

The Incarnation of Jesus & Our Rebirth

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Bible commentator and teacher, Frederick Dale Bruner, notes that in the latter part of the opening prologue to John's Gospel, we discover Jesus being revealed to us as the autobiography of God and the very exegesis of God. The autobiography of God and the exegesis of God. Today on *Groundwork*, we want to unpack a bit what Bruner meant by those terms for Jesus, and as we do so, we will discover over and again the deep wonder that just is the incarnation of God's own Son. 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 in a Christmas frame of mind today, as we are in the opening chapter of John's Gospel. A Gospel that begins – unlike the other three Gospels – a Gospel that begins with a huge frame of reference, as we have noted before. John begins, “In the beginning,” and we all know immediately we are right back to Genesis 1; John is alluding to Genesis Chapter 1, and the creation of the whole universe, and then John reveals to us something that has become so important for the doctrine of the Trinity as it has developed in the Church, that the word of God, who was with God, was the one who spoke in Genesis, “Let there be light.” He is the one who did all the talking.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly, and these deep mysteries are really hinted at – more than hinted at – in the opening verses of John, where John says that there was this *logos*, this word, who was with God; so, in some sense, you could distinguish between the word and God, and yet, who was identical with God; the word was God. So, in some sense, they are indistinguishable. So, what do you do with that? How are two one and one two, and yet, later on we will know that it is not just two, it is three; and so, ever since then, Christians have struggled to express this profound truth that there is only one God; God is one, but God is also a community of persons eternally; a community of love; and out of that love came the incarnation of the Son of God; the second Person of the Trinity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As John goes along here in these first 18 verses of John 1, the focus keeps getting narrower and narrower. We start huge: Creation, Genesis, Trinity, even we would now say with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit we would now say; but it keeps getting narrower and narrower; and so, let's listen to John 1, starting at verse 10, and we will go through 18.

DAVE BAST

John writes: ¹⁰He (referring not to himself, not to John the Baptist, to whom he earlier referred, but to Jesus, to the word) He was in the world, and although the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet, to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God; ¹³children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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. ¹⁵John (now John the Baptist) testified concerning him. He cried, “This is he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me,’” ¹⁶and out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; for the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁷No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, he has made God known.

DAVE BAST

So, we want to work through these verses, and there is a lot there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, it is interesting to notice – some of us, anyway are so familiar with John 1, we do not notice this, but John holds the identity of the word until almost the end here; verse 17 is the first time we hear the word, Jesus. Until then, it is just “the Word,” “He,” “Him,” “He,” “Him,” and then, all of a sudden, in verse 17: Oh, I am talking about Jesus!

DAVE BAST

Yes; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We keep getting very specific, and now we are all the way down to one human.

DAVE BAST

And he sets him off against Moses, too, in distinction with Moses. But, he begins by a reference clearly to Jesus’ earthly life and ministry, which again – John is not keeping secrets here. He is writing for believers, and believers know the story, and they know immediately as they hear these words, “He came to his own people and his own people rejected him. He made the whole world, but the world turned against him; the world did not recognize him.

So, we are going to think of those stories in the Gospels, where Jesus is in Nazareth, his hometown, and he is reading in the synagogue and says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled,” a Messianic prophecy – and they want to kill him – they want to stone him for blasphemy; or his own human family, his brothers and sisters who did not believe in him during the time of his ministry. It is just an historical truth that Jesus was rejected – largely rejected – by the very people who should have accepted him; this topsy-turvy theme that is going to emerge and continue through – really, through the whole history of the Church. The people who most should have recognized him had no use for him; and the least likely prospects are those who were drawn to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there is bad news here – Jesus was rejected; but, there is good news here – some did accept him; and so, in verses 12 and 13 you have this great thing that those who looked at Jesus and said: Oh, my goodness; it is God; it is the Messiah; they, John said, become children of God, and then he has this really interesting phrase that again, for some of us anyway – over-familiarity with John 1 sometimes we just slide right over it – but he says that these are children who do not come about in the normal way, through marriage and procreation, they are born of God; and actually, in the Greek there, it literally says that these are children who are born *from* God. It might be interesting just to spend a moment in this first segment – how does that go?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do you get born *from* God?

DAVE BAST

Even before we dig into that, just think about what John is saying here; what he is implying is that not everyone is a child of God; and you say, “Whoa, wait a minute; time out. I thought everyone was a child of God?” And the response is, “Well, yes, in a sense, we are all God’s creatures.” Certainly, the Bible teaches that. We are part of a human family. We are brothers and sisters in our humanity; but the Bible is also very clear: There is a supernatural sense in which one becomes a child of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sin has to be overcome.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is not automatic. It is not for everybody.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The family breached when sin came about, right? Now how do you get back in the family?

DAVE BAST

There are children of God on a human, common grace level; but then there are children of God who really are the adopted children of God; who can have the privilege of crying, “Abba (Father),” to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, here we come to grace alone again. This is a gift of grace alone. If you get back in the family, the family that we left when we turned our back on God in sin, it is by grace alone. It does not come about through human means, John says. It is not an ordinary way of getting born; it is an extraordinary way of being born. We could even flash forward two chapters to John 3 and the whole conversation with Nicodemus and...

DAVE BAST

Born from above; “Don’t you understand this, Nicodemus? You have to be born again.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Born from God. And again, since John already brought us back to Genesis by starting this with “In the beginning,” we think back to how were the original children, Adam and Eve, made and we see those intimate images of God breathing life – and he breathes the spirit into their nostrils – God gives Adam and Eve a kiss; and so, now that we have come full circle here, and we are coming back now in John 1 to a new creation – a new Genesis, really – we could almost call the Gospel of John *The New Genesis*, because now God is having us born again from him; and again, it is a very, very intimate way that this happens; even as it was intimate for God to breathe right into their nostrils, now we are also going to see a very intimate move of God toward us; and we will look at that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are talking about John Chapter 1, and we have been focusing on verses 12 and 13, where John says that to those who receive Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right or the authority or the privilege, we might say, of becoming children of God – truly becoming children of God in the ultimate sense, by being born again – born from above, as Jesus will say later in John 3; and how does that happen? Well, it is connected to faith, as we believe in him, as we receive him; but it is also the work of the Spirit, and Jesus will explain more of this later in his conversation with Nicodemus. So, there is a supernatural element here. This does not just happen the way natural, human birth takes place, John says; - the will of a father or a human decision. This is supernatural; this is life from above; life from God; new life, new birth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is, in its own way, a miracle, and it comes about now for us on account of another miracle, and that is called the incarnation. John 1:14: And the word became flesh – or really, if you want to get as specific as the Greek language you get to, you could translate verse 14: The word became meat.

If you go to a Mexican restaurant and order chili *con carne* that means you are getting chili with meat because *carne* means meat. *Incarnation...*

DAVE BAST

Incarnation; there you go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is God con carne. This is God with meat. So, we said in the previous segment, Dave, that there is an intimacy to Genesis 1 with God breathing the life into the nostrils of Adam and Eve. He is almost kissing them. Well, now we have another very intimate thing here; God has become meat; God has become us; he has lungs and a spleen and kidneys. That is very intimate; and this is the miracle of the incarnation is what makes our birth as children of God possible.

DAVE BAST

Yes; somebody has said that in John 1 you get two miracles for the price of one; or two mysteries – two mysterious, unfathomable miracles. One is the plurality of God – God is God and the word is God; and the other is the divine and human united in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God, but Jesus is human; completely and fully. Jesus is – yes, even crudely – he is meat; he is flesh; he is real.

Nobody ever came up to Jesus and poked him and said, “Say, you are not really a real human being, are you? You are just a God appearing in phantom form.” Nobody ever made that mistake during his life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In subsequent Church history, we have actually had a heresy called Docetism, which treats Jesus’ humanity as almost like a disguise, but nobody who ever met Jesus from Nazareth ever doubted he was just as real as you and me because it was clear he had eye moisture and he had lips and teeth and hair and all the rest; but what is interesting about John 1, and this is maybe what we can talk about next, is that John no sooner says the word became meat, and then he says and we have seen his glory. Now, meat – glory – hmmm. Usually, if we think of glory, we think: he must mean like the transfiguration when Jesus did not look like a human being and was shining really brightly, but I think John means something more radical by bringing glory in here.

DAVE BAST

John is completely radical in his take on glory. What does glory mean? To us, glory sort of means an *apotheosis*; you are raised to the heights and you shine with radiance. In fact, I was visiting the U.S. Capitol a few months ago and we were taking a tour, and you go in under that great central dome and you look up and it is all painted with these figures; and at the very top of the capitol dome is a painting called *The Apotheosis of George Washington*, where he is being taken up to heaven in his general’s uniform in trailing clouds of glory, as the saying goes; but John could not be farther removed from that than he is, because in the fourth Gospel as he presents it, Jesus’ glory is really first his humanity, first his lowering himself, and then his suffering; his glory is supremely revealed on the cross. So, when we get to Chapter 12, we will read Jesus prays, “Father, glorify your name; now my hour has come – the hour of my glory. Father, glorify your name,” and the voice comes from heaven, “I have glorified it and I will,” and that moment will come when he is lifted up on the cross – the moment of supreme shame, humiliation, utter darkness is also at the same time the supreme glory of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is why a friend of mine is a wonderful preacher named Debby Blue. She pastors a church in Minnesota. She had a sermon title once: *Glory Does Not Shine, it Bleeds*; and that is very much John's message. John gets to that even before the cross. You have the juxtaposition – the paradox, we would say – of glory on an instrument of execution; but even before that. Just go to the next chapter and the very first sign of Jesus, the first miracle...

DAVE BAST

John 2.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the wedding at Cana, and what does Jesus do? Well, he makes wine; wine for people who have probably had a few too many as it was; so, it was a neat trick, turning water into wine, but John, at the end of that story says, "And that is how Jesus revealed his glory." So, you want to say: Really? Glory in a glass of wine?! Where is the glory in something so earthy?

DAVE BAST

Mundane. Everyday. Wedding reception.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is where Jesus' glory comes to us at street level. What a wonderful piece of good news that is for all of us.

DAVE BAST

Well, this would hardly be a *Groundwork* program without a C. S. Lewis reference because we are both big fans. I think of that passage in *The Great Divorce* where he is getting a tour of heaven and he sees this figure of infinite glory approaching and he thinks, "Oh, my goodness! Is it? Is it?" You know, maybe it is the virgin Mary or some great... "No, no, no," he is told, "It is nobody you ever heard of. It is Sarah Smith from Grocers Green. She was a..."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that was great.

DAVE BAST

And then he is told, "Fame in this world, you know, is different from fame in your world." God defines glory differently, and his glory most shines in the everyday, in the true, in the beautiful, in the noble that human beings do, in the love that empties itself and serves others. That is true glory in the eyes of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why I have said sometimes before in sermons, and Dave, you have no doubt pointed out things like this, too, because we need reminders of this. I have told stories, and we have heard other people in our churches bear witness to this kind of thing, where they will say: I was feeling down, my husband was sick, things were not good at all in our lives; and all of a sudden, the doorbell rang and I opened the door and there was Gladys from church with a potato chip crusted tuna fish casserole for our dinner, and I looked at that casserole and I saw glory; I saw the glory of God coming into my house through this act of mercy. John, the writer of the Gospel of John, would say: Yes, that is right. That is exactly right. That is where we have seen his glory of the word made meat; the word at street level moving into our neighborhood, as Eugene Peterson paraphrased it; that is where you are going to see his glory.

DAVE BAST

And that is the Christmas story, and it not only leads to glory, it leads to grace. Grace upon grace in the life of Jesus and in the lives of all those who know Jesus; and that is what we want to talk about when we wrap

up this program in just a few moments.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are looking today at the last part of John's prologue, which is the first 18 verses of John Chapter 1, and let's just listen again; we read them earlier, but just these verses starting at John 1:15:

John the Baptist testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me,'" ¹⁶and out of his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace; ¹⁷for the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in the closest relationship with the Father, he has made God known.

That is the autobiography – the exegesis – of God.

DAVE BAST

I was going to hold you to that, Scott, because you used those terms; you threw them out from Dale Bruner; now, let's unpack them. What do we mean when we say: Jesus is the *exegesis* of God?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everybody who goes to seminary learns that *exegesis* is the way you interpret a passage; you have a Bible passage, and so you have to uncover its meaning, and so when preachers and teachers do exegesis, the goal is to explain what the passage means. It interprets it; it gets at its real meaning; you have explained the text to your people. A good exegesis for preaching helps you explain the text. Again, as Dale Bruner has said – Dale has a free translation of John 1 – and the verb in John 1:18 when it says that he has made him known, that is *exegesato* in Greek, which is where the English word exegesis comes from; but when Dale Bruner free translated it he said: Nobody has ever seen God the Father; but Jesus came down here and explained him to us. And I like that.

DAVE BAST

And the one and only Son, John says, who is himself God; so, once again, we find from the very earliest the conviction among the Apostles that Jesus is God. It is as simple as that and as mind-blowing as that is. One of the things we could surely lay to rest as being completely unhistorical is the old idea that the Trinity was somehow invented by these Church fathers many hundreds of years later and they were concocting these complicated theories and doctrines of God. No, clearly, those who knew him best – those who saw him – those who claimed, as John did, to have beheld his glory – glory as of the only begotten of the Father – they understood that the Son and the Father were one somehow...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, distinct.

DAVE BAST

And yet, distinct. When they were looking into the face of Jesus, they were looking at the face of God, as hard as that is to believe; as mind-blowing, but as comforting as it is. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; in fact, how hard this is to explain and how hard this is to accept, and it was hardest, in some ways, probably, for the original disciples, who knew Jesus, to be such an earthly, earthy guy. They had had meals with him, they brushed their teeth with him, they had laughed with him; he was clearly human. So, you get way deep into John's Gospel – 14 chapters in – the night before Jesus is arrested, or the night he is arrested, actually – and Philip says – Jesus is talking about the Father and Philip says...

DAVE BAST

And he says, "I am going away... You cannot come with me..." and they are kind of like, "Whoa, wait a minute..."

SCOTT HOEZEE

"Before you go," Philip says, "Can you show us the Father?" And Jesus says: Have I been with you so long and you do not know me? Philip, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

Now, you want to talk about the building blocks that went into the doctrine of the Trinity a couple of centuries later, that is a big piece – a block – right there. Jesus says, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." What a wallop verse that is! But it is no more wallop than John 1:14: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. But that is the idea, right? In the Old Testament we are told to see God was to die!

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. I was just going to say, you think of Moses' request, "Show me your face," during the Exodus journey in Exodus 33...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, at Mount Sinai.

DAVE BAST

I think we did a program not too long ago on this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we did.

DAVE BAST

And God says, "You cannot see my face. No one can do that; but I will show you my back," and he hides him in the cleft of the rock and shields him; it is like God is radioactive; and surely, God as he is in himself – God the Father – the First Person of the Holy Trinity – is Spirit and is invisible and it is impossible and his glory is such that it would consume us, like trying to land on the sun; but all of that has been poured into a body, and in the person of a true man, a real man in every sense, as we are except for sin, he has come to live with us and to show us through his words and deeds just who God is and what God is like. Again, you want to know what God looks like? Look at Jesus.

One of the reasons, perhaps, that God forbade us from making images to use in worshiping him is because he planned to make the image himself in the Person of his only Son.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, in the Christmas season – and sometimes we in the church even fall prey to this, but certainly in the wider world, in shopping malls and on TV specials, we do everything we can to try to get something glorious and something pretty and something amazing and something awe-inspiring to look at, and John is saying: Well, you know what? The most amazing thing anybody ever looked at? It was not tinsel; it was not twinkling lights and Christmas trees; it was a human face from a man from Nazareth who said, "Philip, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father," and that leads, also in these concluding verses that we have been looking at in this program from John 1, John then says: And that is why we just keep getting grace upon grace upon grace; we are neck-deep in grace. Because of that, the true wonder of Christmas is the human face

of Jesus is the Father.

DAVE BAST

You cannot get enough of this. You want the best Christmas present ever? Come to Jesus and look at him and believe in him; be born again; be given the power to become a child of God through faith in him, and you will receive out of his fullness, John says, “Grace upon grace.” It just keeps getting better and better.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The more specific John gets in this opening prologue, going from the beginning of the whole cosmos all the way down to a single human being, the better the Good News of the Gospel gets for each one of us. We, too, today – at Christmas and always – we encounter the same living Lord Jesus.

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture, too. So visit our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest topics or passages for future programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-incarnation-of-jesus-our-rebirth>

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