

Friday Bible Study - Week Five

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[0 : 0 0] Hey guys, I'm Brian. Welcome back to Friday Bible Study. Each week we've been looking at different aspects of Christian doctrine, and today we're going to look at the subject of Christology, or the theology of Jesus Christ.

Who was Jesus? What did he do? What does his life and work mean for us? And I just want to say how good is it, especially during a time like this, in the middle of a global pandemic, to just take a moment for the next 20 or so minutes to stop thinking about all the problems in the world that we can't fix, and to just set our minds on one of the most important truths in all the world.

Who was Jesus? You know, every religion offers some kind of explanation of who Jesus was. His life cannot be ignored. Islam teaches that Jesus was a great prophet, but inferior to Muhammad.

The Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was the Archangel Michael, a created being who became a man. The New Age guru, Deepak Chopra, says that Jesus is a state of consciousness that we can all aspire to.

Right now in our country, many people are not religiously affiliated, and they just don't see the point, and maybe they haven't thought about Jesus at all. But the reality is you've got to do something with Jesus.

[1 : 1 6] You can't just ignore him. His mark is written all over history. We literally measure time around his birth and his life. And so we've got to ask and wrestle with this question.

In some ways, the question of Jesus is really the center of Christian theology. Christ is what makes us Christians after all. We don't just believe in God in general as Christians.

We believe in God specifically as revealed to us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Brian Hart has previously spoken about the confusing nature of the Trinity, that we believe in one God in three persons.

Well, when we begin to explore the question of who is Jesus, that's really what leads us towards a development of Trinitarian doctrine. Because we believe that Jesus was God, and yet Jesus is distinct from God the Father.

We see this explicitly in the first few verses of the Gospel of John. In John 1, verse 1, where John writes, And so we learn here that Jesus is the preexistent Word of God.

[2 : 3 7] John makes it clear that Jesus was existing with God in the beginning. He's preexistent, but he also says he was God, but he was also with God, right? So which is it?

John says that this Word of God also created everything. And we know that God created everything. So that means that he's clearly equal to God in every way. God's Word, Jesus is called.

God's Word is God's self-revelation. When God speaks, he reveals himself. God's Word is also God's action. Because whenever God speaks, something happens. When God said, let there be light, boom, there was light.

God speaking is God in action. God's Word is God in revelation. But the way John speaks about it, it's as if God's action and revelation in his Word are so potent and powerful that they're actually spoken of as a separate, unique, distinct person from God the Father.

So the Word is God, but the Word was also with God. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, the Word of God, is in union with God the Father, but is a separate person from God the Father.

[3 : 49] And the place where we really see this more obviously and also powerfully to us personally is when we look at the incarnation. The incarnation is when the Word of God became flesh.

The Word of God becomes flesh. The word incarnation simply means in flesh. Carne means flesh. And so this theological word just means in the flesh. The pre-existing Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, entered into human history and became a man.

And this means that even though Jesus was born into this world, he actually existed before his birth. He existed eternally in his divine nature as the second person of the Trinity, but in the incarnation, he assumed a human nature.

We take this belief a little bit for granted, but when we really marinate in it, it is just a mind-blowing theological idea that the pre-existing Word of God was born.

The very Word that spoke life into being lived a real human life. The creator of the world lived in the creation that he made.

[4 : 58] And this is so important and beautiful because we see that God's ultimate revelation to us is not just words that he spoke to the prophets that were written down in a book, but actually the ultimate revelation of God is a person.

Jesus himself is God's Word. God's ultimate revelation. The author of Hebrews puts it this way. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.

See, John doesn't just say that Jesus brought the Word like other prophets. He says Jesus was the Word. And the author of Hebrews says that unlike prophets who heard messages from God and spoke them, Jesus himself was the message.

God's ultimate message was not a book. God's ultimate message was the person of Jesus. John Piper puts it this way. He says, John calls Jesus the Word because Jesus himself, in his coming and working and teaching and dying and rising, was the final and decisive message of God.

And so the person of Jesus, his life and his words and his works, they reveal God to us. Again, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, it says Jesus was the radiance.

[6 : 12] He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. The exact imprint of the nature of God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. It's as if Jesus were a mirror.

And when you look into it, you actually see God. Like God is what's reflected when you look at Jesus. He's the radiance of the glory of God. In Jesus, we see what God is like, what God loves.

But in the person of Jesus, we also have a tension because Jesus is God. He's fully God. But Jesus is also a man. He was born just like you and me into human history.

He's fully man. And so we see this tension even in his birth because Jesus was born of a virgin, right? So on the one hand, he was born from the womb of a woman, just like us. But on the other hand, the virgin birth reminds us that he was God.

No man but God himself was the father of Jesus. The simple phrase that the church has used to describe this mysterious tension in the person of Jesus is that Jesus is one person with two natures.

[7 : 15] Jesus is one person with two natures. That's something that we believe as Christians. It's something the church has always believed. But it was actually at the Council of Chalcedon, 1,500 years ago, where this language was developed to describe it in this very helpful way, to help us wrap our heads around what's happening in the person of Jesus.

I just want to read for you a portion of the creed that came out of this council. Again, written over 1,500 years ago to help the church understand the person of Jesus and his two natures.

It says this, In other words, he had a real, a rational soul and body, just like you and me.

Consubstantial with the Father, according to the Godhead, that means of the same substance as God the Father, according to the Godhead, and of the same substance, consubstantial with us, according to the manhood.

In all things like unto us, without sin, begotten before all ages of the Father, according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood.

[8 : 35] One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably.

I love how they state such impossibly mysterious truths with such beautiful language. Jesus is one Jesus, one person in two natures.

And so let's briefly talk about these two natures, about both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. First of all, we know that Jesus is fully God. We already saw how Jesus was explicitly called by John to be the pre-existing word of God.

He was God. But we see it in Jesus' own words and works as well. Let's just run through some of the ways that we see Jesus' divine nature put on display in the Bible. First of all, he claimed to forgive sin.

You know, if somebody kicked me, I could say, I forgive you, right, to that person. But if somebody kicked you, it would kind of be inappropriate for me to step in and say, hey, all is forgiven.

[9 : 36] That's your job, right? But Jesus actually had the audacity to forgive somebody for their sins that had nothing to do with him at all. This is how it went down in Mark chapter two. 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's blaspheming who can forgive sins but God alone. And they're right. Secondly, Jesus claimed to be the judge of the world.

You know, the Jewish people believed that after death, every person would stand accountable to God, their creator, for the life that they lived and they would be judged for their works done in the body.

Only God can be our judge because only God has infinite knowledge, enough to be able to judge every person. But that didn't stop Jesus from saying this in John chapter five. For the father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son that all may honor the son just as they honor the father.

Thirdly, Jesus claims to be the exclusive source of truth about God. Jesus didn't just say he was a way to God. He doesn't just give us some information about God, some we find in Jesus, some we find over here.

[10 : 49] No, he said he gave exclusive, unprecedented knowledge of God. In John 14, he said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.

Fourthly, Jesus claimed to be the hope that the Bible, all the scriptures were pointing to. You know, the Jewish people took their scriptures very, very seriously.

The Bible is what told them about God, about what God was like. But Jesus said, you know, as seriously as you take the scriptures, you're missing something. In John 5, he said, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me.

Hey, conceited much? It's only conceited if it's not true. C.S. Lewis put it this way. He said that Jesus' statements about himself, if not true, are those of a megalomaniac compared with whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men.

So, Jesus clearly saw himself as, and the gospel clearly portrayed Jesus as fully God, the second member of the Trinity. But as God, Jesus became fully man.

[11 : 55] So, Jesus is also fully man. It is heresy to diminish the divinity of Jesus, to say that Jesus is less than God. That's heresy to just say Jesus is like God or he, you know, he was God's first and greatest creation or anything like that.

But it's actually just as heretical to diminish the humanity of Jesus. And this is actually a common heresy in the history of the church as well. In fact, one of the very first heresies that we see, even the gospel writers refuting, was the heresy that Jesus was not truly a man, that he didn't really come in the flesh.

This is what it says in 1 John chapter 4. By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. So, some people were saying, maybe God just appeared to us on earth like a spirit, and John says, no, he came in the flesh.

He was a real man, a human being like you and I. And that's why he goes on, he says, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we've seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The word of life was as physical and tangible and real and human as you and I. Jesus was true humanity. That means that Jesus got tired and he slept.

[13 : 09] Jesus got hungry and he ate. And then he used the bathroom afterwards. Jesus got sick, which is a comforting thing to know in the middle of a global pandemic. Jesus stubbed his toes, right?

I love that God himself entered into every ordinary moment of human existence. These are things that God not only created for us to experience, but that he actually experienced.

And Jesus also experienced real human temptation, just like we all do. And this is so important to Christian belief and also for how we relate with and see Jesus. It puts it this way in Hebrews chapter 4.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one in whom every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

A fully human Jesus is a sympathetic Jesus. We have a high priest, a savior, who sympathizes with us, a God who's been where we have been. He didn't keep himself far from us.

[14 : 11] You know, sometimes we think of Jesus as like a superhuman, you know, because he didn't sin after all. But Hebrews says Jesus was tempted in every way like we are. In other words, he could have sinned in the sense that he was presented with the opportunity and he had a human will with real human desires, but Jesus would not sin because he was filled with love for God instead of being filled with broken desires and the sin that keeps us from God.

But that actually makes Jesus more human, not less, because sin is not integral to our humanity. Sin is actually what corrupts our humanity. We talked about this last week.

We talked about what it meant to be an image bearer of God. There's actually a sense in which Jesus is the most human person who's ever lived because he was the only human to live perfectly the way that God intends for all humans to live, acting fully as an image bearer of God, reflecting God's goodness and glory and love the way that we're all meant to be until sin corrupted our humanity and marred that image in us.

And because Jesus lived as a human in obedience and worship to God, Jesus actually fulfilled what it meant to be human and he healed humanity from the inside. See, God entered into humanity in order to redeem humanity.

You know, without the two natures of Jesus Christ, there is no good news because only one who is human could stand in the place of humanity but only one who was God could actually do for humanity what needed to be done.

[15 : 46] Without the incarnation, there is no gospel at all. The good news begins with God coming down, with the descent of God into the world he created, coming to heal the world and humanity from the inside out.

You know, I think if we're honest, when some of us picture God, we think of him sort of like Mr. Clean, right? Big guy, pure white clothes, muscles, very put together, spick and span.

There's no germs on him. There's no grime on him and he would like to keep it that way, right? With Mr. Clean, we're probably not even allowed in the house because we would make a mess and you know, we've been playing outside, we've got mud on our shoes and after all, we know that God can't stand the presence of sin.

He's perfectly holy but actually, when you encounter the incarnation, it sort of turns that picture of God upside down a little bit. Because we don't have a God who's a bit uptight about getting our dirt on his clean white shirt.

No, we actually have a God who got down in the dirt with us. The incarnation means that God is not afraid of our mess. God enters into our mess. Jesus is not the God who stays at a distance and tells us how we can clean ourselves up, make ourselves clean and pure.

[16 : 59] He's not waiting for ourselves to fix our own problems. He is the God who gets dirty with the dirt of humanity. He enters into our muck to make us clean. See, the gospel is the story of a pursuing God.

You know, we talk a lot about our spiritual journey and we all have areas where we want to grow, areas where we've fallen short and most of us, we see ourselves on a journey but what I love about the incarnation when I think about the gospel is what one theologian says that it is not our spiritual journey that lies at the center of our faith.

It is the journey of the incarnate one to us. Jesus came to us. He entered into the world to heal the world. Hebrews again puts it like this. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same things, flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect. There's an early church father named Gregory who had a saying. He said, that which has not been assumed has not been healed.

In other words, Jesus assumed our humanity completely in order to heal it. He entered into our condition in order to fix it. He took on flesh and blood to redeem flesh and blood.

[18 : 16] Jesus endured every pain any human has ever endured and more. See, when God decided to put on flesh and come down, he didn't come down in the form of a rich ruler, but he came down in the form of a servant, a peasant.

And he didn't live a life of earthly success either, but actually one of gruesome failure. He didn't die in comfort at a nice old age. When God put on flesh, he died in the most shameful way possible.

And this truth for us is very powerful in times of trouble that we have a sympathetic savior. I heard the story of Corrie ten Boom. Her and her family were Christian watchmakers in the Netherlands during World War II, and they helped and hid Jews during that time.

And as a result, they were thrown into Nazi concentration camps where Corrie's entire family died except for her. And she wrote her memoir in the book *The Hiding Place* and she told of how every Friday the prisoners were required to strip down for a so-called medical inspection, but really it was just a recurring humiliation.

The prisoners were made to stand totally naked in a line and they weren't even allowed to use their hands to cover themselves. They had to stand erect with their hands at their sides. And one Friday as Corrie stood beside her frail, naked, and dying sister Betsy, the thought came to her.

[19 : 33] Jesus hung naked on the cross. You know, Renaissance artists, when they paint the crucifixion, they try to be reverent. They add at least some sort of scrap of cloth, but Corrie knew that on that good Friday there had been no reverence for Jesus, just like there was no reverence for her in that camp where she stood naked and shamed.

And so she whispered to Betsy as they stood there, ashamed, she whispered to her sister, they took his clothes too, Betsy. What is not assumed is not healed.

And on the cross, God did not only assume our humanity, but he also took on our inhumanity. He took on flesh and that flesh was exposed and torn.

As the Chalcedonian Creed says, for us and for our salvation, Jesus was born into this world and he died in this world for our sins. He was made like us in every respect and his death destroyed the powers of sin and death that held humanity in their grip and with his resurrection, he is the first fruits of our resurrection.

He was made like us in every respect and because of that, his resurrection shows us our future in him. See, this is the beauty of the incarnation.

[20 : 45] We know that just like he was made like us and if his future is resurrection, then that means that we will be made like him. We will, because Jesus Christ conquered death, we will be given resurrection bodies that do not know death or corruption.

We will be restored through our faith in Christ to be full image bearers of God like we were always meant to be. Only God could have conquered the powers of sin and death and only a man could have stood in our place to redeem us.

So thanks be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood. Truly God and truly man.