

Name Above All Names

Building a Christian Mind

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Well, we are in a series titled, "How to Know Jesus is Lord," and in some ways that is the central question of the universe, that is the preeminent theme that needs to be defined for reality to be known in any beginning sense. If creation came through the hands of Christ, and all things find their source in him, and all things are upheld by the word of his power as Scripture teaches, then the only way that you can begin to have a proper understanding of reality in any basic sense is to know with complete accuracy the identity of Jesus Christ, and that's a pretty far-reaching realization to come to. It has a long-term, broad effect on what you think about Christianity, what the purpose of Christianity is, and what the purpose of the church is, why we exist as believers, certainly in a corporate capacity. And let me just say, by way of clearing the field a little bit, pulling up some weeds with an introductory comment or two: Christianity is not about politics. It's not about American politics, it's not about earthly politics, that's not the central focus of Christianity whatsoever, and it's a crying shame when people make that the focus in the name of Christ. That obscures things terribly. Christianity is not about church programs or church membership per se. You can be a member of a church and desperately lost in your sins. You can participate in all kinds of programs and not have the life of God in your soul. Christianity is not about good behavior, it's not about doing good works in the first instance as the primary message of Christianity, because the Bible tells us that salvation is by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, not as a result of works lest anyone should boast. And so it's not about politics, it's not about programs, it's not about good behavior. It doesn't start with friendly relationships and being kind to everyone that you meet and just getting along. We see that in the life of Christ. He was opposed by the religious leaders, they crucified him. We see it in the life of the Apostle Paul. Christianity is not about just primarily about first and foremost about relationships. Just think about it. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34 and following, you know, that Christ came to set a man against his son, a mother against her daughter, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. There's going to be a divisive impact that Christ has on some of our most intimate relationships. And when you realize that, then you realize that you can't put these things in the central place. You can't put relationships at the centerpiece of Christianity. You can't put being a good girl or being a good boy at the center of Christianity as if that's what Christianity was first and foremost about. You can't make it about participation in programs. And I had a friend years ago who said that a lot of times programs are simply a cheap substitute for sanctification, you know, and as if being busy in the church meant

that you were growing in Christ. That's not necessarily true at all, and we've dealt with the matter of politics.

Well, what is it then that Christianity is preeminently about? What is the purpose of Christ? Who is Christ and why did he come? That's the way to state the question. That is the question, that is the theme that Christianity answers as given to us in the pages of Scripture. Well, first of all, we want to acknowledge that what Scripture says about the coming of Christ, and just for an example, 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," Paul goes on and adds, "of whom I am the foremost." Jesus Christ came into the world because mankind is lost in sin; not just mankind generally, but each and every boy and girl, man and woman in the world is lost in their sins apart from Jesus Christ. They are spiritually dead. They cannot understand the things of God. They cannot please God in the flesh, Romans 8 says. And so men are spiritually dead. They are in bondage to Satan. They are under the bondage of sin. They love sin, and they're on a path that leads to eternal destruction and a full eternal experience of the wrath of God appropriate for the measure of their sinfulness, and that is the case for every single individual on the face of the earth.

Now, until we understand that, that the gospel starts with a declaration of the wrath of God, as you see in Romans 1:18, until you factor in the wrath of God and the judgment of God upon the sinfulness of man, you haven't begun to understand Christianity at all, and so a lot of things that sound good at one level, that sound like they're good and wholesome things, can actually be a serious distraction from the purpose of the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ if you don't have these first principles in place. Christ came into the world to save sinners. That's the starting point of it all, and everything else that we've talked about is secondary to that, it is subordinate to that if it even has a place at all, and so you have this statement of the purpose of Christ coming into the earth.

Now, let me just take this another step further with you. If you would, turn to the book of Galatians 1 with me. Galatians 1. And in our postmodern age, which is the reason we're doing this whole mega-series, "Building a Christian Mind," in our postmodern age there are two things that you are never supposed to do, and Christianity contradicts both of them. 1. You're never to insist on your point of view as being true. We're not supposed to argue about the truth because you have your truth, I have my truth, and, you know, we just need to get along with each other. That's not reality. That's not what Scripture says at all, and so Christians cannot think that way. And also just the sense that, you know, we're always to be kind to everyone indiscriminately, and that there should never be any conflict. Conflict is not good, especially conflict over truth is not good. There's just this spirit of tolerance that should pervade everything so that truth is subordinate to tolerance, and truth is subordinate to friendly relationships, let's say, put it like that. You see both of those things immediately contradicted in Paul's letter to the Galatians in chapter 1. Let's begin in verse 3 where you'll see the earlier things that I said reinforced as well.

Galatians 1:3, Paul writes to the churches of Galatia and says this, "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." Why did Christ come? He came not to establish a certain political brand, not to establish Christian nationalism. He didn't come for those reasons. He didn't come to give birth to a lot of church programs. He came in order to save sinners, to deliver us from the bondage and the deception and the destruction of the present evil age. It starts there, beloved, and so we have to have the purpose clear from the very start. How important is truth in that, and how important is it that everybody always get along is that? Well, let's see what Paul says about it as he rebukes the Galatians for their position and the way that they have drifted from what he first delivered to them.

Galatians 1:6, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again," Paul is exercised here. He is upset, and he is repeating himself for the sake of emphasis because these points are so critical. Verse 9 again, "As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." And so in the matter of truth, absolute truth and the existence of truth and biblical truth is real and the things that contradict it are false, we see it laid out there completely. There is one gospel and only one and if someone contradicts the gospel as delivered through the apostles, Paul says, let them be accursed, anathema. Let damnation be upon them because that's what their false gospel is leading men to. It's leading them into damnation.

And so the issues are critical, and truth matters, beloved. Truth matters in the church. Truth matters to Scripture. Truth matters to God. Truth matters to Christ. He is the truth. And until we grasp that central fundamental principle, we haven't begun to develop as Christians at all. Truth matters, and you see it clearly here in what Paul says. As Paul also says, and as we deal with the fact that we're supposed to tolerate one another, Paul is completely intolerant in this passage. He says, "If anyone preaches something contrary to the truth that you've heard, the gospel you've heard, let him be accursed." Paul's arms weren't open wide to a broad diversity of religious viewpoints. He was narrowly intolerant when it came to the gospel and someone contradicting it.

And so, beloved, the point for us here in the 21st century to apply this in a proper way, is that we have to realize that Scripture does not permit us to go along with the spirit of our age, where every viewpoint is valid. Every viewpoint is not valid. Any viewpoint that contradicts the gospel is to be accursed. And alongside that, Paul pronounces damnation on those that would contradict the gospel in a settled way and would teach others a false gospel. There is only one gospel, there is only one way, and it is in Christ. And so, the spirit of Scripture leads us away from the spirit of our age, and it leads us into, you know, you see what Paul says there in verse 10, let me remind you of that. You and I, beloved, I say this sympathetically to a, you know, a broadly sympathetic audience, but you and I have to come to a settled approach to the way that we're going to live. Paul says, "I'm not seeking the approval of man," and in our 21st century age, where the approval of man is

everything, tolerate everything, tolerate every belief, you know, go along with your friends and do what they're doing, the Christian has to settle in his mind that the approval of God is more important to me than the approval of man. Elders have to settle that long before they ever enter into the office, that the approval of God is more important than the approval of man. And until we have that settled and clear in our minds as a proper response to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we cannot make any progress individually or corporately in spiritual growth, in sanctification, in actually being an effective witness for Christ, an effective witness for the gospel, until that point is settled.

Now look, I am not at all a model of a personal evangelist. Evangelism is one of my weakest areas, and it long has been, and it's something that causes me ongoing pain in my heart and grief in my soul that that is true, but I still need to say what I'm about to say. What is it that makes Christians, what is it that makes a man, a woman, maybe you, what is it that makes us reluctant to be bold in our declaration of Christ before someone that's in front of us? It's a fear of being mocked, being rejected, being laughed at, maybe not having the answers to the questions that might come up, not sure what to say, but there is this man-centered fear that is at the heart of a reluctance in evangelism so very often, because we want the approval of man, we want the approval of man so much that we're content to stay silent and let them take two more steps toward perdition rather than maybe have an uncomfortable conversation with them where they mock us or something like that for our faith. We have to have settled in our mind that the approval of God is more important than the approval of man, and it's not simply a matter of standing before God in our own judgment and receiving blessing and reward from him. It's more than that. It's what's necessary and best for the lost souls in front of us. If we're seeking the approval of lost men, if we want the approval of heretics on our ministry, if we never want controversy over doctrine so that people will all get along with us, then we are living in the exact opposite spirit of what Paul expresses here. It's all about seeking the approval of man. What's wrong with a heart that wants the approval of man more than the approval of God?

And so these things have very far-reaching ramifications. These things set us against the spirit of our age, and, beloved, you and I have to embrace that. We cannot try to compromise with it. We can't try to soften the edges of it. We must embrace it because it is central to the person of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. The person of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel are bound up in our refusal to love the approval of man more than we love the approval of God. Those are the kinds of things that steal conviction when opposition comes. It's the kind of thing that sustains you when people resist you in ministry, or perhaps you're seeing relationships sacrificed for the sake of your fidelity to Christ. You must know what the first priority is, and young people have to establish this and have the opportunity to establish this in their hearts early on in life and to set their feet and say, "No matter what happens, that's the kind of life I want to live. I want to be a godly young man. I'm not going to be like others and try to sort these things out when I'm an adult. I'm going to know now. I'm going to make this decision now. I'm going to establish these convictions now." So Scripture is pretty clear on these things.

So the person and work of Christ, then, are very important for us to know and to understand. That's why we're doing this series, "How to Know Jesus is Lord," and I want to review with you just briefly some things that I said on Sunday in order to recapitulate and to bring us back into the spirit of everything that's being said here. We see the importance of it, now we need to know why we believe what we believe. We say that Jesus Christ is Lord. Why do we believe that? What can we point to in Scripture that would lead others to that same conclusion so it's not just a matter of my subjective internal opinion, but we point to an external authority in the word of God and say, "Here is why we proclaim Jesus as Lord," and we never allow compromise on that point.

The gospel of John helps us greatly on that. You'll remember that I said, if you'll turn to the gospel of John, if you haven't already, you'll remember that I said that the gospel of John opens and closes on the theme of the deity of Christ. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word was God, and the Word became flesh. Jesus Christ is eternal God in human flesh and that's the opening salvo of the gospel of John.

Now, John goes through and lays out many signs that Jesus performed, records his teaching and many of his miracles and the Upper Room Discourse, all of those things, and then we come to chapter 20, if you'll turn back to the end of the gospel for a moment, you come to the climax of the main thrust of the gospel, and you'll remember that Jesus showed himself to Thomas after his resurrection and in verse 28, Thomas responded to the visible proof of the resurrection of Christ, and he answered him and said, "My Lord and my God!" My Lord and my God. Beloved, that is the point. That is the result that the gospel of John is seeking to produce in everyone who reads it and we know that from what John himself says in verses 30 and 31 that follow. Chapter 20, verse 30, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe," there is a doctrinal content to true faith. It is not enough to just have faith in anything. Faith in itself is meaningless unless the object of faith is Christ himself and for the object to be Christ himself, it has to be the true Christ, and true Christ is defined by the biblical doctrine revealed about him.

What we believe and what we teach about Christ has eternal consequences. Centuries of unfolding church history, as you read about the Arian controversy in the fourth century, centuries of study and defense and conflict were waged over this, not because those guys got caught up in something that wasn't that important, but because there was conflict over the identity of Christ and everything hinged on the outworking of that dispute. So in verse 31 again, "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." It opens on the deity of Christ. Thomas says, "My Lord and my God," and John builds on that confession and says, "That's what I'm trying to teach you. That's what you are to confess from the depths of your heart, 'My Lord and my God.' Christ, you are my Master. You are full deity. You are equal with God the Father. I submit to you. I trust in your redemptive work on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins." And on it goes.

What does that teach us, beloved? It teaches us something, really so many important things, but one of the things that you and I need to always remind ourselves is this, and this is particularly important at a church that is given to teaching. It'd be true at Grace Community Church in California. It'd be true at Lakeside Community Chapel in Clearwater, Florida. It's true here. Any place where the Bible is taught, it's very important for us to remember what I'm about to say. Scripture is not given to us to puff us up with knowledge. It is not simply giving us information that we can catalog like it's some kind of college lecture that just fills us with intellectual concepts and abstract systems of truth that we can know, and so that we can be smarter than someone else. Scripture says that knowledge puffs up but love edifies. It's not simply knowledge that we're after. We need to know things, we need to know truth, but that's not the end in itself. Scripture is not teaching us a system of works by which we can save ourselves. That's not the idea. Scripture does not commend you for your righteousness. Scripture condemns you for your lack of righteousness. And so Scripture isn't teaching us how we can proudly become a good person that God has to let into heaven. It's not like that at all. Quite to the contrary, in the hands of the blessed Holy Spirit, as the Spirit ministers the word of God to our hearts and illumines our minds, Scripture humbles us. The Bible says, Jesus said, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convict men of sin, judgment, and righteousness. That's the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is his goal. He exalts Christ, he lifts up Christ, and he convicts men of sin, judgment, and righteousness.

And you know what you see with that ministry of the Holy Spirit laid out so clearly in the gospel of John? Once again, you see that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is in direct opposition to the spirit of our tolerant age. Let every man do what he wants. We're about to embark on another ridiculous Pride Month, and it's going to be a celebration of all kinds of wickedness, all celebrating that people can do whatever they want, and we're not to condemn. In fact, we're not to condemn, we are to commend them for the diversity that they bring to the world. Scripture doesn't speak in those terms at all. Scripture speaks in terms that men hate: sin, judgment, righteousness everything that a postmodern society rejects.

And so we can't have it both ways. We can't have one foot in the world and one foot in Scripture. We have to make a choice. We have to come to our own convictions and discern the truth of these things and live accordingly, and so what we find is that until the new birth happens, until a man is born again in his heart, he remains outside of the kingdom of God. You know, God is not the Father of all men in the sense that he's the Father of those who believe in Christ and there's not this general fatherhood of God that means everybody is going to go to heaven. You must be born again, Jesus said, and until repentance and faith are formed in you, you are still in your sins. And so a study on the person of Christ is of the highest urgency. That's why we're embarking on this in the middle of it, I should say.

So we've seen, first of all, the Bible calls Jesus God. That's what we looked at some last time. The Bible calls Jesus God. We've already looked at that here this evening. We don't need to go over it any further. The second thing that we said last time is that Jesus does the works of God. Who is Jesus Christ? He is eternal God in human flesh. How do we know that? The gospel of John is designed to lead us to that conviction, and it does so

with many different themes. And secondly, we see that Jesus does the works of God. Turn to John 5, again by way of quick review. In John 5:16 and 17, we see that what God does, Jesus does. No one else can say that. And we read in chapter 5, verse 16 of John 5, "this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'" The Jews had confronted Jesus because he healed a man on the Sabbath. They said, "You shouldn't be working on the Sabbath." And what Jesus does in response to that charge, that allegation, is he appeals to God the Father to justify his actions. He says, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." He puts himself on the same level as God the Father and says, "I have the same prerogatives as God the Father does.

Now, the Jews understood the significance of that claim. Look at verse 18. "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." If you are equal with God, you are God. And as you read on in verse 19, you see that Jesus does not correct them for misunderstanding his teaching. He reinforces the claim that he had just made. Read in verse 19 with me. "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.'" That's an astonishing claim. So easy to read through something like that quickly and miss the significance of what's being said. Here was a man in human flesh saying that, "Whatever God does, that's what I do also." It is a startling claim to being equal with God, to being God himself. Verse 20, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. 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." To give equal glory to Christ that is given to God the Father, that is what Christ is saying. "Whoever does not honor the Son," in that way, "does not honor the Father who sent him." Jews who do not honor Christ as God are lost. We should not view them as the people of God in the sense that they are in the kingdom of God. If they deny the deity of Christ, they are under the wrath of God, which is Paul's entire point in Romans 1 and in Romans 2, that the Jews are under the wrath of God on an equal basis with the Gentiles because of their rejection of Christ and because of their sinfulness.

And so Jesus does not correct the Jews here in John 5 when they said, "You're making yourself out to be equal with God." Jesus doesn't correct a misunderstanding. Jesus reinforces and states again his equality with God. He does the works of God. Only God does the works of God. Christ does the works of God. Christ is eternal God in human flesh. The Bible calls him God. He does the works of God.

Now, that brings us to new material for this evening. Thirdly, we want to see this, is that Jesus has the name of God. Jesus has the name of God, and to establish this point, I want you to turn back in the Old Testament to Exodus 3 when God made himself known to Moses. Exodus 3:13 and 14. As you're turning there, let me remind you that God was calling Moses into a leadership role for his people whereby he would be the one who would lead them out of the slavery that they had been in in Egypt for over 400 years. And

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush in the early part of chapter 3, and in verse 6, chapter 3, verse 6, as Moses approached this burning bush, God said to him in verse 5, "Do not come near. Take your sandals off your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." It is set apart. It is sanctified. Don't come in a common way, wearing your common sandals. Remove the sandals from your feet in recognition that this is something unique that you are approaching. And God said to him in verse 6, he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God." God explains some things to him, says that there in verse 12, actually let's go to verse 10, God says to Moses, "I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Pharaoh was the head of the greatest nation at the time, the most powerful man on the face of the earth. And so Moses is a little bit intimidated by that call. He says in verse 11, he said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" God said to him, "I will be with you." Look at that, beloved, "I will be with you." God with him was enough. In your trials, in your conflicts, in your sorrows, God with you, that's enough. "I fear no evil for you are with me," Psalm 23:4. "Fear not for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you for I am your God. I will help you. Surely I will strengthen you. Surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand," Isaiah 41:10. The presence of God is sufficient for his people; no matter the adversaries, no matter the circumstances, the presence of God is enough and that's what God is teaching Moses from the very beginning. "Yes, you will go to Pharaoh. Yes, he's the most powerful man on earth, but there's something transcendent and more important than that, and that is the simple fact that I will be with you." And that is where we draw our confidence, that is where we draw our strength, our comfort, is the presence of God. Whether we stand alone or stand with others, it's enough that the Lord is with us. When you're standing alone at a gravesite, turning over with a cold half of the bed because you've lost a mate, or whatever the case may be, we always come back to the presence of God. That is the answer for every earthly dilemma. God says to him in verse 12, "I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Now, finally, we get to the point about Jesus having the name of God in coming to this, but I wanted to set the context there. Verse 13, look at what Moses says. "Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?"'"" You say that God has sent you, what is his name? What shall I say to them? What is the nomenclature that I use that is uniquely set apart to identify you, O God? And in verse 14, God says to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you.'"" The self-existent God. Yahweh. "I AM WHO I AM. I am the self-existent God of the universe. That's my name. You go and tell them that. If they ask you that question, you say, 'I AM' has sent you. That is my name." That is the unique name of the true God. This is the divine name.

Now just think about a name for a moment, just the concept of a name. Beloved, a person's name represents his identity. It sets him apart. "I AM," the name "I AM" identified God with an exclusivity that precluded all other gods. Now with that in mind, with that in mind, as we consider the deity of Christ and the Lordship of Christ, now turn

to John 8 with that foundation laid. John 8, beginning in verse 52. Once again, once again the Jews are contradicting Christ, challenging him. Notice that the most righteous and the most true teacher who ever walked on the face of the earth was met with opposition, with contradiction, and with those who considered him to be a demon. The mere fact of opposition doesn't say anything about whether someone is a righteous teacher or not.

Now in verse 52, "The Jews said to him," now remember they're talking to the eternal Son of God, the one who made their brains, the one who gave them life, the one who established their people. These selfsame Jews say to their Maker, say to God in human flesh, "Now we know that you have a demon!" They said they looked at Christ and concluded that he had a demon. Unbelievable.

Verse 52, continuing on, "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?" Notice that very critical question there in verse 53. The identity of Christ, who he truly is, is the question on the table. That is the issue in play, and you must see that to understand what follows. They want to know who Christ is claiming to be and the dialogue that follows unfolds his answer to them.

"Jesus answered," in verse 54, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word." Jesus says, "I truly know God the Father and you don't. If I said I didn't, I'd be a liar like you." The level of confrontation with his critics is astonishing by modern standards. This is totally wrong by 21st century standards. You should never make a point about truth. We should all get along. Christ looks at them and says, "You do not know God and you are liars."

Now in verse 55, he said that. In verse 56, he goes on to say, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." He said, "Abraham saw my day 2,000 years ago." And the Jews again contradict and challenge him, speaking to Christ when he was in his early 30's at that time, and the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham?" There's a dripping condescension and contempt for his words in what they say and yet Jesus does not back down. Jesus does not apologize to them. They had challenged him on what he had just said about Abraham and rather than backing down, rather than apologizing for the conflict and saying, "Guys, I'm sorry, let's just get along. Let's go have a cup of tea together." Jesus made a more daring assertion. The stronger the challenge, the stronger Christ responded. He made a more daring assertion because, as we're about to see, he claimed the name of the God of the Old Testament as his own.

Verse 58, look at it there with me. "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" The grammar of it, the juxtaposition of verb tenses makes this very awkward in one sense. Something really significant is being stated here. Jesus didn't say, "Before Abraham was, I was." He could have said it like that. But he says, "I am." It is a

clear, undiminished assertion of deity. He claimed the name of the God of the Old Testament for himself.

And so Jesus – watch this, beloved – he didn't simply claim that he was superior to Abraham as if he was a higher class prophet than he was but like Abraham himself, Jesus took the sacred name of divine revelation, of divine self-revelation, and applied it to himself. You and I would never say that unless we were completely demented or demon-possessed. None of us, I'm trying to speak very carefully here, none of us knowing the divine name "I AM" would look to that and appropriate and apply it to ourselves. We know better. The fear of God, if anything else, would forbid us from saying such a thing and yet Jesus had no qualms about taking that name, saying, "I existed before Abraham. I am." He applies the divine name to himself.

The Jews understood the claim. That's why we read in verse 59, "they picked up stones to throw at him." They were going to stone him because in their mind he had just committed blasphemy because he was claiming equality with God. "You must die for saying that!" But it wasn't blasphemy. It was simply a self-disclosure of eternal God in human flesh. He has the name of God.

Notice these claims that are starting to stack up. Any one of them, beloved, and by the time we're done on Sunday, we'll have looked at seven things like this, any one of these would be sufficient in and of themselves to establish the deity of Christ beyond any question, beyond refutation. To the revelation given by the Spirit through the Apostle John, to the believing heart, any one of these alone, standing alone, is sufficient, but when you stack them one upon another upon another, you are led to this overwhelming conclusion, this unavoidable recognition that Thomas had when he saw him resurrected in front of him, "My Lord and my God!" Understand that "my Lord and my God" is the place that John is leading you to in his gospel and as these things are stacked up, our conviction is driven deeper and deeper and deeper. When we see Jesus Christ, when we contemplate him as he is revealed in Scripture, we look at him and we say, "My Lord and my God."

The world may reject him. My family may reject him. But not me. My Lord. My God. Personal appropriation. Personal faith in him. It is not enough for you to be born into a Christian family. It is not enough for you to simply become a member of a church. You must personally receive Christ. You must personally yield to him with an act of your will, recognizing him and submitting to him as he is revealed in Scripture and part of the way that the Spirit of God leads you to that conclusion is seeing this mountain, this Mount Everest, this Pike's Peak of biblical truth piled on top of one another. The Bible calls him God. Jesus does the works of God. Jesus has the name of God. As we're going to see in our fourth point in just a moment, Jesus has full unity with God the Father. That's our fourth point for this evening: Jesus has full unity with God the Father.

But before we go into that, I want to make this pastoral application to each one of you here. You know, we're all accountable for the truth that we hear and the more truth that we receive, the more accountable we are. When Scripture comes to you with such great clarity and shows that the Bible calls Jesus God and that Jesus does the works of God,

and last time, if you weren't here, we went through seven different miracles that Jesus performed that only God could do, including raising the dead, he does the works of God. He manifested it. He displayed it in front of many witnesses. He himself was raised from the dead. And here he has the name of God. And you start to pull these things together, and you just realize that there is no excuse, there is no excuse for anyone to reject him. There is no excuse for anyone to fail to bend the knee before him. And we're only halfway through. And so our accountability in this room is great and what we do with this knowledge is great. It does no good to call him Lord, Jesus says in Luke 6:46, he says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? Enough of the hypocrisy," in other words, Christ says. "Don't honor me with your lips and then refuse your life to me. The one who says I've come to know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." And so there is this deep, profound application that goes to the core of who every one of us is, and at the very center of our being, in the very depths of our unseen soul, we have to answer the question: who is Jesus of Nazareth? Who is he? And how are you related to him? Do you know him from the depth of your heart? Do you respond to Christ from the depth of your heart saying, "My Lord and my God"? Or is this some kind of show to you, something that you grew up with, maybe? Something that, whatever other motives you might have that pertain to men? No. No. This truth of Scripture comes to us so that we would apprehend, understand, recognize Christ by faith, and yield to him, personally receiving him and resting in him by faith alone for your salvation.

Let's look at this fourth and final point that we have for this evening: Jesus has full unity with God the Father, and we'll explain what we mean by that. Let's turn over to John 10 for a moment. John 10. Jesus is of one essence with God the Father. There is a single undivided essence that belongs to the Godhead alone. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit share equally in the fullness of that essence. Now we read about this, and we see this explained, and I want to start in verse 19, I guess. Actually verse 18. We come back again to the fact that Christ came into the world in order to lay his life down for sinners. He came to give his life a ransom for many. He came not to be served, but to serve, Matthew 20:28, and to give his life a ransom for many.

He says in verse 17, he says, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Understand that Jesus went willingly to the cross. There are those who think the idea of blood atonement is a manifestation of child abuse. You'll see people saying that, "It's child abuse for God the Father to punish his Son, much less to punish him for the sins of others." Well, to say something like that is simply to say that you're not a Christian. It's to deny the centrality of the biblical atonement and the work of Christ. And what Christ says, and what is in part the answer to that false theology, is that Christ did this voluntarily. Christ did this as sovereign God, as sovereign over his own soul, sovereign over his own life, and he willingly did it. I don't know where the perverse idea comes from to talk about the atonement as a form of divine child abuse, cosmic child abuse. No, this is the most glorious act of self-sacrifice,

willingly done by Christ out of love for his people to secure their eternal redemption. He willingly laid down his life.

Now, in verse 19, "There was again a division among the Jews because of these words." And they go back to the same old trope. "Many of them said, 'He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?' Others said, 'These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" That sets the context for this section of Scripture that shows that Jesus has full unity with God the Father.

Look at verse 22. "At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" Now look, that's not a sincere question. That's not an honest request for information. As we have already seen in our brief survey, he's been saying all along, he's been teaching them all along that he's God in human flesh and he's manifested it by the signs that he's done and by the self-assertions that they've made. This is not a request for information. This is hardened unbelief. And you can see that as well by the way that Jesus responds to them.

In verse 25, "Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe.'" You don't need more information. I've already answered you many times. The problem is not a lack of information, the problem is that you do not believe. And he says, "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me." He says, "I claim the name of God. I do his works before you. It should be obvious to you who I am. I've been saying this all along."

Verse 26, "but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. You're dead in your sins. You're outside the kingdom of God. That's why you don't believe. It's not any failure on the part of Christ. It's something about you. It's in you that you don't believe." And that's the same thing true today. People don't believe because of darkness in them, not because the revelation of Christ is unclear.

Verse 27 says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life." Look at that. What an astonishing claim. This is something that only eternal God in human flesh could say. Only someone who is Lord of eternity has the ability to give eternal life. And Jesus doesn't simply say that the Father gives eternal life, he says, "I do." It is a claim of possessing eternity himself. He says, "I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." I share his essence. We are perfectly united. There is nothing about God the Father and his essence that I do not have. Everything that God has, I have. We share the essence of God together.

Now this is an assertion of full, undiminished, uncreated deity. Jesus gives eternal life, no one snatches his people from his hands. That's what the Father does. That's what Jesus does. The Father and the Son are perfectly united in will, in power, and in action, and they are united like that because they share a single essence. For Jesus to be one with God

is an assertion and expression of his complete deity. This is not simply, you know, someone saying this 2,000 years later and putting his own spin on it.

Once again, we see from the context of Scripture that the Jews understood exactly what he was saying. In verse 31, "The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?'" In other words, "Everything I've done is good." In another place he says, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" No one could answer. There was no lie found in his mouth, no deception, no unrighteousness found in him. They could not righteously stone him for anything that he had done. And they knew that.

The Jews knew that and look at how they respond with how it fits within the theme of what we're speaking here, how to know Jesus is Lord. "The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.'" They rightly understood Christ. They understood the claim that he was making. They did not believe it, but they understood the claim that he was making. He was claiming to be God in human flesh, and therefore they were going to stone him for blasphemy.

And so we see this over and over again in the gospel of John. We saw it in John 5, we saw it in John 8, we see it in John 10. Jesus makes these claims, the Jews understood he was claiming deity, and they tried to stone him, to put him to death for making a claim like that. The thing for you and I to see is not the actions of the Jews, but the self-assertion of deity that Christ was making throughout. Ultimately, you and I have to come to a point of decision. We have to decide what we believe for ourselves about Christ.

Look over at Matthew 16, and with this we'll close. Matthew 16, I've pointed to this in the past. I never get tired of pointing to this. The fact, the mere fact that there is controversy around the person of Christ does not mean that the teaching is unclear. The mere fact that there is disagreement among men about the teaching of Christ does not mean that the teaching is unclear or that there is no conclusion that can be rightly drawn. Out on the suggestion. And you see this so clearly in Matthew 16, and the question, beloved, the question that is going to be the climax of this passage that we're about to read is the question that each one of you have to answer for yourself, and you have to answer it not before men, not before a pastor, not before your spouse or your children, you have to, as it were, you have to go alone into the throne room of God and answer for yourself, who is this Christ? And you have to answer it for yourself. You cannot delegate to someone else the responsibility for it. You cannot rely on someone else's confession to make the answer for you. And you cannot excuse yourself from deciding simply because so many people have a different opinion. Each one of you, beloved, are responsible before Christ to answer for this evidence that is laid before you, this testimony from Christ directly to your soul through his word applied to your heart by the Holy Spirit. No one can avoid, no one can avoid, what am I going to do with this Jesus?

Verse 13 of Matthew 16, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'" What's the word on the street? What are they saying at the coffee shop? What are they saying at the camel stables

about me? What do people say? He's drawing the disciples out. He didn't need new information that he didn't have. He's drawing the disciples out. He's setting up something here and notice, beloved, what they say. They said, "Well, some say that you're John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Do you see it, beloved? See the greater principle beyond simply the wrong identities that were being ascribed to Christ. The greater principle here is that there was conflict amongst the opinions of men about who Jesus Christ was. There was no agreement in the world about who he was.

Now does that mean that it was so hopelessly confused that no one could know? Were the arguments among men, the confusion among men, was that a barrier to true belief in Christ? Does that mean that no one can know the truth? Does it mean that we're wasting our time having spent weeks on declaring the Lordship and deity of Christ to you? Is this all a waste of time because once you walk out of the church, there are going to be all kinds of people who disagree? Are we just wasting our time here and are we at the mercy of the disagreements of men simply to continue walking in darkness and having no light in our souls? Is that it? Is that the reality that God appointed for his people?

I love how our blessed Lord cuts through all of the fog, disregards all of the fallen opinions of men, and addresses the question directly to the disciples. Verse 15, "He said to them, 'But...'" Notice the contrast here. "Okay, okay. Those are the opinions of the world but let's talk about something else." He sets aside all of that confusion and crystallizes the question for the disciples and he calls them to make a confession and commitment of faith that is personal, based on their own conclusions, that are independent of the opinions of men. Verse 15, "who do you say that I am?" Who do you say that I am? Obviously, the fact that there were disagreements in the street had nothing to do with the exercise of personal faith. Christ, as it were, I'm speaking somewhat metaphorically here, Christ is calling them out of the world with that question. You're in the world, and this is what you've been hearing. Now, you step out of the world and you tell me who you say that I am. You've got to step out. You cannot stay in the world and have the approval of men and belong to Christ. You have to choose.

"'Who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" You are eternal God in human flesh. "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" He says, "Simon, you didn't come to this through your own superior intellect. My Father has opened your mind to understand these things." Christ puts the question forth. Peter sets aside every excuse that the world would give him to waffle, refuses and rejects and steps courageously out of the world and says, "I'll tell you what I think. I think you're the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "Bingo, that's exactly right. That is who I am, Peter. You are the privileged recipient of divine favor to be able to make that confession."

Now beloved, nothing has changed. Nothing has changed in the intervening 2,000 years. There are always going to be people, there are going to be far more people than not who give us false views of Christ, give us false views of his teaching, give us false views of his person and of his work. There are always going to be groups, if Christ delays another

2,000 years, there will be other groups like Mormons, other groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, there will probably still be a perverse institution called the Roman Catholic Church leading billions of people astray, and there are always going to be people saying, "You know, it's just so confusing, we can't make up our minds." It's always going to be that way. It's always been that way. And it will be until the return of Christ. And Jesus says, "Okay, but what about you?" The only correct answer, the one that I ask if it's in your heart is the exact same simple, clear answer that Thomas gave when he saw the resurrected Christ. He saw him in the flesh, you see him in the word. The Spirit of God comes to you and says to the deepest part of your heart, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" Beloved, I pray that for every one of you, from the depths of your heart, you say, "My Lord and my God!"

Let's pray together.

Lord, we see in the examples of the Jews and the gospels that there were always opponents to your ministry, always opponents to your person. They weren't content until you were dead. And yet, you call men out from the world. You call them out of false doctrine. You call them to decide for themselves, "Who do you say that I am?" Father, may everyone under the sound of my voice now and into the future hear these things of Christ, what Scripture says about you, your works, your name, your unity with God, may the Spirit of God work through the word to bring each one to that confession of faith, "Yes, I am a sinner, lost and under judgment and deserving the full wrath of God, but you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, you are the one who laid down your life by your own authority, you took my sin into your body on the cross and suffered the penalty on my behalf, you are my Lord and my God." Father, may that be the confession of each one and may you fling the gospel of Christ to every corner of the world. May you fling the gospel of Christ into future generations. May this triumphant confession of faith, "Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God," may you continue as you've been doing for 2,000 years upon the rock of that confession, O God, to build your church and may the gates of hell never prevail against it. And Father, may we not be frightened by those who would threaten us, those who would intimidate us, may we not be frightened by the smoke of death rising up from the gates of hell as we battle against them but, Father, may we be strengthened by the knowledge that you are with us to keep us, to protect us, to provide for us, to keep us in your hand that we would never be lost. Help us to that end, to maintain the good confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Father, as we do our part in the brief days that you give to us, Father, may the gates of hell never prevail against us as we commit ourselves into your care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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