

The Word Became Flesh

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for this warm and well-lit space that we can meet in on this day, our Lord's day, the day of his resurrection. Father, especially today as we think of the incarnation of your son, and in particular, how he was fully God in our midst.

Jesus, as we think of how you took on flesh for us, and how we see in the testimony to your earthly life, the evidence of your deity, we pray for the help of your spirit to understand these things. We think of Peter's words when he said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, and you said back to him that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him. So we acknowledge this morning that we need your help, Father, Son, and Spirit, to know you. But we also thank you that in your grace, you have promised to do just that, to make yourself known in your son and by your spirit through your word. So it's with that assurance and that confidence that we gather this morning, knowing that you are speaking and revealing God full of grace, and that in your son you have come with grace upon grace. So it's to him we look this morning, and it's his face we ask to see.

We pray in his mighty name, amen. All right, so class two, we're in class two of our course on the incarnation. Last week, you'll remember we kind of took a whistle-stop tour through the gospels, looking at Jesus's full humanity. And today, we're going to look at the other side of the coin, as it were. We're going to look at Jesus's full divinity, that he is fully God.

I want to start maybe in an odd place, just to sort of frame our conversation. One of the classic kind of books on comparative religion, at least in the West, is a book by a guy named Houston Smith. He wrote a book called *The World Religions*.

Interesting book. Not perfect, but good. And it's interesting, in his chapter on Buddhism, he starts the whole chapter on Buddhism saying this. He says, he says, how many people have provoked this question? Not who are you, with respect to name, origin, or ancestry, but what are you? What order of being do you belong to? What species do you represent? Not Caesar, certainly. Not Napoleon, or even Socrates. Only two. So only two people, Houston Smith says, in the history of humanity, have ever provoked the question, not just who are you, but what are you? And he says, Jesus and Buddha. They're the only two. And he goes on and says this, when people carried their puzzlement to the Buddha himself, the answer he gave provided an identity for his entire message. Are you a god, they asked? No. An angel? No. A saint? No. Then what are you?

[3 : 23] Buddha answered, I'm awake. I'm awake. What a great answer. You have to respect that answer, right? I mean, come on, that's a really cool answer. But isn't it interesting that the Buddha, given the quality of life that he lived, provokes this question, not just who are you, but what are you? But when people come to him and say, are you a god? Are you an angel? Are you a saint? He says, no, no, no, no, no.

I'm awake. I found a path to enlightenment, and I'm here to kind of teach you a path to enlightenment, right? Now, that has an interesting background to what we're going to talk about this morning, which is the person of Jesus Christ. When people came to Jesus and asked that question, what did Jesus say? Did he say, no, no, no, no, no? I've just come to teach you a path?

Or was his answer quite different? Spoiler alert, it was very different. And we're going to look at, last week, I realized I didn't use my time very well. We filled up the time with too much. So today, I want to take a little bit of a different tack, and just look at a couple choice passages that give us a window into Jesus's own understanding of who he was. Now, of course, when you read the Gospels, you realize that Jesus is testified as doing things that are quite amazing, right? I love this one section of the Gospel of Mark. It actually starts at the end of Mark 4 and into Mark 5, where Jesus comes and he calms a storm, right? Showing that he has authority over nature. And then they land on the shore of Gerasa, and he meets a demon-possessed man, and he casts the demons out of the man, showing that Jesus doesn't just have authority over the material creation, but also the spiritual creation, over the supernatural, right? The natural and the supernatural. And then the next scene, he goes and he heals a woman who's dealt with a bleeding issue for years and years and years, showing that he has authority over our physical sickness and our condition. And then, do you remember what happens at the end of this kind of series of stories? What's the last miracle that Jesus does there? Do you remember? Bible quiz time. He raises

Jairus' daughter. That's right. Jairus' daughter has died, and Jesus goes in and says, little girl, get up. And she wakes up from death, proving that Jesus even has authority over death itself. So you see in the gospel records, just constant testimony to Jesus's mighty works, which starts to provoke this question, who are you? Remember what they say when he calms the wind and the waves? Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him, right? We've never seen anything like this, was the things that they start to say.

But who does Jesus understand himself to be? So let's look at a few passages that might give us a window into that. The first one that I want us to look at, and if you have a Bible on your phone, you can turn there. I think, do we have some Bible? Beth, do we have any Bibles in the back? Maybe in the cabinet? Well, anyway, if you've got a Bible app or something, you can just turn. Let's start with Mark chapter 2. Mark chapter 2. Oh, thanks, Beth. Does anybody need a Bible? Mark 2. I'll read this for us.

[6 : 49] It says, now again, he's been kind of doing, at this point in Mark's gospel, even into the first chapter, he's been healing and teaching with authority, and people are saying, what is this? He's teaching with authority. We've never heard someone teach like that. And then he's doing mighty deeds. And then this happens. He says, and when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home, and many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them, and they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when the crowd could not get near him, I'm sorry, and when they, the people carrying the paralytic, could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him. And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. Now, some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, why do you question these things in your hearts?

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we never saw anything like this. Okay, a couple notes here. So Jesus says that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. If you start reading the Gospels for yourself, you'll find that Jesus is often using this expression, the Son of Man, to talk about himself. And what does that little phrase mean? Well, I think sometimes, you know, it's easy to think, oh, a Son of Man, that's like a human being, right? But actually, Jesus means something pretty specific by that. The Son of Man was actually a messianic title. It was a title for the Messiah that came from the book of Daniel.

Daniel was an Old Testament prophetic book. The second half of Daniel especially has very symbolic visions of how God's kingdom will come to fruition. And one of the key figures in that vision that Daniel has hundreds of years before Jesus came is of one like the Son of Man who ascends on the clouds of heaven and has given an everlasting dominion, right? And from that phrase in Daniel, the Son of Man, it became sort of a messianic title, a title of this like ruler who was going to come, who would be the greatest ruler, and who would rule with an everlasting dominion. So it's very interesting that Jesus here and throughout the Gospels, especially the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is taking up that title for himself, the Son of Man. But the question is, okay, well, okay, it's a messianic title.

That doesn't necessarily mean he's God, right? But let's look a little deeper at this passage in Mark 2. Jesus claims something very, very surprising in this passage. Jesus assumes to himself the authority to forgive sins, right? They lower the man down on the mat and he says, sons, your sins are forgiven. Now why on earth, well, why, looking at verse 6, some of the scribes are sitting there questioning their hearts. Why does this man speak like that? He's blaspheming.

[10 : 50] Why do they think it's blasphemy? It says right there. Who can forgive sins but God alone, right? Yeah. What is a sin, by the way? Who is a sin against?

It's an offense against God, right? Yeah. You know, if Abraham were to come to Richard one day and give him a good offensive slap against the cheek, be like, I mock you, right?

Something very, you know, chivalrous and austere. And I would step in and say, you know, don't worry. Abraham, I forgive you. How would Richard feel, right? Who has the authority to forgive this wrong except for Richard alone, right? You know? And here's Jesus sitting in the middle of this room looking to this man talking about sin, right? Which Jews knew that sin was against the one Lord God saying, therefore, I forgive you. I forgive you. Your sins are forgiven, right? That Jesus is here speaking with the authority of God.

And it's very interesting in this moment, Jesus isn't, you know, it would be one thing, wouldn't it, if Jesus were in the temple, right? Presiding over sacrifices, performing a sacrifice on behalf of someone as a priest and saying, ah, okay, God forgives your sins because you've done what God asked you to do under the old covenant of doing a sacrifice, right? But clearly that's not what Jesus is doing here. He's speaking out of his own authority, saying that he has the authority to forgive sins.

So Jesus is clearly here, I think, claiming a divine prerogative to himself. Something that only can be true of God, Jesus is just naturally taking to himself. And then giving evidence of it. How?

[12 : 49] By telling the man, take up your mat and walk. So that you know the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. Pick up your bed and walk, right? Which, by the way, is why they wanted the guy lowered through the roof in the first place, right? But isn't it, Jesus, that Jesus takes the opportunity here to go even deeper to reveal himself, right? And this is very early in Jesus's ministry, right? Sometimes we can think, if Jesus were God, why don't you just show up and just be like, everybody, I'm God. I'm here, right?

Now, let's workshop that a little bit. Why would that not have been a great idea for Jesus to do? Yeah, okay, he would have provoked a lot of ire from good monotheistic, his good monotheistic, you know, compatriots. Yeah, why else? Yeah, Ivor?

Yes, yep, yep, that's exactly what Josh threw in. Yes, they would have been like, this guy's blaspheming, you're out. Yeah, any other reasons? Judy, yeah? Because he wanted them to be able to hear, he wanted them to get it.

Yes! Doing it that way, yeah. Yeah, that's exactly right. I mean, it would have completely hit them as implausible if Jesus, who had lived in their, you know, he's in his hometown here. Did you catch that detail from Mark? He's in his hometown where he, you know, he didn't technically grow up there, but it was where he kind of, you know, set up shop. They knew he was a human being, like we talked about last week, right? He wouldn't have gotten very far if he just would have jumped right to the conclusion. He was going to show them, right? He was going to show them who he was before he told them who he was. Okay, let's keep going. Let's look, let's turn to a different gospel.

Let's go back to the gospel of Matthew, Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11, verses 25 through 30.

[14 : 42] Spending some time in what's called the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels, which is a Greek word that means they sort of see things together. They see things similarly, which is just a way of saying that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all are really similar, right? And then John sort of has this different perspective. He adds a lot to the life of Jesus, but I'm starting with the synoptic gospels because sometimes you'll find if you read some of the literature that, oh, all this stuff about Jesus being God, you only find that in the gospel of John. That was a later thing. It wasn't in some of the earliest records. That's actually not true when you look at the synoptic gospels and you really start to understand them on their own terms in their Jewish context, that they're presenting a very, very similar picture of Jesus' self-understanding.

Granted, not as explicit as the gospel of John, and we'll get there, but certainly very clear. Okay, let's look at this one from Matthew 11, 25 through 30. Matthew writes this, At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Okay, what's the context here? The context here is that we're a little further along in Jesus' ministry, and some people are starting to understand and be attracted to Jesus, and some people are starting to not understand, and opposition is starting to grow. And you see in the passage right before this, where some of the places where Jesus did a lot of his ministry, they're the ones who are actually rejecting him. So you're seeing the opposition to Jesus start to grow. But some are believing. Some eyes are being opened. So he says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

Jesus says this, all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me. Did I read that right? Did I skip a line? I think I skipped a line. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the... There we go, that's a line I missed.

And no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and a loving heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. What a great... I mean, the end of this passage is great. It's one of my favorite passages in all the Gospels, right?

[17 : 32] Jesus just inviting everyone to come and find rest in him. What a wonderful invitation of the Lord. But very interesting, what gives him the authority to say, come to me and rest? Well, look at the verse right before this. Verse 27. Jesus says, all things have been committed to me.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father. Makes this staggering claim that he has the right and the power to control everything that exists. All things have been given to me, right? Jesus will say in that same verse, right? No one knows the Father but the Son.

Okay. No one knows the Father but the Son. He's making a remarkable claim there to have complete knowledge of the Father, right? In a way that no one else does. Jesus is saying, I know God fully to the full in a personal way, right? And compared to the comprehensive and exhaustive way that Jesus knows the Father, no one else knows him at all, right? Now, that in of itself is a pretty stunning claim, right? How could a mere human say, I know God fully, deeply, intimately, supremely, right? After all, who can know the infinite but the infinite, right?

And this, in the Jewish context, would have been extra powerful, right? For sure, yeah. Because claiming that lineage and that full knowledge would have been identifying himself. Yeah, well, this Father-Son language, which I think we'll see in one of the other passages I've picked out, this Father-Son language starts to push into this kind of identity between Jesus and the Father. Yeah.

Because it was common for Jews to call God Father. Oh, absolutely. Yeah, it was... Exclusive kind of context where no one else knows him. Right. Exactly. Yeah. You can see that Jesus is taking that language and transfiguring it, right? He's pushing it up to a different degree that's true of him in a way that it's not true of others. That's right, Josh. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Now, here's the most startling statement in verse 27, though, when Jesus goes on and says, No one knows the Son but the Father.

[19 : 49] Okay. No one can understand the fullness of who Jesus is except for God himself.

I mean, I'm not... Think of how audacious that is, right? Again, if I were to come to... I'm going to use you as an example, Abraham. You're sitting close to the front, you and Richard. You guys are sitting closest to the front to me, so you get all that.

But, like, you know, if I were to come to Richard and be like, Richard, I'm so profound. I'm so wise. I'm so great. You won't be able to understand me.

Only God can really understand me. Right? I mean, that's a ridiculous thing to say, right? I mean, we just sit here and laugh about it. Right? Yeah. Right? Now, there is a truth in the fact that, like, only God really knows each of us individually. Right? Only God really knows me in the depths of who I am and Richard in the depths of who he is and Beth in the depths of who she is. Right? Of course. Right? As human beings, our understanding is limited. Right? But don't you see in the context of this verse where Jesus is saying, no one knows the Father but me and no one knows me but the Father. The kind of identity that he's drawing between himself and God. It really is a stunning, stunning claim.

Any thoughts on this passage before we move to the next one? Yeah, Richard. So, I'm uncomfortable with the word identity. Yeah, sure, sure, sure. Go ahead. Go ahead. I know what you mean. Yeah, yeah.

[21 : 24] I can't think of a better word just offhand right now. Yeah, yeah. But things that are identical are not in any way different or separate from each other.

Right, right. Certainly not numerically separate from each other. Yeah, yeah. Yep. I just slipped into modalism. Well, inadvertently. No, it's really right. Now, I think you're bringing up a really good point, Richard, because you can see why, again, we're pushing into the reality of God as Trinity, right?

Can I say one more thing? Oh, yeah, of course. If by identical you mean the Son finds his identity in the Father and the Father finds his identity in the Son as distinct identities.

Yeah. Sure, sure, sure. I'll go along. Yeah, the only thing I meant by that is just Jesus is fully divine. Yeah. He is of one nature with the Father, right? But they are different persons, right?

If we have fun in this class, we'll do a class on the Trinity in spring, you know, and then we'll get into it. Yeah. Yeah. No, thank you for that clarification. You're right. You're right. Because Jesus isn't saying, like, I'm the Father, right?

[22 : 35] He's saying, no, I'm the Son of the Father, right? Which is pushing us into the realm of God's, of there being one God who eternally exists in more than one person, right?

And as we see in the rest of the, as the rest of the New Testament unfolds, that God reveals himself to eternally exist as one God in three persons, right? There's one God, right?

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Spirit is God. But the Father is not the Son. And the Son is not the Spirit. And the Spirit is not the Father, right? And in that right there, that's the doctrine of the Trinity, right?

And if you can wrap your mind around that, then you're God, right? Then there's a fourth person of the Trinity. No, I'm kidding. Anyway, we're getting into the, we're getting a little off track.

But you can see the kinds of claims that Jesus is making here of this, well, identity isn't the right word. He's at an equal level as the Father, right? Yeah, Susan, go ahead.

[23 : 35] I just love how the scripture teaches me the full of the, as you said, never saying, look, guys, we're training. Yeah.

Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah. About 66 separate books over how many generations reveals it. That's right. And to read it.

Yeah, that's right. I'm going to see you're hovering over the water. Yeah, that's right. I mean, just on and on and on. Yeah, yeah. It's just so beautiful. Yeah. It is. I don't think any other conclusion. Yeah, that's right.

That's right. It's the Bible. Yeah, that's right. When you, you know, when you, especially when you study the development of how the church articulates what we now call the doctrine of the Trinity, what you really find they're doing is just exegesis of the Bible.

They're trying to, they're trying to understand what God has revealed in the Bible and, and put it into language so that we can come to the text and understand what it's saying. You know, sometimes people look at the development of Christian doctrine and say, ah, it's all these like, all these foreign ideas getting imported and we just need to get back to the pure scriptures.

[24 : 40] And of course, scriptures always are supreme norm, right? And maybe there are some ways of articulating it that we articulate in different ways. But what the church is doing as it develops these doctrines is simply exegeting scripture and finding ways of saying it that brings these threads together.

And that's what, that's what a word like Trinity or even incarnation is, right? Trinity is not a word you will find in scripture. What it is, is it's a, it's a, it's a little handle that points to these passages about the very nature of who God's revealed himself to be, right?

You could, you can chalk the word Trinity if you want, that's fine, right? But you're hard pressed to find a better word to describe the biblical reality, right? Same thing with incarnation.

Now, incarnation gets pretty close to John 1, 14, right? The word, the word became flesh. I mean, literally all incarnation means the Latin word that just means became flesh, right? So anyway, let's keep, let's keep going.

Let's look at the gospel of John. John 5. Yeah, Jonathan. No, I think it's definitely getting into that realm.

[26 : 01] John, for sure. Yeah. And we'll look at some other passages that push into that more explicitly, especially as some of Jesus' earliest followers start to explain their understanding of who Jesus revealed himself to be.

Yeah. But absolutely, you see this when it comes to the person Jesus all the time. It's almost as if, like, there's a line, right? And above that line is God, and below that line is all of creation.

And that's, like, basic biblical worldview, right? Like, God is not the creation. He's the creator, right? And then the question comes is, like, well, where do we put Jesus with respect to that line?

Is he above it or is he below it, right? And we'll talk more about this next week when we get into the kind of development of understanding the incarnation. But again and again, the scripture writers are saying he's above that line.

He assumed human nature below that line, but he is above it, right? And we'll look at some places in just a second where that comes out. So let's look at John 5, actually. This will be good.

[27 : 02] This will get us there. John 5. Let's look at 19 through 23. And then we'll look at John 8 after this.

Okay. John 5, 19 through 23. So Jesus said to them, Then Jesus goes on and says, So Jesus is claiming here that, again, he and the Father basically are working in unison.

And all the glory that the Father deserves, Jesus deserves. All the right and authority that the Father has to judge, the Son has. All the authority and power to give life and to grant life and to take it away, the Son has.

And if you think about a kind of basic biblical monotheism, right? If we were to read the Old Testament and just ask, what is the picture of God that we're seeing here?

It's very clear in the Old Testament that the one Lord God has two prerogatives. One, to make things, right? He is the giver of life. And two, because he's the giver of life, he has a right to judge things, right?

[28 : 58] He will be the one before whom all of creation comes into account. And again, Jesus is saying, In that circle of that God, I'm inside of it.

It's almost as if, you know, again, going back to the kind of scholarly criticism, Like, oh yeah, John's gospel is kind of later. Right. It's kind of weird.

Right. It's not. Yeah. It doesn't line up. It's not really what Jesus... Right. If you think about the relationship that John... Sure. ...claims for himself, right?

Yeah, right. Jesus is like best friend. Right. Right. And there's 12 guys, right? Like, not all of them can be as close to Jesus. Right, right. Yeah, right, right. It's like, he's in the crowd and he's preaching something, But the people in the back row can't quite hear.

Yeah, yeah. John is hearing, like, every little thing that he's... Yeah, yeah. And so, I don't know. It's... Yeah. Or like, somebody described once, John's description of, like, the Lord's Supper and watching the disciples' feet as like a photographer doing close-ups.

[30 : 09] Mm, interesting. Yeah. Like, just... It's just that much more intimate because it's closer to... Yeah. Literally closer to Jesus. Yeah, that's right. That's a good word, Josh.

Yeah. I think you find that a lot of those perspectives on the New Testament were developed kind of late... I mean...

For a while, New Testament scholars thought... If they kind of took a very kind of... For lack of a better term, secular view of the New Testament, they started to develop theories whereby the composition and completion of John's Gospel wasn't until, like, the early second century, right?

So, they started to believe that John was really, really late. And that was because when they read John's Gospel, they thought, well, there's all these, what they thought to be, really Greek influences.

It just felt like there was all these Greek ideas that had been imported. Anachronistic? Yeah. So, the hypothesis was, well, what happens when those Jesus stories kind of got passed down and whispered down the lane into the second century in Greek cultures?

[31 : 22] Well, then they just started adding all this stuff. What's really interesting is this, is that we actually have small copies, like, not full copies, but fragments of the Gospel of John that are dated well within the first century.

So, that kind of crushed that idea that John's Gospel wasn't written until into the second century, right? And then, the more we've actually studied first century Judaism, we realize that John's Gospel actually is a very Jewish Gospel.

It's not just sort of larded with Greek ideas, whatever that means, right? And this is where a more sophisticated understanding of the first century has really blown a lot of holes in these kind of old modernist ideas of the development of the New Testament.

Is that an oxymoron, old modernist? No, actually. Modernist meaning a particular intellectual movement. Yeah. But it does sound kind of oxymoronic, doesn't it?

Which is good. I like that it sounds oxymoronic. So, the more and more we've studied the history of first century Judaism, we've realized that there isn't this kind of clean divide between like all these Hebrew ideas and all these Greek ideas, which is how a lot of that kind of turn of the century New Testament scholarship worked.

[32 : 40] It's like, well, anything that we thought was a Hebrew idea was early. Anything we thought was a Greek idea is late. But look, first century Jews were always, the cultures were always mixed.

Since Alexander in the fourth century BC took over everything, it was all Hellenized, right? Right? Philo in the first century was writing things that were more Greek and philosophical than some of the Greeks were.

So, it just blows holes in a lot of these theories that try to undermine the early day and the plausibility of the Gospels being historically reliable.

Okay, anyway, that was a way rabbit trail. Let's go to John 8. Let's go to John 8 before we run out of time. John 8, verse 51.

Let's see where we're at here. Yeah, let's look at 51 through 59. So, in John 8, as John is telling the story of Jesus' life, his conflict with the religious authorities is really starting to peak at this point.

[33 : 40] So, let's pick up with 51. Jesus is saying, truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. I mean, maybe we could have just read that verse and then called it a day.

If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. Okay, well, then the Jews said to him, now we know that you have a demon. Okay, so they're in the middle of a fight right now. Now we know that you have a demon.

Listen, Abraham died, as did the prophets. Yet you say, if anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham who died and the prophets died?

Who do you make yourself out to be? There's Houston Smith's point, right? People are asking, who are you? Well, they're actually asking, who do you think you are right here? Okay, yeah. Jesus answered, if I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

It's my father who glorifies me, of whom you say he is our God. But you've not known him. I know him. If I were to say to you that I do not know him, I'd be a liar like you.

[34 : 47] Sorry. The gloves are coming off in this very first century. You know, when we read the New Testament, we have to remember that, like, it's gritty and real, right? Like, they weren't always as civil in their disagreements as sometimes we maybe were.

I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham, now here's the stunning thing. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day.

He saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to him. And in John's Gospel, by the way, when it says, the Jews, like that, what he means is not all Jewish people. That's a technical phrase for John that means, like, the Jewish authorities, like the Jewish religious authorities.

So the Jews said to him, you're not yet 50 years old. Have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

So they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. So clearly, I mean, this is a strange thing for someone to say, right?

[36 : 00] Before Abraham was, I am. I mean, it's just a stunning statement for Jesus to say. And not only is Jesus sort of claiming a sort of eternal existence here that predates even the sort of ultimate patriarch of Judaism.

And not just is he claiming that, like, Abraham's hopes were all riding on him coming and fulfilling the promises, which, of course, that's true. But even the tense of, you know, he doesn't say, before Abraham was, I was, right?

But before Abraham was, I am. Which most scholars of the Gospel of John will say Jesus is sort of deliberately picking up there on an Old Testament thread, right?

Do you remember when Moses was at the burning bush, right? And how does God reveal himself in that moment? What's the sort of divine name that the Lord, God, speaks out of the burning bush to Moses, right?

Go ahead, Kim. I am who I am, right? And this I am becomes a way of referring to the one true transcendent ultimate creator God who's covenanted himself with Israel for the rescue of the world.

[37 : 11] And Jesus is claiming that for himself here. And that's why they pick up stones to throw at him. Because clearly they heard it as blasphemy. Okay.

It's a quarter of. I wonder... There's so much more I wanted to do. I'm terrible at time management in these Sunday schools. I'm sorry. Why don't we look at, just real briefly, two passages of New Testament writers looking back on Jesus and kind of making sense of him.

So what did the earliest followers of Jesus believe about Jesus, right? So we've seen kind of Jesus' own self-understanding here. What was the earliest church saying about him?

One place to start would be Colossians 2. So we're flipping into the letters now. So moving from the kind of accounts of Jesus' life into the letters where the apostles of Jesus are teaching the churches and shepherding them and guiding them in their belief and following of Jesus.

So Philippians, Colossians. Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. It's after 1 and 2 Corinthians. Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

[38 : 32] Colossians chapter 2. Let me read 6 through 10. Paul says, Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty to seed according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

And you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority. So, I mean, there's a pretty straightforward claim that the apostles understood in Jesus the fullness of deity to dwell.

I want to jump back a chapter in Colossians, just because this will come up at times in these conversations about the early church's understanding of Jesus. And that's in Colossians 1, verse 15.

So if you just jump back a chapter, you see that in 1, 15, Paul's talking about Jesus. He's talking about the Son. And then he says, He is the image of the invisible God.

[39 : 40] And then he says this, The firstborn of all creation. Now you think, whoa, tap the brakes. The firstborn of all creation. That sounds a lot like Jesus was a created being, right?

He was the firstborn. Okay, this is where a little bit of cultural translation is helpful. The firstborn was basically a title in the first century for someone who was the inheritor of the entire estate, right?

Now you can see why firstborn language would mean sort of the one who has authority and privilege and right over something. Because it was a culture where if you were literally the oldest son, you were the heir of the whole estate, right?

But that language of firstborn becomes almost like a technical term. That doesn't have to mean like you were literally born of someone, but you have the rights over it all, right?

And so in other words, what Paul means here, not necessarily that Jesus was sort of first in created order, right? But first in rank or first in authority or first in glory over it, right?

[40 : 45] Now, granted, if verse 15 were the only verse we had about Jesus, it would be kind of open. What does Paul mean? But I think when you compare that with the rest of the New Testament, it's clear that Paul's using that as a title, not as a statement of Jesus' ontological nature, right?

So he's the firstborn of all creation, meaning because he is the image of the invisible God, he has the right over all creation. Now, why does he have the right over all creation?

For by him, all things were created. Oh, okay. Well, now that sort of solves it, right? For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. And that for him is the idea that he is the first, the heir of it all, right?

And he is before all things. And in him, all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning. So now Paul's turned the corner from creation, right, to redemption.

[41 : 51] He's the head of the body, the church, right? This body that's the new creation out of sin. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, right? So now he has authority not just over creation, but even over life and death, right?

That in everything he might be preeminent. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

And that verse kind of gets us into the just practical difference that it makes. That Jesus is not just human, but God, right?

We touched on a little bit this last week. And we'll pick this up next week. This is where we'll start next week. But maybe we'll just end by saying this. Like, if Jesus is God, then that means a number of things.

[43 : 02] It means not just that Jesus is worthy of complete worship, right? Not just sort of respect as another human, but utter adoration and total allegiance and obedience, right?

But it also means that the salvation, that the redemption that Jesus has accomplished is of infinite value. We said last week that because he's a human, he's able to intercede for us.

He's able to work on our behalf. That because he's fully God, that salvation he's wrought on our behalf is incomparably great. Because God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

Okay, why don't we stop there? We have like maybe two or three minutes for questions. Any other questions you guys have? Again, we're going to pick up on some of the ramifications of Jesus being God next week.

And then we'll do a little church history of talking about how the church tried to draw these two truths together of Jesus being human and God and divine. Yeah, Richard, go ahead. Well, the passage in chapter 2 of Colossians that we read.

[44 : 14] Yeah. I use this verse sometimes with Jehovah's Witnesses. Yeah. And others too who are not Jehovah's Witnesses.

Yeah. And when I point that out, they say, oh my, look at verse 10. And you have fullness in him. You have been brought to fullness, as it says in the NIV.

Right, right. So you see, we participate in the same fullness Jesus had. Does that make us God? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I always thought that was such a lame argument.

Say more. Yeah, say more. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, well, clearly, I mean, yeah, I mean, I think the short answer is, is that the fullness of deity dwelt in Jesus and he brings us into his fullness.

Right? It's not ours. It's his. Right? But what is the fullness Paul's talking about in that next verse? Is it the fullness of deity or something else? Right? I think it's the fullness of the salvation that he's brought for us.

[45 : 18] Right? The fullness of what God intends humans to enjoy and have. Right? Now, here's what's true about that. Right? That we were created in God's image. Right?

To be co-regents with God in creation. That doesn't make us God, but it certainly elevates us to a status that's very wonderful. Right? And undeserved.

Completely undeserved. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Good. Any other questions or thoughts? Yes. Yes. So, just that, going back to the technical use of firstborn.

Yeah. I guess I'm trying to equate it to something else in my mind. I don't like how Jesus takes on the other title, the son of David, even though he teaches the crowds, like, how can he be David's son?

Right, right. He's Lord over David. Yeah, yeah. And also how it's kind of murky because Joseph is not Jesus' biological father. Right, right.

[46 : 16] I don't know. I'm, that's something I'm trying to wrap my mind on. Yeah, yeah. Christmas is like, wait. Right. I'm going to be the son of David. Just like. Yeah. Well, so you see, so a couple things there, Josh.

So, one is Jesus is the son of David through Joseph by adoption and through Mary by physical birth, right? And you see that in the genealogies.

Two, I think that the firstborn language there is, it's a title as opposed to a statement of his, like, nature, of his nature, right?

It's a title of his right and his rule to authority. When you're, when you're reading through the New Testament, you will see that there are, there are times when, like, I think this happens at the beginning of Romans, where he was declared to be the son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead.

He became Lord in Christ. Okay, so then it seems like, well, wait, it seems like Jesus wasn't always God. He sort of became God. And what you'll find, again, this gets back to Jesus being fully human and fulfilling all of those promises that were made about David's son and the true role of humanity, right?

[47 : 27] So, there are things that Jesus accomplishes in his human nature, right? Kind of like Hebrews, he became perfect through what he suffered. Exactly, exactly, right? So, there are ways in which Jesus in his humanity does fulfill those things.

He is enthroned as king forever, right? Right, but that, but, so, so the, so the New Testament can look at Jesus and talk about, you know, what he has accomplished, but then also who he is, right?

So, I mean, so we, it's helpful to have that distinction. Yeah, it's like, in his incarnation, because, because the full picture of that passage in Hebrews is saying, like, this is your model for, for the path of faith.

Right. When he took on a human nature, he had to then become the God-man, right? Like, that's not, that's not right.

He experienced our full humanity in that experience of suffering. Right. And even in sort of growing in his moral fiber, we might say, as in his human nature, right?

[48 : 32] Even though in his divine nature, he was perfect and sinless and would always be so. And that, that's actually something that was sort of overlooked in my early days. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, still wrapping my head in it.

Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. But it's. We will be for all eternity wrapping our heads around that. Yeah. For our human souls to know. Absolutely. Didn't. Yeah. He didn't have easy mode turned on through life, right?

Yeah, that's right. That's right. You know, like. Yeah, that's right. Because that was a picture of Christ that was painted for me. Yeah, that's right. That's right. Like, oh, Jesus, you know, like, he was tempted in every way like we are. Right. But, you know, he was God, so like, it really wasn't a big deal to him.

Right. Like, that does undercut. Right. Like you were saying, the enormous value of the salvation he brought to us. Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah. In reading the Gospels, you never get the sense that Jesus in his fully human nature has it just on autopilot.

Right? Yeah. And there is a sense that in order to procure for us a perfect righteousness, a perfect human righteousness, that Jesus, you know, he did those things in his human nature.

[49 : 39] Right? He resisted sin and temptation in his human nature. And in fact, as I'm sure you know, you know, Hebrews will say he was tempted in every way that we are except without sin. And that's an interesting phrase, right?

Yet without sin. We can sometimes read that and think, well, how did Jesus know what I dealt with if he never sinned? Right? But, you know, it's interesting if you, when you bend something, if any of you are engineers, when you bend something, at the point it breaks is where your force on it needs to stop.

Right? So if I'm bending a toothpick, I only need to exert a certain amount of force and then it snaps. If I'm bending a piece of iron, I've really got to bend it. And then it probably won't even break. But then if I was like superhuman strength, I'd break it.

Right? So Jesus in his human nature experienced the full weight of temptation without ever breaking, which means that Jesus experienced a kind of like a tempting that we can't imagine.

Right. So there's a way in which Jesus understood temptation in an even deeper way than we did, which is such a great comfort to know that whatever temptations I'm experiencing, our Savior, our Shepherd can sympathize with that to the thousandth degree.

[50 : 52] On the cross, right? Exactly. Right. So he understands even the guilt and shame of sin as well. That's right. Yes, Lewis could even say that like on the cross, Christ repented, right?

Yeah, right. Which I don't remember how he did that. Yeah. Right. That was very helpful. Right. Yeah, good. Okay, we should wrap up. Okay. Let me pray for us. Lord Jesus, we give you praise as our God and our King.

Lord, again, as we began, so we end, asking for your Holy Spirit to help these things, not just take up residence in our minds, but that we might understand them with our hearts and that we might really trust in you as our Savior and as our King and as our God.

We pray this in your mighty name, Lord. Amen. All right, friends. Thanks for coming. We'll see you next week. Thank you. Okay.

Okay.