

Jesus Christ: God and Man — Part 1

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Date: 08 May 2016

Preacher: Harvey Guest

[0 : 00] When I do stand up in front of this group, I always want to quote Samuel Johnson, one of my favorites. And I've quoted him before here, so forgive me. But he famously said that he was an 18th century guy, so he spoke like an 18th century guy.

But he said, men, he means people, all of us, men more often or more frequently need to be reminded than instructed.

Which is wisdom, very wise. You need to be reminded of things that we've been told, great things, rather than instructed in new things. So I'm very much aware of today, I'm instructing you folks, I'm very much aware, I'm telling you things you already know.

I'm just going to hear them again, hear these things that we know in the gospel, hear them again, I hope without distortion, so that we may be blessed together. So this little meditation, I'm going to look over my left shoulder on occasion, make sure I'm in touch with the time.

This little meditation this morning, not to make it seem too formal at all, but it's going to start with a preface. And then a bit of an introduction. And then followed by a bit of a look, I hope a good look at a bit of a look at a passage from Paul.

[1 : 25] And next week, continue to look at this same passage, it's in front of you, Galatians 1, 1-5. But it'll take us a while to get there. A preface. A preface, as I understand it, and I know there are authors in this room, so they'll correct me later about this.

But roughly speaking, a preface announces purpose. The purpose of today here is to ponder, as a kind of focus word, from a great church father named Athanasius.

If I was a high-tech guy, I'd have all these quotes up in a big fancy screen here, but I don't.

Athanasius, speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, He ministered the things of God to man, and the things of man to God.

Jesus Christ ministered the things of God to man, and the things of man to God. That's an astonishing statement, for sure.

As it's been unfolded, I know this from memory, but theologians will unfold a statement like that. It's something like this. In the one divine person, there transpires a two-fold ministry.

[2 : 45] Again, God to man. Man to God. The words from the Athanasian Creed, I love them.

Perfect God. Perfect man. That's Jesus Christ. Athanasius speaks this way, obviously. He speaks this way because he hears the New Testament witness to Jesus, so speaking.

Just almost at random, you can find where Athanasius would find the basis of such a great assertion. The word became flesh. All these words, you can just stop and ponder them for the longest time.

As Paul says in Colossians, In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. What words? If a bit of formal language helps, and I find sometimes it does, it brings out a truth some ways, perhaps in a new way or in a memorable way, this is sometimes called the basic grammar of Christian speech.

This is the basic grammar of Christian theology. Grammar holds speech together, if you will. Or a bit more bluntly, with a bit of challenge in it, I know I need to hear such things on occasion, there is a way that Christians, there is a way that the Christian church should speak about Jesus Christ.

[4 : 12] And there are ways we should not speak about Jesus Christ. It's good to get some order into our language about Jesus Christ.

Church has always done this. At Nicaea, famously, these words were confessed today at the 730 service, they will be again today, I take it.

At Nicaea, the church says, here is how we speak about, here is how we confess Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Nicaea Creed says, God and man.

And so, obviously, that's the title of today's talk. Jesus Christ, God and man. Very God and man.

Perfect God, again, specifically from the Athanasian Creed. Perfect God and perfect man. So, there you go, there's the preface.

[5 : 19] If a preface announces a purpose, well, what is an introduction? Sometimes you wonder if an author is just taking his or her time getting going. You know, I would think the best introduction is achieved when an author or a speaker, just to put it simply, comes clean with you.

You know, comes clean about the approach which is going to follow in this book, this presentation.

What's the backdrop? Why is this happening?

Is there a larger horizon for the book, for the talk? Some kind of word about where what follows fits into something, something quite broad or quite specific.

Why this theme? Why this book? Why this talk? Just an aside here on the subject of introductions. I love this story.

Perhaps you've heard it. I just delight in C.S. Lewis when he describes, he received a request to write a book, which was going to be part of a series.

[6 : 28] And the book became Lewis's wonderful little book, I hope you've read it, called The Problem of Pain. And when he was asked to write the book, Lewis told the editor, it was of this series of books, that he, C.S. Lewis, he says, I really feel quite inadequate to this topic.

You know, can I, should I really write this book? And the editor wrote back to C.S. Lewis, and he obviously amused him much. The editor said to him, Mr. Lewis, that isn't really a problem.

You can just write an introduction explaining to your readers that you don't really know what you're talking about. So, you can see that introductions serve many, many things.

I hope that's not appropriate for today. Harvey attempted a talk on something, but it really didn't work. In fact, he's been invited to try it again next week.

So, my interest here in thinking through the Athanasius statement, and the statement and the theme for today, or in thinking through the Nicaea Confession, Very God and Man, is, of course, it's not new.

[7 : 45] The Church has took a lot of centuries, a few centuries to think it through and get it right. The Church thinks it got it right. How are we, how are we to think intelligibly about these things, about these kind of words?

Because someone mentioned to me earlier, in a jocular manner, but I took it a bit seriously, those are big words. Jesus Christ, God, and Man.

How do you think intelligibly about words like that? Never, never are we called to, as I understand it, to understand such words precisely.

No. That is really out of the question. But one may think, nevertheless, responsibly about where mystery resides and learn to speak responsibly about mystery.

Jesus Christ, the Divine Person, we've heard here already, very God and Man, ministering God to Man and ministering Man to God, we'll come to that in a moment, is indeed mystery.

[9 : 00] Surely it is mystery to say, to even look at words like Jesus Christ, God, and Man, that is mystery. What else could you call it?

Again, not to be understood, but how is it intelligible that the Church puts together words like that? How does the grammar of her speech, if you will again, come about?

Mystery. Mystery is not nonsense. Mystery is not just noise on the wind. No, it lives, mystery, within a coherent narrative which makes an appeal to mystery appropriate.

that, again, is part of the coherent speech of Christian theology. We refer to mystery, we invoke mystery as Christians, but not just out of the blue.

Mystery, again, lives within a coherent narrative which Christians confess about the world, specifically which they confess about Jesus Christ.

[10 : 14] How may we speak intelligibly about that kind of thing, about Jesus Christ, God, and man, which shows, in fact, mystery, this discourse, to be nothing less than a call to praise.

Jesus Christ, God, and man, the mystery of God's gift to the world, this is a call to praise. So, there is reason number one, as this introduction unfolds, for thinking through this issue, Jesus, God, and man.

How, again, may we speak intelligibly about such language, about such a confession, which we make here at St. John's, and the Christian Church does throughout the world.

There it is. But more specifically, Jesus, God, and man, might raise for some, it does for me, another big question as well.

What significance does the New Testament grant to our believing in Jesus? Is our believing in Jesus a decisive or a secondary kind of thing?

[11 : 34] question arises because St. Athanasius made another, that statement of St.

Athanasius, when you look at it carefully, where he talks about Jesus Christ ministers the things of God to man, and then he says Jesus Christ ministers the things of man to God.

God, how that second part of the Athanasius assertion really seems to me to raise the question of our believing. What significance does the New Testament grant to our believing since Jesus Christ, the man Jesus Christ, has ministered the things of man to God on our behalf?

Is our believing, again, is it a decisive thing as portrayed in the New Testament, or is it secondary?

And again, the question arises when pondering this second part of our Athanasius statement.

Jesus Christ ministers the things of man to God. That seems to me an amazing statement and worth much, much pondering.

[12 : 47] Jesus Christ ministers the things of man to God. How is this so? how much of this are we called to know? Where does this fit into our grammar of Christian confession, our understanding of the gospel itself?

How is it with our believing? How do we understand in Christian discourse, again, believing? That question is really going to be addressed next week.

I think it deserves, the question of our believing deserves a session on its own. So that's going to be looked at next week.

Today we're going to zero in on the intelligibility itself of this kind of language. Sounds highfalutin, I know, but again, as I unfold it, I know you'll know that you already know this.

So an introduction should not be too, too long. Didn't that go on for quite a while. So I will just let it go at that for now. Just, there it is.

[13 : 54] Quite a mouthful, again. But the gospel, I want to apologize for this big mouthful of an introduction because the gospel, does it not, it invites us to think very great things, the more you think about it.

The gospel is an invitation to think about very great things. Perfect God is Jesus Christ.

Perfect man is Jesus Christ. What a topic this is. What an immense, an immensity it is to think about the gospel.

To think about Jesus is simply immense. He opens up into new and new and greater vistas of meaning. Jesus Christ. So it's worth looking at words like Jesus Christ, God, and man.

Here ends the introduction. Really, this time. And before we move on, therefore, let's say a word of prayer.

[15 : 08] Our God and Father, we call on your spirit today to aid us in surely what is properly understood, our God, our greatest task, which is to think upon the mystery of Jesus Christ, your gift to us.

Jesus Christ, God and man. In his name we pray. Amen. man. In a sense, to get at this topic, there's many different ways to approach it.

The intelligibility, again, of this kind of speech, Jesus Christ is God, perfect God, as the Athanasian Creed says, and Jesus Christ is perfect man.

So here's an approach to it this morning. In a sense, learners exchange, and all Christian discourse, but I'll zero in on a place like this where Christian discourse happens, it always works in a certain sense on two levels.

And for time's sake this morning, I'm just going to speak very boldly about these things. There is always talk here, which may be called, and I want to speak this kind of language with reverence, it's easy for this kind of talk to become, to lose reverence, but reverence is important appropriately.

[16 : 41] There is always, at learners exchange, a certain kind of talk that could be called, and it is called in some circles to unfold this kind of thing.

There is here what can be called God talk. That's what we do at learners exchange. We do God talk. That is there is a God talk, which is a first order confessional speech, if you will.

For instance, this morning at the 730 service and the other two services this morning, the Bible will be read. Just someone will stand up and read the Bible for us. That may be called definitely God talk.

Or this morning at the 730 service, we had a very able exposition of a few verses from the Bible, a Bible exposition which serves the scriptures.

That is definitely God talk. We listen for the word of God from pulpits. Or saying the creeds is God talk.

[17 : 45] For some, you can expand on this, it's a topic in and of itself that can be quite interesting, I think. For some, and I'm in this category myself, for some their most beloved hymnody is God talk in a certain mode, isn't it?

Or the high musical traditions of the church is a kind of direct first order God talk. However defined, there is God talk.

Again, first order Christian speech that is confessional. Here is where we stand. There is, there it is. But, and this should, it seems to me, be better known.

I think it is known, but it should be more explicitly. We should be reminded of this, as Samuel Johnson would say, more often than we are. There is in the life of the church, there is certainly at Learner's Exchange frequently, in fact, maybe most of our talk here at Learner's Exchange is, it has been called God talk, talk.

God talk, talk. talk. Not to be too subtle about it, but there it is. It's sometimes called this. This kind of inquiry is a very simple point, really, isn't it?

[19 : 04] It's about the church's confessional speech. God talk, talk is about God talk. There it is. That's pretty straightforward.

It seeks God talk, talk. It's a very important form of discourse in the church's life. It seeks deepening of our faith. It wants to know things better.

It seeks, in fact, if I may use the somewhat daring language of Thomas Torrance, great theologian of our time, the late Thomas Torrance, God talk, talk seeks what he calls the real text of the Bible. What is the real text of the Bible, he would ask you to ponder? The answer is pretty obvious. The real text of the Bible is the man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the text. The Bible is not about itself, it's about Jesus Christ. We seek the real text of the Bible, Jesus Christ.

[20 : 10] Scripture, it's a great theme of Torrance, Scripture fights with our rebellious humanity and seeks to subdue us to the one it reveals.

Again, seeks to subdue us to the divine person, God and man, Jesus Christ. Scripture's four, it has a real text that it wants to get you to, Jesus Christ.

It seeks to bring us into his, to show us his mystery and bring us into his presence. This secondary work, God Talk, Talk, the work of it is extremely necessary in the life of the church.

It keeps, again, God Talk fresh, it keeps it alive, even it corrects distortions that can creep into the life of the church.

We need to hear good, ongoing God Talk talk. talk. The Bible, I would think, I have no authority for this other than my little self, it just came to my mind the other day, does the Bible not grant us or even invites us into this kind of work?

[21 : 24] Think over what I say, says Paul to Timothy, Timothy 2.7. Think over what I say, he says to Timothy, the Lord will grant you understanding in these things.

I think that's an invitation to God Talk Talk. Think over is God Talk Talk. What I say, the I there is the apostle to the Gentiles.

And what he says, that's God talk, because Paul's an apostle. What he says is direct, authoritative speech in the life of the church.

And so, with that in mind, with the fact that Paul, his talk to us is not God Talk Talk. It's authoritative. It's scripture itself. When Paul talks, that's God Talk. First order Christian speech. It's time now to turn to some direct, good God Talk from the scriptures.

[22 : 31] And I have an overhead. I don't today. I would put it up now. But I hope you have, some have Bibles, I know, and these have been handed out. Paul to the Galatians, chapter 1, 1 to 5.

Again, God Talk indeed. Let me just zip through this for us. Paul, he says, Paul, an apostle. As this unfolds, I hope you'll see the relevance to the issues that I want to talk about today, about the intelligibility again of Christian speech.

Paul, an apostle, he begins, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia.

And he continues, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God

and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. God talk indeed there. first order Christian speech is Holy Scripture, one of its main forms, perhaps its main form, and then to have it read is still, of course, God talk.

[24 : 15] And now, after that, now some God talk talk. God talk about it. So, a thing of both deep necessity in the life of the church, but it has no authority.

But it's the church seeking to understand her first order speech again. I love those five words in the middle, in the middle of this weighty salutation.

easy to in a Bible study in one's own reading, but of late, in thinking through this issue, it's been brought home to me how amazingly important to see certain things in Scripture are.

Remember, this is first order God talk. This is divine mystery in front of us. Paul says right in the middle of this amazing salutation, it's unique in the Pauline corpus, of course, as you know, Galatians is such a punchy, polemical letter from Paul.

Right in the middle of this salutation, he says, to the churches of Galatia. Now, we should God talk talk, pause and ponder that.

[25 : 40] To the churches of Galatia. when God acts to reveal as he's done in Jesus Christ and to mediate something to us, which we know is in fact nothing less than salvation, when God acts to reveal and mediate, he, God, creates a corporate entity formed by and called to embody what he reveals and mediates.

There's a mouthful of God talk, talk, but I think extremely important to hear on occasion. the gospel forms something in the world and it's not accidental or incidental.

The church is nothing less. The church is where the gospel is in the world. Paul has a very important thing to say about the gospel in Galatians, about Jesus raised from the dead, the one who died for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.

But he doesn't just let it float in midair. He says this God talk to the churches of Galatia, you, churches, where this message is embodied, where it's held on to, where it lives.

This is so important to the churches of Galatia. And more, and this obviously goes right to the heart, if you see the kind of question I'm trying to think through.

[27 : 37] Again, the things you already know, but I'm just doing some God talk with you about it. More, the church is the place that heaven sets apart where a meaningful speech about what he has done occurs.

The church is the place where God's speech about what he's done for the world, where it lives, where it takes shape, and where it occurs. It gets spoken.

It lives. It's proclaimed there. That's an amazing thing to see, it seems to me. Obvious, you already know it, but it's good to bring it up and make sure we're seeing the obvious.

Intelligible speech, the thing raised in the introduction, the too long introduction, intelligible speech about our faith needs a place for itself, and God has created that place.

Or, and I think this is better, perhaps, it needs a living tradition of speech. The gospel is a living, breathing tradition of speech, which embodies the church, and the church in turn proclaims that message.

[29 : 03] Providence, Alexander will be especially pleased to hear this confession this morning. Providence, I am increasingly told that Providence watches over drunks in the United States of America.

But Providence also watches over Learner's Exchange. It really does. I know, of course, Providence watches over everything.

Last week, if you were here, we heard a very, I found it, a very, very interesting discussion led by Dr. Slaymaker, who's been leading a Bible study group of late, looking at Matthew's Gospel.

And the question was raised in that group, and Dr. Slaymaker shared this again last week. Why is, remember the question?

I thought it was so interesting. Why is Matthew's Gospel the first in the canon? It was, again, discussed in this place. why was it placed first in the canon?

[30 : 11] And the answer, or one of the answers, if I got it right, I sure hope I did, because I'm going to tell you, remind you of what I think was the big answer from last week.

The answer, again, is or was that Matthew, again, the first of the Gospels in the canon, Matthew is placing Jesus Christ within the corporate discourse of Israel.

That's how the New Testament begins with a warning to you, here's how to understand Jesus. Jesus lives within the corporate discourse of Israel.

Matthew's Gospel famously, and it often raises a bit of humor about how the New Testament gets off to a rather lame start, some people think. But it doesn't, really.

Matthew's genealogy, with which he begins his Gospel, Matthew's genealogy, any genealogy, is nothing, is it not? If not, an example of a community's self-understanding.

[31 : 21] That's what a genealogy does, surely. It's a community's assertion of here's who we, collective, we are. That's how, that's why Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy.

Again, a genealogy is nothing if not a community's self-understanding. A genealogy says here is where we come from, here is who we are.

Here, continuing with this, here is a discourse, to put it in a bit of formal language, here is a discourse within which we, and our language included, makes sense, or is intelligible, is my favorite word for this kind of thing.

Yes, Matthew is telling us, here's how to understand Jesus, here's the discourse in which he lives. Jesus, here's the God. So the first question, how may we talk intelligibly about words like the words, say, of Athanasius, hear them again, nothing else today, just go away with these kind of words from our God talk.

[32 : 41] Jesus Christ, perfect God, perfect man, ministering again the things of God to man, and ministering the things of man to God.

Where again does such a discourse live? Well, the answer must be, to begin with, according to Matthew, at least, this discourse about Jesus Christ is, to begin with, Israel specific.

That's where Jesus Christ, talk about him, lives. And that means, you can expand on that a bit, very helpfully, I'm sure, for me it's helpful. Israel, that would be Israel as Pentateuch, the first five scrolls, Genesis through Deuteronomy, Israel as a narrative about Egypt and desert and a promised land, Israel as law, as Moses, as Sinai, Israel as wisdom literature, Israel as prophets, priests, and kings. In this matrix, if you will, in this heaven-given discourse, this heaven-given discourse, Jesus Christ lives intelligibly.

You can use a certain language and understand and understand him within this discourse. Take him out of this discourse and it gets all confused. What a moment, what happens when you take it out.

[34 : 20] Jesus is, this is a Tom Wright, a renewed Tom Wright emphasis in his scholarship in our time. Jesus is Israel's God as promised returning to Zion.

Israel was expecting a great presence. Jesus is