

# Jesus Christ is...

## DAVE BAST

Sometimes a brief formula can change the world. Early in the last century, Einstein did just that with  $E=mc^2$ ; but there is a formula in John's gospel that is even more powerful...four brief words: The Word became flesh. They describe an event so amazing, so daring, that it changes everything afterwards. We will look at that phrase, and the chapter from which it comes, today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

## DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and today on *Groundwork*, Scott, we are beginning a new series on the Gospel of John, the fourth gospel; and we are going to do it in seven programs, which is a little bit maybe presumptuous or ridiculous because of what this gospel contains.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

It has 21 chapters, so technically we would have to cover three chapters per program, but unfortunately there is just going to be a lot of stuff that we are going to skip; some of what we will skip we have covered in other series here on *Groundwork* in the past; but we will have to keep moving, even in seven programs, to capture the majesty of John. The Gospel of John has been compared to a body of water, which some scholars have said on the one hand, it is accessible enough that it is a shallow enough pool that a toddler could splash around safely; on the other hand, it has depths that could drown an elephant; and I think we will see that in this series, both the stunning teachings that are right there, and yet the depth that is behind them.

## DAVE BAST

And in a sense, seven is a pretty good number if you are going to tackle John, and you are not going to take two or three years to do so, because seven occurs again and again, sort of symbolically almost...you almost have a feeling that John targeted that as a symbol of completeness or fullness or perfection. So, it is often said seven miracles that John describes, out of all the must have been hundreds and hundreds of miracles Jesus performed. In fact, he even says toward the end of his gospel that he has been very selective in what he has presented; and John actually calls those miracles with a special word. He calls them *signs*.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; they are like arrows that point you to the reality of the kingdom...the reality of Jesus...the kingdom that is just right above our heads and always waiting to break in. So, there are seven witnesses to Jesus, there are seven of the more famous of the I AM sayings, and we should point out, Dave, that John's gospel we think was written last. Perhaps he was aware of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so he didn't just sort of repeat their structure. John contains no parables. Jesus taught only in parables, we are told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but John doesn't include a single one...

## DAVE BAST

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Probably because he figured they were covered in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; but he does have what Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't have, and that is the famous I AM sayings.

**DAVE BAST**

And many of those are developed in the course of long discourses of Jesus...

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes.

**DAVE BAST**

So, there is plenty of Jesus' teaching, but as you say, Scott, no parables, but lots of in-depth, chapter length...

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right.

**DAVE BAST**

Many, many verses of comment and development of Jesus' ideas.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And the structure of John...we are going to look at John 1...we are going to get to it in just a moment. That is the prologue. It also has an epilogue, which will be our final episode, John 21. In between, there are two sections...Chapters 2 through 12 are the book of signs...this is the real public ministry...13 through 20, the book of glory; and that was more of Jesus' private teachings; but it begins with this prologue, Dave, in John Chapter 1, a very famous part of a lot of worship services and lessons and carols, even. It is a majestic prologue.

**DAVE BAST**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>Now, he himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world...(we will just jump down to verse 14) <sup>14</sup>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.

**DAVE BAST**

Right; you mentioned, Scott, lessons and carols. That is a famous service that churches all over the world now undertake to put on at Christmastime; but it began at Cambridge University, at King's College, a little over a hundred years ago, and each of those nine lessons sort of spreads through the Bible, telling the story of redemption; and they get to this last lesson...it is always John 1...and it is introduced as St. John unfolds to us the *mystery* of the incarnation; and that is what, really, these verses say. We have covered them in *Groundwork* programs before, but it is a mystery because, again, here are some of those depths that you can never plumb...

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right.

**DAVE BAST**

You can never get to the bottom of it. God is more than one person? There is God and there is also the Word, who is God? And this same Word, who is God, became flesh.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right; we could point out, too, Dave, that in what we read just a moment ago, this is almost like a song. It is like a poem, but John interrupts his own song at one point to talk about John the Baptist, and he goes out of his way to say: Now, look; he is not the light. The light I am talking about, that is not John the Baptist. He just came to witness to it. The reason was because by the time John wrote the gospel, there were still a lot of people who thought John the Baptist had been the Messiah. So, he has to make clear: Look, I'm talking about...ultimately Jesus. His name won't come up until almost verse 17, but he has to make it clear: No, I am not singing about John the Baptist. This is about the Word, who was with God in the beginning. That Word is the Son of God, who is going to be referring to God as his Father extensively here in John's gospel; and yet, that eternal Word, who created the whole universe...this sort of back-fills for us what we understand happened in Genesis 1...

**DAVE BAST**

Right.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

This Word is the one who did all the "Let there be... Let there be... Let there be" language; and yet, that Word became flesh. A real human being, not a costume, not a disguise, not a deception; a real person.

**DAVE BAST**

And it seems as though John chose that word *flesh* very deliberately, because we speak of the *incarnation*, and again, we get these Latinate terms...that comes from Latin...but it literally means *inmeatment*!

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right.

**DAVE BAST**

At the heart of incarnation is *carne*—meat. So, John wants to emphasize: Look, this actually happened. Again, mystery. We cannot really fully wrap our minds around it, that the God who called all things into being became a little baby who cried and puked and had to be changed and wiped up and all the rest, but he did it for a very specific and special reason; and that is what we want to look at next.

*Segment 2*

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this, the first episode of a planned seven-part series covering the entire Gospel of John; and Dave, we have just been in the prologue of John Chapter 1, and the center of that prologue, verse 14, this eternal Word who created the entire cosmos in the beginning was made meat—was made a true human being; and John wants us to know that he is a true human being. Interestingly, Dave, one of the earliest heresies in the Church was something called Docetism, which was the heresy that said that Jesus was only divine, but not really human. The human part was like a costume or disguise. He was like Superman, pretending to be the mild-mannered reporter, Clark Kent, but he really wasn't. But John wants to say no, Jesus was as human as anybody you have ever met.

**DAVE BAST**

Yes, absolutely; I like to think of what we see in the gospels...the first three gospels, in particular, of the humanity of Jesus. You know, nobody in the gospels...in any of them...ever came up to Jesus and said: Say, you're not really a human being, are you? You are just pretending. No; he exhibited all of the traits of our common humanity. He could be tired, he could have emotions, he was hungry, he was thirsty...all of them, the Bible says, except for sin. In all other respects, he was one of us; and yet, this bombshell...this

formula...this  $E=mc^2$  in spiritual terms...the Word became flesh; and John adds then his word of witness: We beheld his glory...glory, as of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth; and that sort of sends your mind elsewhere in the gospels. You think of the story of the transfiguration, when John and his brother James, and Peter were with Jesus on the mountain, and suddenly the veil was dropped and they could see the glory of his divinity shine through just for a moment, as a kind of preview. Glory is an important word in John; we will come back to it in future programs.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes; in fact, in the next program we will see it crops up in some surprising contexts, but you are right, Dave. Nobody struggled to believe he was a real human being. It was figuring that he was God that was the...he was *so* human that to say, well, he is actually also completely God...*that* was the tough part for the disciples. They didn't have any doubts...I mean, they just spent too much time with him to doubt that he was a human being. Later they would begin to think: I think there is more to him than that.

### **DAVE BAST**

Right.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

In fact, eventually they concluded it was correct to worship him, which would be idolatry if he wasn't really God. We are still tempted to Docetism. I mean, sometimes even in...I have had it...I don't know if you have had it, Dave...in some of my sermons, if I talked about Jesus in just a little bit too earthy of terms, people get squeamish. They don't really like that, you know? They don't want to think about Jesus needing to brush his teeth because he got some parsley stuck between his incisors. That is just a little bit too common. We still tend toward: He is only divine, not really human...

### **DAVE BAST**

Right.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

But, he has to be both to save us.

### **DAVE BAST**

If you ask what he came for, we will look at maybe the supreme purpose of Jesus' life in the next segment, but for now, let's take note of the fact that, yes, he came to show us what God is like. He really was God, even though he put on human flesh. He took on a true and full and complete human nature. He still, in his character, is a revelation of the Father. In fact, Jesus would say later, speaking to Thomas: Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So, if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus; but at the same time, I think it is only fitting to say he came to show us what a real person is like...what a true human being ought to be.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And it is interesting, too, that in the verse you read there, that he is the one and only Son who came from the Father, *full of grace and truth*; and our friend Neal Plantinga has pointed out that Jesus was full of grace and truth, and he was the only one; because most of us have a hard time getting both things up and running simultaneously. Some people are full of grace. They are so nice, they would never say a harsh word to anybody, but they are kind of wishy-washy. Some people are so full of truth, you wish they would just be quiet, you know...

### **DAVE BAST**

Yes, right.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Did you like my cake? No, it was terribly dry; it was terrible. Oh, well, thanks a lot. They are full of truth, but they've got no grace. Jesus had both; and in an upcoming program, Dave, we are going to look at some stories where sinners were so attracted to Jesus. They sensed that he knew exactly what their sins were; and yet, they weren't repelled by him like they were by the Pharisees. Why? Because the truth was always stuck tight to the grace.

**DAVE BAST**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And the grace was always stuck tight to the truth...both up and running; and again, we needed that for our salvation, to forgive our sins. God knows the truth about us, but the grace is always greater.

**DAVE BAST**

Yes, absolutely; and you know, one more thing on that phrase from the prologue...the famous...it's verse 14: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. What John literally says there is he pitched his tent in our midst; the *skéné* in Greek, which points back to the tabernacle in the wilderness. We did a series recently on *Groundwork* on the book of Leviticus, and you may think *Leviticus!* Can anything good come out of Leviticus, to make a reference to something later in John Chapter 1; but yes, Leviticus shows up throughout the New Testament, and there is an allusion to it here because there is a lot about the tabernacle in Leviticus, and the fact that now the dwelling place of God is in the midst of our world, and the Temple now, which the tabernacle prefigured, is the body of Jesus. We will consider that in our very next program. So, he pitched his tent; he really came; he was with us; he was one of us; and we saw it, says John, and we can testify to it.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

One thing we didn't read from John 1, though, is that not everybody saw it. In verse 10: He was in the world... (and remember, John had just told us that this Word of God made the whole world, so...) he was in the world he made (John says) he was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He [even] came to that which was his own, and they did not receive him. (Or as an older translation) they received him not.

**DAVE BAST**

Right.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

A devastating phrase. He was so human that he didn't look like the Messiah everybody was expecting. Even when he came to his own people—the people of Israel—the Jews—they didn't recognize him as the Messiah. Not what they were looking for; and yet, John is here to say this is the proper man, *der recht mann* as Martin Luther once said. The right man, and he is the one that we need to save us.

**DAVE BAST**

And to those who did receive him, John adds, he gave the authority—the power—the right—to become children of God. So, yes; there were some who did spot him...see him...recognize him...accept him, and they became children of God through him; and how that happened is what we will look at next.

*Segment 3*

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

**DAVE BAST**

And I am Dave Bast; and today we are beginning a series on the Gospel of John, seven programs—a symbolic number in John—and we are going to try to hit at least the main themes and passages from this most majestic and deep of all the gospels. Today we are looking at the first chapter, Scott.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And we have looked at most of the prologue, which really runs about the first eighteen verses or so. John the Baptist is referred to in there, we already mentioned that. By the time John wrote his gospel, late in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, there were still a lot of people who thought John the Baptist was the Messiah. You see this in the book of Acts...

**DAVE BAST**

Right.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

The apostles run into some people who say: Oh, yeah, yeah; we're following the Messiah, but who is this Jesus you're talking about? John the Baptist...

**DAVE BAST**

We were baptized by John.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes; not quite over the finish line there; but John is, of course, the one who bears witness; and in John's gospel...so, we have the evangelist, John, who wrote the gospel, and John the Baptist.

**DAVE BAST**

Keep your Johns straight here.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes, we've got to be clear there; but, John the Baptist does here what he does in all the gospels, and that is, he bears witness. You know, in a lot of medieval paintings of Jesus there is often a figure on the side with a long, bony finger pointing at Jesus, and that is always John the Baptist, because that was his job, to point to Jesus. In John's gospel, he does it in a unique way because he says...in John 1:29, when he sees Jesus coming, he says:

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

**DAVE BAST**

Right; which is the powerful introduction of John's witness. So, we move out of the prologue, and John the Baptist is referred to a couple of times there, including parenthetically: <sup>30</sup>“This is he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.’”

That is near the end of the prologue; and it is a tie-in to the synoptic gospels, where John says: No, I am not worthy to stoop down and untie his sandal. I am not the one; he is the one; look at him. But then, we see him with some of his disciples. Scott, as you mentioned, some of them kind of hung on for years, still calling themselves, or thinking of themselves as followers of John the Baptist; and they see Jesus approaching and John shoots out his finger metaphorically and says: Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And this now because of many, many musical settings, even the Latin of this phrase is known to a lot of people: *Angus Dei, que tollis peccata mundi*—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—stained glass windows.

So, we think this Lamb of God thing is all over the Bible. The truth is, John 1...and John the Baptist says it twice in this chapter...John 1 is the only place in the entire Bible with the exact phrase *the Lamb of God* occurs. Even in Revelation, when we get those visions of the Lamb upon the Throne, that exact phrase, the *Lamb of God* is not there; and it never occurs in the Old Testament either. It looks like it is a phrase that John coined right there on the spot, which could lead you to wonder, what did people hear the first time they heard this? This never, ever had been uttered before: The Lamb of God. It might have...lamb and sheep are not the brightest animals in the world...so some people might have thought: Well, that is not a nice thing to say. It is like today calling somebody a dumb bunny, but worst yet, Dave, there is that whole association of lamb and sacrifice.

**DAVE BAST**

Yes, right; probably what they would have thought...those first disciples...is not *Mary had a little lamb*...

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right, no.

**DAVE BAST**

*Whose fleece was white as snow*...not some cute, cuddly little creature that followed God around the way the lamb followed Mary. No, I think again, they would have gone to Leviticus and to the daily sacrifices that they saw in the Temple, where a lamb would often be brought, and its throat would be cut, its blood applied to the altar...this kind of graphic demonstration of death for sin; or maybe they would have thought of the Day of Atonement, where they were not sheep but goats...young goats...who were taken, and one of them was sacrificed; and the high priest would bring the blood into the Holy of Holies. The idea of sacrifice, as you said, would have, I think, jumped into their minds.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

You are exactly right; that is exactly where their minds would go, which would mean this sounded a rather grim note. If this Jesus is going to be a lamb who is going to take away the sin of the *world*, not just one or two sins...

**DAVE BAST**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

He might be headed for a bad end. Sacrifice...John is saying he is going to die...he is going to be sacrificed to take away the sin of the world. So again, we hear that Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, and we think of all these beautiful choral settings by different composers, but it might have landed like a thud the day John the Baptist first said it, because it was sort of like saying: Behold, dead man walking.

**DAVE BAST**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

This man is headed for doom...for something good...but he is going to be sacrificed.

**DAVE BAST**

And as you pointed out, Scott, that exact phrase, *Lamb of God*, only occurs here in the New Testament, but the word *lamb*, of course, is used elsewhere, and supremely in John's great vision in the book of Revelation, in Revelation Chapter 5, where he hears this voice that says there is one who is worthy to open this scroll and explain the world and history and bring it all to its conclusion—the Lion of the tribe of Judah; but when he turns and looks, what he sees is a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered...as if it had been sacrificed...a lamb with its throat cut.

There, of course, is Jesus in his dual role as both the conqueror and the sacrifice—the victim; and in the New Testament, we see again and again this reference to the fact that Christ died for our sins...or he bore our sins in his body on the tree, as Peter puts it...and that has been a kind of truth that theologians have puzzled over; they have tried to explain for many, many years. Maybe again, it is a mystery that we won't get to the depths of, but nevertheless, it is true: his death somehow for our sins.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And there is one more thing in John 1 as this ministry begins, and here it is from John Chapter 1, beginning in verse 35: The next day, John the Baptist was there with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup>When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, (now, this is the second time he says it) “Look, the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup>When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. <sup>40</sup>Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup>The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup>And he brought him to Jesus.

### **DAVE BAST**

Which is a wonderful picture of what we need to do, right? This is what disciples do, when they see Jesus, they start following him. That is simply what it means. You may not understand it all. You may not completely get it, but you follow Jesus; and I love the fact, as it has often been pointed out, that the first thing Andrew does after he starts following Jesus is go find his brother, Peter.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

It is quite amazing that this early in the gospel that they think they have already found the Messiah. Now, they are going to struggle with that, as we said, over time; and it won't end the way they think it is going to end. I mean, Peter will end up denying Jesus when things look like they have gone south; but here it is: We have found the Messiah; and he brought him to Jesus. All of that packed into John Chapter 1, and we are just getting started; so, stayed tuned to this series as we continue in this wonderful gospel.

### **DAVE BAST**

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue studying the Gospel of John by looking at the signs Jesus performed in John Chapters 2 through 4.

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