodness and glory wisdom justice and truth this is God this is his essence this is the substance of God to be very clear father son and holy spirit are one true God the same essence Jesus is very God of very God Colossians 1:17 he is before all things and in him all things consist the Athanasian creed which we read not too long ago as part of our public profession it powerfully declares this glorious mystery of God's unity and distinction as a triune God quote in this trinity none is before or after other none is greater or less than another but in the three persons they are co-equal and co-eternal we also confess as a church the Nicene creed that

Jesus is God from God light from light true God from true God begotten not made being of one substance with the father so this is of God's substance his essence his unity now the distinction is among the persons or the subsistence of God and subsistence is a term I think it's worth you learning about this and me too to stretch us and to help us a little bit it's a term carefully used over the centuries to rigorously guard against tritheism on one side that there are three gods Christians are not polytheists worshipping three different gods but on the other side it guards against modalism saying that there is only one God that uses three different modes or displays himself in three roles no there are three distinct subsistences in God a subsistence is the essence of God so all three persons have the essence plus a relational property

I know this sounds technical but it's important that we understand we can easily use language that is making us think creaturely thoughts about a holy God that's creator he's different than anything in this world the second London confession of faith chapter two paragraph three upholds this truth in the one divine and infinite being God the creator there are three subsistences or three persons the father the word or son and the holy spirit this mysterious truth that we confess about Jesus these are important doctrines because they draw good lines it excludes those who reject the full glory of God in our Lord Jesus Christ but at the same time these good lines unite all Christians who stand on this common ground of Nicene Trinitarianism we can call it

John Norton again affirmed truth and then backed off very quickly at this glorious mystery he wrote this mystery is from the perspective of the internal action of the Godhead this generation is not temporary but eternal not carnal but spiritual not of necessity but ineffable and that means too great to describe in words Romans 11:33 echoes that same sentiment oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable his ways we receive it with a childlike faith it's impossible for us to understand fully or comprehend completely because our minds and our words are limited we are created creatures we are so creaturely aren't we one time someone asked me how should we try to teach our children about father son and holy spirit the mystery of the trinity and you know the question was should we use illustrations like an egg or water and it's different stages stuff like that

I at the time I didn't give the best answer so I want to tell you that and add to it we are told to have a child like faith receive God's word as he's given it and we trust him in this glorious mystery so think of that simple passage in the beginning meaning before time and space were even created God the one creator God he sent his only begotten son there's a father the son that whosoever the whole world needs to hear this glorious gospel and whoever the spirit will draw whosoever believes that's the Holy Spirit there's father son and spirit will have eternal life how can sinners have eternal life because of the work of God to save us through the person of Jesus Christ I want to add to that answer though

[25 : 49] I don't think we should use illustrations to speak of the Trinity because every single one will train our brains the wrong way to think of a holy God I do think though we need to use scripture with scripture we also need to use hymns that capture the truth of scripture and help melt our hearts and receive this in a childlike way and we also make it our practice as a church as we've done today to systematically profess our faith together to read these creeds from the early centuries of the church the Nicene creed chalcedonian!

athanasian creed and state what the church has held up because it guards against error and on top of that we read a catechism developed mostly for children and families like we do today in our simple baptist catechism from the 1600s so I think we can and should disciple children even when they're in that developmental stage where their brains are the faith he will help us to realize in our own thinking how can it be even sharper and this is a glorious way to grow in our discipleship our confession of faith states this the trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God and comfortable dependence on him this does matter all of our communion with God is only possible because of this glorious mystery of the trinity and it teaches us a comfortable dependence on

Jesus Christ through whom God unites us to himself brothers and sisters we are saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ no one forced him it was for the joy set before him that our Lord endured the cross it was his good pleasure out of the abundant!

love of the one triune God who himself became our sacrifice God himself so loved us to redeem us the will of God would never fail to redeem Jesus Christ according to his human nature humbled himself and according to his human nature he knew that the will of God would be done and he said joyfully your will not mine according to my human nature be done oh father our lord Jesus despised the shame of the cross he who came from heavenly unimaginable glory to this created realm and put to shame here in the darkness and he did this because it was his will he was not forced to do it it was the mission that the triune God decreed before time began do you see who Jesus Christ is well our third and final encouragement is let's fix our thoughts on Jesus because he is the glory of God revealed let's fix our thoughts on Jesus he is the glory of God revealed what I hope to emphasize for you is that Jesus Christ is the eternally united exegete of God that's what these words literally say he is the eternally united exegete of God verse 14 and 18 one more time we beheld his glory the glory of God the glory as of the only begotten of the father verse 18 no one has seen God at any time the only begotten son who is in the bosom of the father he declared him it's an old word that maybe we need to bring back into our vernacular bosom it brings to mind a picture of a child held in a parent's loving embrace cherished bound almost as if they're one that's the picture we know from scripture that

Jesus Christ is bound in this way God the son being the same substance of God unites eternally Jesus Christ to the God head Jesus Christ knew to abide in God and because of this intimate union he is alone the one who can perfectly reveal or declare God in verse 18 we're told that he has declared him and that word declared that verb in Greek it's exegete oh my it's literally mean he's the one who will exegete or draw out you hear of an exegetical sermon it's drawing out what's contained in a verse it means to unfold or correctly lay forth narrate who

[31 : 09] God is so Jesus is the ultimate and excellent declarer of God the father since God is spirit God is invisible Jesus had to reveal him he had to come and translate and interpret to us who the father is this is the work that Jesus came to do and now from the right hand of the father in glory he's poured out his spirit he says I don't leave you as orphans and it's the spirit of Christ who ministers who declares and who preaches God to us now Jesus is still doing this work that he came to do that he loves to do and he does it through his Holy Spirit 1st Corinthians 2 verses 11 through 13 tell us that no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the spirit of God God is infinite unsearchable incomprehensible description still when the spirit causes us to ponder the person of

Jesus Christ the eternal word of God and by faith we we grab hold of Jesus we truly apprehend we truly lay hold of the glory of God in him God has graciously revealed himself to us through the person of his son second London confession of faith chapter 8 paragraph 2 says the son of God is quoting scripture the brightness of the father's glory it's the same God the same substance but made visible God is is perfectly revealed it's the self revelation given to us in Jesus Christ that phrase again the bosom of the father John Norton commented that this puts Jesus in the perfect and required position to know God truly and to present him perfectly Norton wrote he is both the inward and outward word he is the inward word in that he is the knowledge of

God himself and he is the outward word in that he makes known to us the counsel of God in this world he's also called the image of the invisible God Colossians 1:15 which means he is the perfect and essential image of the father manifesting all the glory of God even as a perfect reflection contains the full likeness of the original that's the end of Norton's quote do do you see who Jesus is fix your thoughts on Jesus we're told in Philippians 4:8 finally brethren whatever things are true whatever things are noble whatever things are just whatever things are pure whatever things are lovely whatever things are of good report if there is any virtue if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things and there's nothing more noble more praiseworthy more pure more just more lovely than

Jesus Christ because of who he is Jesus Christ not only saves us from the wrath that our sins deserves but he also helps us to do what we can't do in our weakness we struggle to fix our thoughts on him like we want to don't we but Jesus Christ came and fulfilled all righteousness he fixed his thoughts on God perfectly perpetually and he imparts to us he gives to us freely his power his righteousness his thoughts of God he puts them on to his people he makes us willing and able by his spirit to obey him in John 10 10 he said I came so that you may have life life of the God creator himself and that you will have my life in you abundantly so when our thoughts bounce off of God quickly remember the active obedience of

Jesus continually and empowering us to do the same God causes those he redeemed to grow in the righteousness of Jesus even in our thought life even in our thoughts of him Jesus is in the bosom of the father he's one with the father and his gospel is to invite you and me to share in this intimate union this intimate bond with our creator in Christ you and I are brought to the very heart of God himself the ceremonial law had the people standing far away and through ceremonial rituals you could get a little bit closer and then no closer at all because there's a veil keeping sinners away from the holy God and the book of Hebrews tells us that the veil is the body of

[36 : 24] Jesus Christ and it's torn for you and me to enter into that closest most intimate communion with our creator through Jesus Christ come near to God in him oh may we ponder marvel and savor God trust this that because Jesus Christ is who he is you and I are also held by God in his loving embrace just as the father cherishes the son he cherishes you and me who he's adopted we're bound eternally we're united to God in Christ we are kept sustained and protected in him Hebrews 3 1 therefore holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling fix your thoughts on Jesus Colossians 2 9 in him the fullness of

God dwells bodily let's pray and thank him oh lord we know your arms are open wide you call us to yourself you receive us by faith we get we get a real taste of your love but we have no idea how much you love us we pray you keep teaching us this lord that we will know it more and more and more may we experience the love of God through the person of Jesus Christ for the sake of Christ alone we pray amen