

Getting back to the Essentials of Jesus Colossians 1:10-1:23, Acts 10:34-43

The little girl who was furiously coloring a picture in her Sunday School class. It was a pretty picture, but the teacher couldn't quite figure out what it was going to be. So she asked her. Smilingly, she told the teacher, I'm coloring a picture of God and she resumed her work.

Perhaps a bit overly mindful of instilling good theology at whatever age, the teacher replied —"sweetheart, you can't really draw a picture of God, because nobody really knows what He looks like." But without even looking up from her paper, the little girl answered, "Well, they will when I get done."

How many times do we do that? How many times do we paint a picture of Jesus based on what we think He ought to look like rather than what He is really like?

Some people think he was a great teacher. Some think he was a prophet. Some think he was a good example for us to follow. But most people don't really think he was God in the flesh.

Perhaps I should have said most non-churched people don't think that Jesus was God, but the truth is that most Churched people just don't think about it at all. We have been so trained in the Sunday School stories of Jesus, that we just don't realize how preposterous, how hard it is to actually rationally believe that Jesus was God, who walked around this earth some 33 years as a human, then was killed, then physically returned from the dead, walked around some more before bodily going off to heaven – where he yet waits, still in the flesh, for all his followers to join him in one big happily ever after.

Preposterous! Unbelievable! And that is the story that his disciples faithfully passed down through the ages. And that is the story that Christians should still believe today. But perhaps we should think about it a bit more. So let's get down to the essentials on the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

March 4, 2007 -- James Cameron (of Titanic discovery fame) aired a 90-minute film for the Discovery Channel entitled, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," claiming that the actual bones of Jesus of Nazareth had been buried in a tomb near Jerusalem. Of course at the end of 90 minutes all he had presented were some images of empty Jewish burial boxes and not much fact.

But that's not so unusual, Cameron's is just the latest in a long line of failed attempts to find the human remains of Jesus. Because if such remains could be found and validated... This would be the greatest expose in history of the world. It would signal the complete and total triumph of science over religion. It would completely undermine the Christian faith and render 2,000 years of Christian endeavor – as little more than foolishness.

And if they ever do – find the bones of Jesus, I'll be the first one to take up Sunday golfing, while also looking for another job.

Because the entirety of our Christian faith is based on the story as the Apostle Peter told Cornelius – that *They put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear ...[and] He [the newly restored to life – Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead Acts 10:39-40*

This is either a world transforming truth Or the biggest lie ever foisted on humanity. There is no middle ground. Jesus can't be just a good man, a great teacher, a life model. He is either God in the flesh who for a while walked among us, or he is the biggest charlatan, the most egomaniacal madman to ever pull the wool humanity's eyes.

Are you shocked that I would say this? The Apostles said essentially the same thing. They knew the unbelievable nature of their story and they readily admitted that if anyone could prove them wrong, then as Apostle Paul told the Corinthian Church.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19

These are rather bold words.... But I doubt that they will ever find the bones of Jesus – because he is still using them. I believe.

So let's go on to the even more radical claims about Jesus: Not just that he came back to life, but that he was actually the God of the universe – who for our sake entered time and space and for 33 years walked among us as a man named Jesus of Nazareth.

In his letter to the Colossian Church, Paul even then was dealing with Christians who had a hard time believing this foundational Christian truth – that God had once walked among us as a human.

The surprising thing is that Greco/Roman religion was filled with stories of the gods disguising themselves as humans to come to Earth – usually just to play around. But by Jesus' day, most of the western world had become atheists – not really believing any of the ancient stories – and treating religion more as a cultural heritage than anything else. Only to have this new story come out of Palestine of Jesus of Nazareth – God's son and our savior.

So Paul begins, that God the Father *has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Next, Paul equally carefully explains just who Jesus was and is. Let's take a look at some of these claims.

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

When Paul said that Jesus was the "image of the invisible God," his Greek audience would immediately have caught his reference to wax security seals attached to letters and the signet rings used to impress an image into the softened wax – an image that served as the signature of the wearer of the ring. So in one sense, Jesus was literally God's signature. The Greek word has come into our language as "**icon**" meaning that Jesus is an exact replication of God the Father.

Not his face, not his body type, not his skin color, but his in personhood – in his thoughts and in his ways Jesus was the exact likeness of God.... As if God had pressed the seal of his being into the soft wax of human flesh.

And in another sense in being "the image of the invisible God" Jesus – by his life, by his actions, by his thoughts, revealed to us the personality of God. To watch the life of Jesus was to glimpse into the heart and mind of God.

This is what Jesus had worked hard to teach his disciples and that is why it so grieved him when, at the last supper, Phillip asked Jesus to show them the father... listen to the tone in Jesus voice when he replied to this request....

'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?' John 14:9

So the early Apostles were eventually convinced – particularly when they saw Jesus walking around again in the flesh after seeing him dead -- that in seeing Jesus they were looking at God – and that is what they taught the rest of us.

This next term "*firstborn of all creation*" needs some explaining. Jehovah's Witnesses and other offshoots of Christianity – who think that perhaps we are giving the Son too much credit as God, explain that the word "firstborn," used in this verse, proves that Jesus having been made by God therefore could not be the same as God. Jesus was a lower God-created being.

But they say this, because they do not understand that "firstborn" does not necessarily mean birth order. Firstborn also means preeminence of place. According to Hebrew thinking, to be firstborn means you hold the highest place of honor. Jesus is "firstborn" in that God the Father has given him preeminence over all of creation, all of humanity, all of the Church – Jesus has the final authority.

Just like Jesus, being described as "sitting at the right hand of the Father" is also a reference to his rank and authority – since God the Father being an omnipresent Spirit, has no right or left side and needs nowhere to sit.

And the next verses that follow prove this. Because the Apostle Paul went on to explain that in Jesus *all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Wait a minute, doesn't Genesis say that in the beginning GOD created everything by himself – yep.

And that very same creation story also notes with a strange use of the Hebrew plural: *Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;* (Genesis 1:26). So even back at the start of the Bible, we are getting hints that the one God who created the heavens and earth – somehow functioned in more than one person

Let's go on.

Paul next describes Jesus as the "head of the Church" that God's intention is for him to have "first place in everything" -- again that is not in the order that a race was won, but in rank, and authority , and privilege. So when we say "**Jesus is number 1!**" we are just saying what God the Father had intended all along.

Which brings us to one of my favorite verses.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

This word fullness is such a wonderful description of how Jesus and God are one and the same. Have you ever had a water balloon fight? You take this empty little rubbery tube. Holding it tight to the hose nozzle you begin filling it with water. And as the balloon gets bigger and fuller the skin gets tighter and transparent. And you can actually see the water swirling and bubbling around inside. And when you dare not fill it any more ... you knot it off and try to throw it without it bursting all over you. That's what "fullness" means here.

That when you look at Jesus, you see him completely almost transparently filled with God – you can see God swirling around inside him. You could get no more of God into Jesus even if you tried.

That's what *in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* means.

And Paul continues

that through [Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:13-20

Meaning that in Jesus of Nazareth, the God of the universe, took on human form, human soul, human mind, born as a human, living as a human, and dying like a human.

That this carpenter from Nazareth, being both completely God and completely human at the same time, in his death and resurrection was able not only to ransom us from death to life but was able to offer forgiveness, freedom, and rebirth into God's family for all who would accept it by faith.

That my friends is the Gospel, the "Good News" that Peter shared with Cornelius and that we have been sharing with each other ever since.

- Jesus' relationship to His creation is that of creator and sustainer.
- His relationship to His church is the relationship of preeminent headship.
- and His relationship to His children is a relationship of reconciliation, of bringing home.

As Paul went on to explain

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. (Colossians 1:20-22)

So we now conclude this essential summary of the truths of Jesus – the same way Paul summarized it (it you read on a bit in Colossians chapter 2 you will come to this statement (2;9-10)

For in [Jesus] all the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and [through Jesus] you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

So when Jesus one day asks you, "Who do you think I am?" (Mt. 16:16).
Your reply can be as bold as Peter's "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Amen.