

Message Notes July 5th, 2020 – Beautiful Outlaw: Encountering the True Personality of Jesus

Week 4: The Humanness of Jesus (John 1:1-18; Mark 14:32-36)

• The Gospel

- Let me hit you with another personal question to start off: *how is your relationship with Jesus going right now?*
 - It's not uncommon for people to ask, "How is your marriage, how are your kids, how are you doing with coworkers, how are your friends?" But today I'm asking you, how is your relationship with Jesus?
 - What words would you use to describe it right now? This isn't a question of judgement or comparison, it's a question of insight. I can imagine a lot of different answers, and maybe more than one seems true at the same time: would you describe your relationship with Jesus as *close; connected; distracted; discontent; united; intimate; unsure; fearful; growing; thriving; stuck; struggling; good but not great; just "OK"?*
 - Can I offer you a beautiful assurance? Whichever of those words feel true about your relationship with Jesus right now, *his love for you is completely unchanged and his character is utterly consistent.* His love for you is not now or ever dependent on how you feel about him or how you feel your relationship with him is going. Christian, he is for you, he is with you.
 - Romans 5 puts it this way, "*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,*" (verses 7-8). This is the mindboggling depth of the love of Christ.
 - And here's another reassuring truth: whatever you're feeling, whatever you're going through in life right now, Jesus understands. Jesus actually understands. You might have trouble believing that right now, but that's what we're talking about today.
- The Gospel of Jesus is about a *relationship* with Jesus.
- It's *in Christ* that we are saved. It's through an ever-growing union with Jesus that we are forgiven, healed, restored, and given eternal life starting now. It's through a relationship with Jesus that our destiny changes from death to life.
 - Jesus said in John 15 that he is the vine, we are the branches, and we can do nothing without him. It's only by *abiding* in union with him, in relationship with him, that we have life and we bear fruit—*good fruit, lasting fruit.*
- So, I ask you again, how is your relationship with Jesus?
 - We can't expect to have a vital relationship with Christ if we don't know who Christ really is. We're in constant need of rediscovering him in all his goodness if we want to maintain a vital union with God.
 - G.K. Chesterton once said that every generation loses the Gospel and every generation needs to recover and rediscover the Gospel for themselves.
 - That's why we're trying to encounter the true personality of Jesus in this series called *Beautiful Outlaw*. When we explore God's Word and experience Jesus' presence, and we begin to discover or rediscover Jesus as he really is—it's not hard to want to love him with all our hearts.
 - But there is so much that sets itself against our knowing Jesus: we live in a battle, a spiritual war; we fight against our flesh even though we are risen to new life; we get distracted by the world in which we live; and often there is a "religious fog" that tries to creep in and obscure our vision of Christ in all that he is.
 - So far, we've talked about the playfulness of Jesus and we've talked about the fierce intention of Jesus. But in all this discovering of his greatness, we have to work against the tendency to push Jesus out of reach: to relegate him to the rafters, to the stratosphere, to the stained-glass windows—no longer accessible, no longer relatable.
- And that's why today, we're talking about the *humanness* of Jesus.
 - Yes, Jesus was human.

- Christians from earliest days have confessed, in accordance with the Scriptures, that Jesus is fully God and fully human. The ancient Nicene Creed states that Jesus is “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God.” It’s one of the central mysteries of the Gospel: God took on humanity, became one of us, walked in the dust of the earth. We call it the incarnation.
 - It says it right there in John chapter 1. The opening lines of the Gospel capture the mystery and bluntness of this Fact: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...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...” (v.1, v. 14).
 - And because the Word became flesh, John goes on to acknowledge this: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known,” (v. 18).
 - But as we venerate Jesus, glorify him, worship him as God, we can forget what it means that he *became one of us*. The ancient church father Athanasius said, “God became human so that humans could become like God.”
 - We see all the unprecedented miracles and accomplishments of Jesus and it’s not hard to worship him, but it seems that we all too easily forget the implications of his humanity. And we need to recover that if we’re going to relate to him fully.
- **Was Jesus Pretending?**
 - Here’s how John Eldredge puts it in this week’s chapter: “...*something has crept into our assumptions about Jesus that makes it almost impossible to relate to him, not to mention love him. I say ‘crept’ because it has not been a conscious decision; few of the things that shape our actual convictions are. I think much of the creep has happened, ironically, as a result of our attempts to love and revere Christ.* But crept in this notion has, and it has done great damage to our perceptions of him, our experience of him. It’s the notion that Jesus was really ‘pretending’ when he presented himself as a man...when we read what we would call the more human moments, we feel that Jesus was sort of...cheating. With a nod and a wink we know that what’s really happening is that Einstein has dropped in to take the first-grade math quiz. Mozart is playing a measure in the kindergarten song flute choir. After all, we’re talking about Jesus here. The guy walked on water, raised Lazarus from the dead. He never broke a sweat, right?” (Chapter 5 in *Beautiful Outlaw*, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing)
 - So, what do you think? Was Jesus pretending? Did the crack of that whip against his back and the nails piercing his flesh hurt for him as badly as they would hurt for us? Was he just “acting” or experiencing some rough equivalent of human experience all those times the Bible said he was tired, or thirsty, or hungry, or needed space from the crowds, or grieved, or wept? Did he just tap into some inner, Divine strength to jump over all those hurtles with ease? Was God putting on a show, or did Jesus experience all the thrills and frailties of being human as we do?
 - If he was just pretending to be human, what do you make of those agonizing moments in the garden: when he begged the Father for another way, when he cried out in prayer to remove the cup of physical, emotional, and most of all *spiritual* anguish that would be the Cross of Calvary. It says he sweat poured out in drops of *blood*. That’s a pretty radical, manipulative performance if he’s not *really* feeling all those things in that moment. And that’s the point: he was. Read the Bible. Jesus is human. And Jesus is God.
 - Brennan Manning once wrote, “*We have spread so many ashes over the historical Jesus that we scarcely feel the glow of His presence anymore...He is a man in a way that we have forgotten men can be: truthful, blunt, emotional, nonmanipulative, sensitive, compassionate.*”
 - John Eldredge goes on to comment, “*It will do your heart good to discover that Jesus shares in your humanity. He was, as the creeds insist, fully human. (Yes, yes—more than that to be sure. But never less than that.) I’m sure the chipmunks made him laugh. The Pharisees sure made him furious. He felt joy, weakness, sorrow. The more we can grasp his humanity, the more we will find him someone we can approach, know, love, trust, and adore.*”

- **Someone We Can Follow**

- All of this rings true with these beautiful words in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Speaking about Jesus as our Great High Priest, it says (listen closely), *“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* And again, *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* (Hebrews 2:17-19, 4:14-16).
 - What an unspeakable treasure to know that the One who sits enthroned on High, with all authority, who holds our life, our future, our eternity in his hands, fully empathizes with our weakness. And this same One who is fully human and fully God, has made full atonement for all of our sins, so that we may approach the throne of grace with confidence, to meet God and find mercy, grace, and help in our time of need. But we must turn to him, and we must trust him, and we must receive him.
 - I think, if we’re honest, we sometimes hear the staggering promises of God and radical teachings of Jesus, and react with an attitude of, “Well, that’s easy for you to say, Jesus. You never...” And I can hear him replying, “What? What haven’t I done? I never experienced temptation? Never known the limitations of being human? Known poverty? Loneliness? Felt misunderstood? Lost a friend? Been betrayed? Been exhausted? Felt dread? Experienced emotional anguish, physical pain? Been outraged by injustice? Been hungry or thirsty? Been through grief? Been oppressed, hunted, tortured? Experienced death? Been through hell?”
 - What hasn’t Jesus done? What hasn’t he felt that you’ve felt? The only thing he hasn’t done, is sin.
 - But he understands you. And he’s with you. And he’s for you.
- Would you allow the truth that Jesus became *one of us* to open your heart more deeply to him right now? Is there something you’re holding back? A past trauma or disappointment that’s kept you at a distance?
 - He understands you. He’s with you. He’s for you. He’s knocking on the door. You can let him in.
- Right now, in this season, honestly at this moment, I’m tired. It’s a tiring season to lead. And then I think about how tired *Jesus* must have been sometimes, in all that he carried, all that he did. And somehow, it makes me appreciate him, love him, trust him all the more, to know that he understands—even more than I do, he understands. And I love him for it.
- Let’s keep this journey going. We’ll see you next week. The Lord bless you and keep you, amen.