

Back to Basics: God the Son

John 1:1-14 ¹

As Jesus shared His last Passover meal with His disciples, He gave them some extended instruction recorded chiefly by John. Among the important teachings Jesus gave that night was this one:

- *“If you love me, keep my commands. And **I** will ask the **Father**, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the **Spirit** of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:15-18).*
- *“When the Advocate comes, whom **I** will send to you from the **Father**—the **Spirit** of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26).*

As we continue our five-week “Back to Basics” overview, we looked last week at God the Father. We look this morning at God the Son, and next week at God the Spirit. As we move forward, remember that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in so many words in the New Testament. Rather, Jesus’ followers began to discern the reality of the Trinity as they tried to make sense of their own experiences with God, and of such statements as those Jesus made in the texts I just read.

This morning’s text in John 1 tells us that *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Christians call what took place in the person of Jesus the “Incarnation,” which means “to be made flesh.”

The mystery of how God could take on human flesh yet still remain God is beyond our understanding, and it has been so from the beginning. People of Jesus’ own day were certainly divided over Him:

- *“We know that God spoke to Moses, [the leaders said,] but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from”* (John 9:29).
- The people responded, *“If this man were not from God, he could do nothing”* (John 9:33).
- No! *“He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”* (John 10:20).
- *But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon”* (John 10:21).
- *“If you are the Messiah, [the leaders said,] tell us plainly”* (John 10:24).
- *Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe”* (John 10:25).

Have you ever wondered whether, if Jesus were among us in a similar way today, we would recognize Him? When I wonder about that, I ask myself this question: **“If God became human in the form of a man, what kind of man would we expect Him to be?”** Let me suggest six things we might expect:

1. We would expect God-in-the-flesh to be a perfect picture of the ideal man.

When we examine the record, Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated consistency without obstinacy; kindness without weakness; tenderness without sentimentality; dignity without pride; and self-denial without morbidity. He was not worldly or materialistic,

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on October 21, 2012.

but neither was He indifferent or unsociable. He had virtue with strength. He demonstrated both love for God and love for other people. He extended forgiveness for the sinner but expressed condemnation for the sin. He looks pretty good so far.

2. We would expect what Jesus said to be the greatest statements ever made.

Those who heard [Jesus] said, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46). People were amazed by Jesus' gracious words (Luke 4:22), and they were astonished that when Jesus taught, He taught with ultimate, final authority, unlike their own teachers of the Law (Luke 4:32).

When Jesus taught, He never appealed to other authorities. He never added afterthoughts or revisions. He never altered or retracted. He never guessed, never supposed, never spoke with uncertainty, and never apologized for misstatements, since He didn't make any. The four Gospels, the record of His teaching, are read, quoted, translated, portrayed in art, set to music, proclaimed and witnessed to by more people than any other writings in human history. Still looking pretty good.

3. We would expect Him to demonstrate the love of God.

Jesus demonstrated God's love to the woman at the well (John 4), to the woman taken in adultery (John 8), to children (Matthew 19:14), to Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19), and to His dear friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 11:35).

Jesus told His disciples, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (John 15:13); and Jesus showed that same love to His enemies. Only the Love of God is so strong as that.

4. If God became a man, we would expect that man to be sinless.

Pilate could find no fault in Jesus (Luke 23:4). Pilate's wife and the thief on the cross both said that He was innocent (Matthew 27:19; Luke 23:41). Judas admitted that he had betrayed innocent blood (Matthew 27:4). John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, said He had no faults (John 1:19-36). Paul said He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Peter said He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus Himself never confessed a sin or struggled with sin and guilt as we do. The Bible says that Jesus was perfect—tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Sinless: check!

5. We would expect Him to have a tremendous influence on people who met Him.

All those who knew Jesus long ago as well as those who believe in Him today report the experience of radical change in their lives. Atheist Lee Strobel's young daughter told his wife several months after her father's conversion, "I don't know what's happened to Daddy, but I want it to happen to me, too."

In James Francis's famous words, "He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and He then became an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never travelled 200 miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. . . .

"He was only thirty-three when the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to his enemies

and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When He was dead He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

“[Twenty] wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all of the kings that ever reigned, *put together*, have not affected the life of man[kind] on this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life.”² I think Jesus passed the influence test.

6. We would expect Him to work miracles.

From His birth to His resurrection and ascension, Jesus’ life was characterized by the supernatural. People followed Him around hoping to see another miracle, and even Herod wanted to see one.

One of the most amazing miracles attending Jesus’ life happened as He died. Several weeks after Jesus’ resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter delivered a very famous sermon to a great crowd in Jerusalem. In that sermon, Peter quoted these words from the prophet Joel as having been recently fulfilled, pointing out that his hearers had seen the fulfillment themselves: “*And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*” (Joel 2:30-32; Acts 2:19-21).

With respect to “*the sun turning to darkness*,” the Bible tells us that a great darkness fell across the land from noon until three o’clock as Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:45). The ancient historian, Phlegon Tralles, wrote that “In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [A.D. 32-33], a failure of the Sun took place greater than any previously known, and night came on at the sixth hour of the day [noon], so that stars actually appeared in the sky.”³

But perhaps even more amazing is the moon’s turning “to blood.” A “blood moon” is a moon in eclipse. When the moon is eclipsed by the earth, it receives only dim light refracted through the earth’s atmosphere, reddened like a sunset. There was only one Passover lunar eclipse visible from Jerusalem while Pilate was procurator of Judea. It occurred on April 3, 33 A.D., the Day of the Cross.

When the moon rose on the night of Jesus’ crucifixion, it was already a blood moon. Using computer simulations, we can tell that the eclipse began about 3 p.m. What this means is that as Jesus was breathing His last on the cross, the moon was turning “to blood.” And, because the stars and planets move in their courses according to equations determined at creation, the time of Jesus’ death was built into the universe from the first moment of its birth. Jesus passes the miracle test, too.

When all these expectations are taken together, we discover that Jesus of Nazareth is exactly Who our highest dreams might imagine such a person to be as the incarnate God; but there’s more. You’ll remember that when we looked at God the Father last week, we noted that God gave the Divine Name to Moses as “**I AM WHO I AM**” (Exodus 3:14).

² James Allan Francis, c. 1926.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_darkness_and_eclipse

Making reference to that Name, Jesus told the Jews, “*Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, **I am!***” (John 8:58).

Jesus did not say, “I was.” He said, “**I AM.**” It was a claim to timelessness. It was a claim to divinity, and His listeners did not miss the point. Indeed, when Jesus later stood trial, not for anything He had done, but for Who He said He was, the Jewish leaders insisted, “*We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because **he claimed to be the Son of God***” (John 19:7).

The Gospel of John records seven “I AM” statements of Jesus, each of which is a claim to divinity, and each of which bears much more attention than I can give to it this morning. Here are the seven statements, and I will comment briefly on two of them:

1. “***I am the bread of life.*** *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty* (John 6:35).
2. “***I am the light of the world.*** *Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12).
3. “*Very truly I tell you, **I am the gate for the sheep***” (John 10:7).
4. “***I am the good shepherd.*** *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*” (John 10:11).
5. “***I am the resurrection and the life.*** *The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die*” (John 11:25-26a).
6. “***I am the way and the truth and the life.*** *No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).
7. “***I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener***” (John 15:1).

We’ve just come through the season of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot. While the Second Temple stood, there was a great ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles called the “Illumination of the Temple,” that involved the lighting of four golden oil-fed lamps in the Court of the Women.

These lamps were huge, seventy-five foot candelabra lighted in the Temple at night to remind the people of the pillar of fire that had guided Israel in their wilderness journey. Each candelabrum had four branches, and each branch had a ten-gallon oil basin at its tip. These sixteen blazes were visible for the entire city to see, reminding the people of how God’s glory had once filled the temple. The festival looked forward to the time when God’s glory would return, a time associated with the coming of Messiah.⁴

If you can picture this scene, you can begin to imagine the electrifying impact that it had on the people for Jesus to stand in those very courts and shout out that “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12). There was no question about the claim He was making.⁵

Let’s look at just one more of these “I AM” statements. This one comes in the context of Lazarus’ death:

- ²¹ “*Lord,*” *Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*
²² *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”*

⁴ www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/15_1/miracleatsukkot

⁵ See also Psalm 104:2; 1 Timothy 6:15b-16a.

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;** ²⁶ **and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?**"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:21-27).

Jesus predicted His death and resurrection sixteen times in the Gospels, deliberately staking His claim to authenticity upon His resurrection. When asked for a sign, Jesus pointed to this one as His single and sufficient credential (Matthew 12:39).

As Paul would later write, "Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . he was **buried** . . . he was **raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures . . . and he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he **appeared** to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

It's no wonder that Paul exulted, "Therefore, **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

When we choose to *believe* that Jesus is Who He says He is, we *become* as He is. His death becomes our death. His resurrection becomes our resurrection. His victory becomes our victory, and His life becomes our life!

The moment we put our trust in Jesus, in that same moment we begin to experience the first taste of the life of the age to come, Life that cannot be touched by death. The key to this transformation is Jesus. When we believe in Him, this happens. Without Him, it does not.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? We cannot give a better answer than Peter gave: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).