

Jesus: The Word of God

SCOTT HOEZEE

When the fullness of no less than Almighty God comes down to earth in human form, you would expect that God would bring so much to this world that you could never exhaust the possible ways of talking about it. The New Testament writers knew that was true of the Son of God, who was born Jesus of Nazareth. So, they reached for lots of images to describe various aspects of Jesus, calling Him the Image of God, the Wisdom of God, the Lamb of God, the Word of God. Each image is rich in biblical background; so today, let's explore what it means to say that Jesus is the Word of God. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, we are starting today just a short series – a four-parter – as we are going to dig into scripture to discover the meaning behind some of the better known ways that the New Testament writers tried to describe Jesus as the incarnate Son of God.

DAVE BAST

Obviously, that is a huge idea; the idea that the Almighty creator of the universe – the One who was and is and is to come – took human form and human nature, assumed completely human flesh, and came to be among us and to show us something about who God is. Well, that is going to take more than just one idea or one picture, one metaphor to describe that concept.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is – the New Testament writers, and eventually people like the Apostle Paul knew this as well – it is mind-boggling – mind-blowing – to think that you had one human being in whom – inside of whom, somehow, was all the glory of God – all the power of God – packed in, tamped down, stuffed in there – that is a lot of stuffing.

DAVE BAST

How did they ever come to believe that? These were all people who were absolutely grounded in the fact that there is only one God and that God is a spirit, and God is not like an idol; He does not have hands and feet and all that. How did they come to believe that this man they knew as Jesus of Nazareth embodied everything that God was, and was, in fact, God. The only answer is because He rose from the dead. That is what blew their minds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, they were kind of forced to believe. First they believed that there is one God, and then they also were forced by the very circumstances of His life, death, and resurrection to say: Well, Jesus is God, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; yes, it is one of the great proofs of the Trinity – of the doctrine of the Trinity – was that these Jewish people, who were raised on monotheism – that there is only one God – yet, they came to worship Jesus, and they did not find it idolatrous to do so. Jesus was almost like this really gargantuan diamond with lots of different facets, and you could just keep turning the diamond and now you could look at this facet – this aspect of Jesus – turn the diamond again, there is another whole angle on Jesus. One of the facets, the one we are looking at today, is the one where Jesus is described as the Word of God.

DAVE BAST

And that brings us to a familiar passage of scripture from the first chapter of the Gospel of John; one of the real high points; one of the great poetic passages, but it describes Jesus as the Word of God.

¹¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through Him, all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In Him was life, and that life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And then the famous 14th verse – those were verses 1 through 5; here is verse 14 – John 1:14:

¹⁴The 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The evangelist, John, does not mess around. He packs a tremendous amount of theology into this opening chapter, and it all starts with those three little clarion words: In the beginning. Any biblically literate person – if you know the Bible reasonably well, then those three words send a signal to you that bring you right back to Genesis 1. It is sort of like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; if you know music at all... even if...

DAVE BAST

Da-da-da-daa (opening 4 notes of Beethoven's Fifth).

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; as soon as you hear that...

DAVE BAST

In the beginning... (sung to opening 4 notes of Beethoven's Fifth)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes – as soon as you hear it – oh, that is Beethoven – and as soon as you hear, “In the beginning,” you say, “Oh, that is Genesis;” and John will do the same thing in his first epistle, by the way. He will say, “That which we have heard from the beginning,” so John likes to go back to Genesis, and Genesis 1, and hear what he is saying by bringing us back to the very beginning, and just in case we miss it, he hits us over the head in verse 2. He says: Listen, listen; we are talking about the One who made everything. So, it is like: In case you did not get the little Beethoven - Da-da-da-daa (again opening 4 notes of Beethoven's Fifth), I am going to hit you over the head with it and say: I am talking about creation, and guess who was involved in creation?

DAVE BAST

Right; so Genesis opens with “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and then verse 2 is: The earth was without form or shape and it was empty or void, and the Spirit of God was what – brooding over the face of the waters – hovering – kind of like a mother; so, right there, there is a sense of at least the Father and the Spirit, even in Genesis; and then we come to this repeated refrain: And God said, and God said; so, there is the Word. So, that is another link; another connection.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the second Person of the Trinity – the One who, of the Triune Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Son is the one who became incarnate through the Virgin Mary – and He now, John is telling us, is the one who is the active force in getting the creation going.

My friend the Bible commentator, Frederick Dale Bruner, will often give a dramatic recitation of this passage, and when he gets to verse 3, where it says: Without Him nothing was made that has been made; he always pauses in there and he says, “Through Him, all things were made – let there be, let there be, let there be;” he always reads it that way.

DAVE BAST

An echo of Genesis... yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

An echo of Genesis: Let there be light; let there be waters; let there be an expanse; we get all the “let there be,” and by tucking that little echo in there, what Dale Bruner is doing is saying: Jesus, the one we now know as Jesus – He was not known as Jesus at the time – but, the Son of God – was the one who did the talking.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the talking did the creating.

DAVE BAST

Again, it is kind of a mind-boggling concept; and as long as we are on classical music here in this segment, what I think of in that Genesis narrative – and then John picks up on it here – is the – early on in Haydn’s Creation – his oratory of creation – there is this very quiet moment where the soloist sings: “And God said, let there be light;” then the first day, and he comes in, “And there was,” and then BANG, it is like a nuclear explosion – the whole choir with brass comes in: Light; on the word *light*. That is Jesus. Jesus the Word is the agent of creation, we might say; so, it is the whole Triune God who is active.

One of the, I guess, ideas that we need to discard or argue against as Christians is the sense that: Well, God the Father, He is the Old Testament God; and Jesus shows up in the New Testament, and then the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost; but no; all the way from...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is not segmented like that.

DAVE BAST

No. From creation on, the whole Triune God is involved in all of His acts and works.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They always act in concert; always act together. In the way they have divvied up the work, if you will, in creation, it was the Son of God who did the speaking. So, what John is telling us – again, this is just a whopper of an opening chapter – he is saying that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who walked around this earth for 30-some years preexisted His own birth because He was the Son of God from all eternity, and He is the one who created every atom of the universe. He was laid in a manger. Every atom in that wood was created by the Son of God, who now is Jesus – and that is a mind-boggling thing to consider; but, it is also – this whole Word of God concept – also has rich Old Testament echoes. There are some interesting little Greek echoes in there. We will look at that next.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where we are talking today about this marvelous biblical image of Jesus as the divine Word – the Word of God – the Word incarnate, who became flesh and moved into our neighborhood, as John says in a wonderful paraphrase by Eugene Peterson; but, we have looked at Genesis 1 and the background of the creation story, when God speaks the whole universe into being, from flaming stars and galaxies to the minutiae of microscopic life, it is – it is actually Jesus – the Son, the second Person of the Trinity – the preexistent Word of God who is the agent who does the talking, as we said; but there are some other wonderful background passages in the Old Testament that also illuminate what this idea of God’s Word is, and one of them is from Isaiah; share that with us, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, Isaiah 55, a well-known passage. The Lord through Isaiah is saying to His people:

¹Come, all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ²Why spend the money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to Me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³Give ear and come to Me; listen, that you may live; I will make an everlasting covenant with you. My faithful love promised to David.

Then jumping down to verse 10:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹so is My Word that goes out from My mouth. It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

So, there are a lot of interesting things there relating to the Word. At first it looks like we are talking about real food, but then He says: Listen, and eat; give ear and live; and then He talks about the Word going forth in great power.

DAVE BAST

Well, and that introduces one of the most important, I think, concepts in the Bible, and that is the idea – theologians sometimes describe it as God’s Word being performative – it is a *performative* word – and what they mean by that is – the Hebrew term is *dabar* for the Word of God – that it has within it the power to affect what it describes or says. We distinguish between our words and our deeds, and sometimes they do not match, and that is always a problem. A person with a bad character – you say you cannot trust his word, or it is just words, just promises that he makes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Talk is cheap. That is just so much talk. Sometimes in our human interactions, and unfortunately, sometimes in our human interactions we have good reason to do this, we cheapen the word. Words can just be vibrations on the air and they can just be flowery and high-flown speech that does not ever translate into action, but not with God. With God, what Isaiah is saying is that when God says it, it is as good as done already. It is what we saw in the creation account. When God says, “Let there be,” it is! You would never read, God said, “Let there be,” and then the next verse would be: And nothing happened. No! That can happen when I say something. I can tell my kids to do something or I can promise something and nothing will happen. Not God. When He sends His Word out – His *dabar* in the Hebrew – it is as good as done the moment He speaks it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, Isaiah has this beautiful analogy of the rain and snow falling down from heaven, and you think about how miraculous agriculture must have seemed to those ancient Hebrews in Palestine. They called it the “land of milk and honey,” but that is really only in comparison with the Sinai Desert. For us, it seems pretty dry; but, when the rains came, that is what made the seeds sprout and life would burst forth and the crops – I was just listening to one of the psalms this morning on the way here. It talks about how the valleys are so filled with corn that they laugh and sing; and this wonderful sense of: There is food! It is a miracle,

and it happened because the rain fell and watered the earth, and somehow that brought forth the life, and that is how God's Word is; it accomplishes it just like that rain miraculously seems to bring life – God's Word brings life wherever He speaks it with that intention, and nothing can stop that; nothing can keep it from happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and now – right, so you take that and now connect that – and this is just one passage, right? There are some passages in the psalms, but elsewhere in the Old Testament, where you could also go where you would read something similar to Isaiah 55 in terms of how the Israelites viewed the Word of God; but now, we loop back to John 1 and make the connection. John says Jesus is that Word of God, and if it is so, that means that the purpose for which God sent that Word, Jesus, into the world, could not be thwarted. It was as good as accomplished as soon as Jesus became human – as soon as He became a zygote inside Mary's womb and the whole process got kicked off – redemption was going to happen. The devil was not going to derail it. The world was not going to prevent it. Salvation was as good as done because God had sent His Word and it was not going to come back to Him empty and void.

DAVE BAST

Yes, okay; but let's talk a little bit more about this term in John 1, because we have touched on the Old Testament background, which is great and wonderful, but there is sort of a new thought that comes in with John because he uses this term, *logos*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, because he is writing in Greek.

DAVE BAST

And that had a major background in Greek thought; so, we also have to touch on that a little bit, don't we?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, so Jewish readers would sense all of the Old Testament connections; Greek readers, less familiar, initially anyway, with the Hebrew scriptures, would connect it to Greek philosophy, where the *logos*, the word, was considered a powerful governing principle – not personal, probably, but more of a part of the governing structure of the universe that upheld rationality and upheld logic and upheld reason. So, in Greek thought, although it was not a god, per se; it was not personal at all, as near as I can tell; but the concept of *logos* was philosophically really important to the Greeks, and John's plucking that string for his Greek readers – because he is writing in Greek and he uses *logos* – it is personal.

DAVE BAST

The Greeks looked out and they saw a kind of order in the universe. Their world view was hierarchical; it involved ascending to heaven, and they thought that somehow there was an organizing principle – maybe even a divine principle – but it was sort of vague. It sounds a little New Agey to us. A lot of people think that there is a higher power, or some sort of spiritual principle that helps things hang together. Well, that is the *logos* to the Greeks; and what John is saying is: You are on to something with this idea of a powerful *logos*, but actually, it is a person. In fact, it is not just a person, it is a Jew. It is a First Century Jew named Jesus. He is the *logos*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the one. He ties in with all that you have ever thought of, but in a very, very different way, of course. So, John is turning that on its head. You have both the Hebrew and the Greek, and both are very powerful.

DAVE BAST

So, we talked a lot about background and some of these wonderful, more theoretical concepts – or theological concepts, I guess we should say. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the one who created – He is the divine *logos*. He is the one who brings order and rationality; but what does it mean for us? That is what we

want to focus on next. If Jesus is God's Word incarnate, how does that impact our lives in our world today?
BREAK

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, talking about the beginning of this series now on some of the different metaphors, images that they use for Jesus in the New Testament, thinking today about the Word. We have been to John 1, which brought us back to Genesis 1, seeing that Jesus was the active, speaking force in the creation of the entire universe. Then we went to Isaiah 55, seeing that God's Word is as good as a deed done; and Jesus coming to the world, therefore, as the in-flesh God, the deed was as good as done. He came to save us and that was going to happen; but interestingly, in John's Gospel – John starts with this huge, soaring, opening chapter: Jesus is the Word of God

DAVE BAST

The prologue, we call it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and then it disappears. John does not really use the phrase "Word of God" ever again, except for where he goes with all of those "I am," sayings.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. That is very interesting. It struck me – this concept of *logos*, which is a little bit up in the air. It is hard to get our arms around and figure out exactly what is that getting at? But, it drops out. He does not talk about the *logos* anymore after these opening words. It is almost like he wants to say to his readers, especially the sophisticated, Greek ones: Okay, this is how to think of Jesus, but now I want to go on and show you who He really is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we are going to see this unpacked in a narrative way for the rest of John's Gospel; and again, it comes up mostly in those "I am," sayings. We all know that you do not get any "I am," sayings in Matthew, Mark, or Luke – only in John: I am the Good Shepherd. I am the Door. I am the Light. I am the Bread of Life. I am the Resurrection and the Life. In Greek, it is *ego eimi* – *I am*, which again, thoughtful biblical readers will know just that phrase, I am, is an echo of God's name as revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

DAVE BAST

That is going to send you right to Exodus 3. "Who shall I say sent me?" Moses asked. And God replies, "Tell them Yahweh – tell them I AM sent you."

This is so great, I think, because the Greeks love philosophy, they loved ideas. Nothing better for them than sitting back with a glass of wine – kicking back and talking about speculative philosophy – and John wants to say: No, no; it is about a person – it is about a person – I want you to know Jesus. The Church father, Tertullian, famously asked, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What do these philosophers have to do with the real Gospel?" And the answer is: Philosophers also need Jesus, and they need to come to the real en-fleshed logos, who is God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We will actually think about that a little bit in the next program on Jesus as Wisdom. Paul, in I Corinthians, will directly take on some of the Greek philosophers; but here in John, it is Jesus from there on out showing

that He is the Word of God. That He is Yahweh. He is the God of Israel in the flesh. We all know that the famous “I am” sayings: I am the Bread of Life. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We know those, but interestingly in John’s Gospel, there are two times when Jesus says – He just says, “I am,” It is lost in the English translation, but even before that, the first is in John 4, actually, when He is talking to the Samaritan woman – the woman at the well – and at one point, she says – this is John 4:25:

I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us. ²⁶And then Jesus declared (Now, here is the translation), “I, the one speaking to you, I am He.” That is kind of a long sentence. In the Greek, Jesus just says, “*Ego eimi*,” I AM.

DAVE BAST

“I AM,” right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is like – not only is He acknowledging that He is the Messiah she just spoke of, He did it in such a way that He basically said, “I am also Yahweh,” sitting on the lip of well here with you. It is like wow! And then it happens again in John Chapter 6, when there is a storm and the disciples – Jesus walks on the water – they are very terrified; they think it is a ghost or something, and Jesus calms them in saying, “Do not be afraid – *ego eimi* – I AM. And that is all He says; and so, He is revealing – the woman at the well, He reveals that He is Yahweh in flesh, here to do redemption. On the lake, He reveals that He is the creator God, because then He calms the storm, and they are like, Wow!

And then after that, you get the other “I am” sayings, but those first two are big in John.

DAVE BAST

I had forgotten about that John 6 one. I thought you were going to go to John 8, because He does it again there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, yes, yes.

DAVE BAST

in the face of His critics, the leaders of the people, and the temple authorities, and He says to them, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” There it is again, *ego eimi*; and John says they picked up stones because they got it. They understood.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If this guy is not God, He just committed a really big, blasphemous deed.

DAVE BAST

Here is the point. He is not just the Messiah. They could maybe have accepted that claim, or they would have tested it; but His claim goes far deeper than that. His claim is that He is Yahweh; He is the God of Israel come now in the body of this man, Jesus; He is the Word of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And He is bringing – and that is what I means for us today. When we sing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, what a friend, indeed! This is God in all His fullness that lives in our hearts. We did not read the 18th verse of John 1 earlier, Dave, but that is the verse that says: No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only who is at God’s side, has made Him known. In the Greek, again, to go back to my friend, Dale Bruner, that where we get our word *exegesis*, which means to explain. So, nobody has ever seen God, but Jesus came here and He explained Him. He explains God because He brings God to us, and what a beautiful truth that is, that when we are in a living connection with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, we are in touch with all the fullness of God, and that is mind boggling.

DAVE BAST

Another closing thought: As Reformed Christians, we sometimes talk about the authority of the Word, and that does not just mean that we try to believe the Bible and follow the Bible. Ultimately, the Word is Jesus Himself; and for us, the fact that He is the Word means we put all of life, all of ourselves, under His authority.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is exactly where we want to be. Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture; so visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics or passages that you would like us to dig into next on Groundwork.

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