

The Gospel of Jesus Christ  
**Lesson 7 – Jesus As the Center of the Gospel**

**Introduction**

If you recall, from Lesson 2 (The Big Story), we demonstrated how the Bible tells the epic story of the presence of God. The first three chapters of the Bible tell us how the good world was created with humans and God walking together in the Garden--and how sin and Satan came and wrecked that harmony exiling us from the presence of God. The remainder of Scripture tells us what God does to get us back.

In this lesson, Lesson Seven, we see how the person and work of Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of that story. In his incarnation and ministry, we see God's desire to be Immanuel--God with Us. In his crucifixion, we see the lengths God would go to save us from our sin; we see that God in Jesus would choose to be exiled and "without God" that we might be brought in. In his resurrection and ascension, we see his promise to be with us always till the very end of the age. If we only had one word, to sum up the Gospel, it would be Jesus. Who he is and what he did and is doing is the climax and core of the Gospel we are all charged to proclaim.

**Jesus is Immanuel God with Us**

The Gospel, according to Matthew, gets right to the point of revealing where Jesus is from, who he is, and what his purpose is on earth. Matthew 1:20-24 tells us that Jesus is from God, is God, and has come to save his people from their sins. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7, which is a passage about God's commitment to his people in spite of their weakness and wicked ruler. God gave a sign to the people of Judah that a virgin or young woman would give birth to a son, and he would be called Immanuel, for God is with his people. This came to pass in Isaiah's day--but it also hinted at a greater reality and a greater commitment. The son who was born in Isaiah 7 was Hezekiah, and he, with God's help, would lead Judah through its greatest crisis, the invasion of the Assyrian empire. But now, God is doing a new thing; a child is not born as a sign of God's spiritual presence--God himself is born as a child with us in Spirit and Flesh. Upon this mystery hangs the hope of the world.

**God with Us--The Incarnation**

***Begin this section by asking your class to give you adjectives that describe God: you will likely hear: "Almighty, Father, Powerful, Awesome, Love, Sovereign faithful, Mountain, Refuge."***

***Next, ask your class to give you adjectives that describe a Baby: You will likely hear "pudgy, helpless, small, cute, weak, crying, stinky."***

Conceptually speaking, "God" and "a baby" could not be further apart. One holds the universe in his hand, and another requires hands to hold it up. Yet, the Christian story unmistakably tells us that this is exactly what God became for a time. God emptied himself of power, omnipotence, and indestructibility and became a fragile child born in a cave in Bethlehem.

In spite of tremendous cultural change in the past half-century, we still live in a culture unmistakably marked by the Christian story. Our attitude towards the incarnation reveals this; Christians and non-Christians respond with indifference to the audacious claim that God became a baby. God with us came at a tremendous cost for God. God left utter perfection, bliss, safety, glory, knowledge, and strength. For the frailties common to mankind and sufferings of a fallen world. Food, water, shelter, disease, oppression, death, loss are all things God need not have experienced. God experiences nothing outside God's own choosing. We confess that God *chose* to experience the weaknesses, sufferings, pains, and shames common to all mankind that he may know us, suffer with us, weep with us, and ultimately rescue us from the utter mess of the world we have made.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Our Jewish friends worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In many, many respects, we worship the same God. But to their knowledge, God never left his heavens and came to earth. How does this change their understanding of God?
  - How does this change their approach to suffering and loss?
  - How does Jesus, who is God and Man, experiencing the frailties and indignities of life on earth shape our understanding of God?

### **The Cross – Jesus "without" God.**

It would be marvelous on its own that the Triune God subjected himself to the frailties of humanity--bearing the natural sufferings of mankind as our brother. But, our God did so much more. God accepted not only the indignities common to all mortal beings, but he

bore the full wrath of God (his wrath) that we, his people, might be brought in. On the cross, not only did Jesus endure the pain and shame of dying naked on two planks of wood. He also experienced hell (the absence of God) that we might enter his presence again. *Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)*

Jesus was forsaken of God that we might be drawn in. Jurgen Moltmann says it well:

*"When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of the criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God. The suffering in the passion of Jesus is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father. God does not become a religion, so that man participates in him by corresponding religious thoughts and feelings. God does not become a law, so that man participates in him through obedience to a law. God does not become an ideal, so that man achieves communion with him through constant striving. He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him."*

### **Discussion Questions**

- **Why does the Gospel require the cross?**
  - **Why did God not simply forget our sins?**
  - **Why didn't God let his wrath go rather than bearing it himself in Christ?**
- **How should Christians approach discussing the wrath of God?**
  - **How do we avoid gleefully anticipating the death of sinners?**
  - **How do we avoid minimizing God's wrath--treating sin flippantly?**

### **Resurrection Jesus – "I am with you always" (God in Us)**

Matthew 27 tells us that when Jesus cried out in a loud voice--giving up his Spirit--the curtain of the temple tore in two from top to bottom. Jesus's death was the final and sufficient propitiation for the just wrath of God. His sacrifice made it possible for humans to bear the presence again without death--for they would be clothed in Christ's righteousness instead of their filthy rags. Tombs burst open--rocks split--the first fruits of Christ's work. In Christ--the exile is over the presence of God is once again among mankind.

Jesus's final words in the Gospel according to Matthew were his promise to "be with y'all always even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28). How can this be true if Jesus later

ascends to the right hand of the Father? It is true because, at Pentecost, the Father sends the Holy Spirit. The work of the Son enables the Father to send the Spirit. When two or more are gathered in Jesus's name, Jesus is with them--in the Holy Spirit(Matthew 18). Of course, the Triune God is not absent from individual Christians--but he is specially present in the gathered body of believers. We are the Temple of the Lord, and his presence will be among us until he joins us in full at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Matthew 18 tells us that Jesus is specially present when two or more are gathered. Why not simply when one is praying? Or Fasting? Or worshipping? Why must it be two or more?
- Matthew begins his gospel account with Immanuel and ends with the statement, "I am with you always"? Why is God's presence so significant to Christians?

### **For additional material on Christology see comments from D.A. Carson, The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

(1) The gospel is Christological; it is Christ-centered. The gospel is not a bland theism, still less an impersonal pantheism. The gospel is irrevocably Christ-centered. The point is powerfully articulated in every major New Testament book and corpus. In Matthew's Gospel, for instance, Christ himself is Emmanuel, God with us; he is the long-promised Davidic king who will bring in the kingdom of God. By his death and resurrection he becomes the mediatorial monarch who insists that all authority in heaven and earth is his alone. In John, Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through him, for it is the Father's solemn intent that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. In the sermons reported in Acts, there is no name but Jesus given under heaven by which we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). In Romans and Galatians and Ephesians, Jesus is the last Adam, the one to whom the law and the prophets bear witness, the one who by God's own design propitiates God's wrath and reconciles Jews and Gentiles to his heavenly Father and thus also to each other. In the great vision of Revelation 4-5, the Son alone, emerging 3 from the very throne of God Almighty, is simultaneously the lion and the lamb, and he alone is qualified to open the seals of the scroll in the right hand of God, and thus bring about all of God's matchless purposes for judgment and blessing. So also here: the gospel is Christological. John Stott is right: "The gospel is not preached if Christ is not preached."

Yet this Christological stance does not focus exclusively on Christ's person; it embraces with equal fervor his death and resurrection. As a matter of first importance, Paul writes, "Christ died for our sins" (15:3). Earlier in this letter, Paul does not tell his readers, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ"; rather, he says, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1Cor 2:2). Moreover, Paul here ties Jesus' death to his resurrection, as the rest of the chapter makes clear. This is the gospel of Christ crucified and risen again.

In other words, it is not enough to make a splash of Christmas, and downplay Good Friday and Easter. When we insist that as a matter of first importance, the gospel is Christological, we are not thinking of Christ as a cypher, or simply as the God-man who comes along and helps us like a nice insurance agent: “Jesus is a nice God-man, he’s a very, very nice God-man, and when you break down, he comes along and fixes you.” The gospel is Christological in a more robust sense: Jesus is the promised Messiah who died and rose again.