
The Omniscient & Ignorant Jesus

DAVE BAST

Whenever there is a scandal of any type, such as an economic crisis, where countries go bankrupt or a high profile celebrity indiscretion, it reminds me of what happened during the Watergate scandal when I was younger. The question is raised over and over; what did he know and when did he know it? Well, you might ask that same question about Jesus: What did he know, and when did he know it? 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.

REGGIE SMITH

And I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

Reggie, it is great to have you back again. We are in the middle of a series of programs that we are calling the Jesus We Never Knew, borrowing that title from Philip Yancey's book, but what we are really doing is looking at sort of the flipside of some of these characteristics of Jesus. I mean, we think of him... We spoke in earlier programs about his compassion, but also the hard side – his loving nature, but also he could hate certain things; and now we are kind of moving on into some of his attributes that are perhaps a little surprising.

REGGIE SMITH

We are trying to remove our own canon of how we try to put Jesus into boxes; and when we get Jesus out of the box, he is a little bit more wild, and we cannot quite tame him; and that is a good thing when we cannot tame Jesus – when we have both sides of him, whether weak or strong, whether omniscient or ignorant – those are the things that we really need to have a fully-orbed Jesus.

DAVE BAST

And I think in this program today we want to look at and focus on Jesus' knowledge. One of the characteristics of God, we say, is that he is omniscient, as you mentioned – all-knowing – he knows everything; he knows everything that has ever happened – he knows everything that is going to happen; that, at least, is the orthodox Christian view; and I know when I was growing up I thought: Well, Jesus is God, so he must be omniscient, right?

REGGIE SMITH

That's right.

DAVE BAST

He knows everything, doesn't he?

REGGIE SMITH

He's got it all.

DAVE BAST

And if you look at the Bible and the Gospel accounts, it does appear like Jesus knew an awful lot.

REGGIE SMITH

It does appear. I mean, he is able to know people's hearts. He is able to predict things that will happen in the future. He is able to know the motives and aspirations of people. Jesus has a pretty good sense of human nature, and we get a sense of that in the Gospels; and at the same time, we get a sense that maybe there is something more to Jesus that maybe we don't know; and that is what this program is going to try to at least illuminate here.

DAVE BAST

Well, I don't know if you ever did this, but when I was a kid I can remember sort of speculating about Jesus – you know, did he know about America, for example? Did he know that the world was round, and that there was this whole other hemisphere and a couple of continents over here where the Indians lived? Did he know that Saturn has rings? Did he know about the solar system – the planets? Did he know that we would be making this radio program today, talking about what he knew? Did you ever play that game? I don't know - I did.

REGGIE SMITH

Oh, yeah, I played that game. It is called Trivial Pursuit.

DAVE BAST

Maybe that is a good warning that we should not indulge too much in it.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right.

DAVE BAST

But just think about some of the Gospel passages that talk about his knowledge. Here is an example from John 2:24,25:

²⁴But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them (to the crowd of his enemies) because he knew all people, ²⁵and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. It is almost like he can kind of read people's minds.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes; Jesus is pretty good at predicting and looking at people and getting really at the heart of our motives and desires, and I don't think of any person who is able to do it unless he was kind of the pre-Oprah, which I think he is a little bit better than Oprah.

DAVE BAST

Did he have x-ray vision that could see spiritually?

REGGIE SMITH

I don't know, but if he had superpowers, they were greater than ours; but more importantly, that he understood human nature, and Jesus was a great observer of how we are, when we are, and where we are.

DAVE BAST

Well, and here are a couple of other examples. I mean, there is a story in John where he comes up to a disciple named Nathaniel and speaks to him and sort of calls him – invites him to follow him; and Nathaniel says in effect: Why do you want me? And Jesus says: I saw you sitting under a tree in Galilee, or words to that effect, and it kind of spooks Nathaniel because he thinks: Whoa, wait a minute!

REGGIE SMITH

What's up with that?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and then Jesus just kind of casually says: Well, you are going to see greater things than this. You will see the heavens open and the angels descending and ascending upon the Son of Man; almost like he is the ladder to heaven; and you think: Wow; whoa; how does that happen?

REGGIE SMITH

What an amazing prediction, huh? He kind of lays out his future before him; but it may be that Jesus is trying to pull in Nathaniel to this large thing called the kingdom of God that he will get a chance to be a part of, and that he will get to see it; and Jesus wants him to get in on the ground floor on that.

DAVE BAST

And, you know, speaking of the future and knowing the future, he clearly knew he was going to die; he knew how he would die. He says over and over... I think there are three times in Mark where Jesus says: I am going to be crucified. I am going to be betrayed. I am going to be handed over... In fact, he even knew which one of his disciples would be the betrayer; he pointed him out at the Last Supper; and then he said: I will rise again. So all of this kind of supernatural knowledge, not even to mention the miracles that he did. It is easy for us to kind of develop the sense that he was sort of like Clark Kent, you know what I mean?

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, yes.

DAVE BAST

Kind of mild-mannered reporter on the outside – mild-mannered prophet most of the time on the outside, but inside, underneath, he is really Superman – he is really Super-God, and not really a true human being; but that is an error that the Church has rejected.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right; that is what we call *docetism*, and we reject this whole idea that Jesus has got – oh, he has just got this human cloak – this human mass – this disguise. We do a disservice to everyone when we say that Jesus just seems like... but he is fully human – he is fully God – and when we accept that about him we have to live with this tension that God is fully God, and God is fully human; and that Jesus takes that – he receives that – and this is how God presents himself to us, and that causes a little bit of friction for us because we do not want anything to do with tension because we would rather get rid of tension than to have to deal with tension.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is much easier to go one way or the other. He is just this nice man – this great teacher – or he is Super-God who only appeared to be human; but speaking of what he knew and when he knew it, there is also some evidence in the Gospels of remarkable ignorance on the part of Jesus. He himself said there were things he did not know; so we have to take that into account, too; and on *Groundwork*, we are going to look at that next.

Segment 2

REGGIE SMITH

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

And we are digging into the scriptures to examine and to understand the characteristics of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

In this program, we are talking about his knowledge – what did he know and when did he know it? How much did he know? And we are trying to balance this idea that, yes, he is truly God, but he is truly human as well, and maybe that involved some limitations to what he knew, but other limitations as well.

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely; that Jesus was one who got tired, he had to sleep; that Jesus got sad; that Jesus had to deal with pain; that Jesus had to deal with going to funerals; that Jesus attended weddings; that Jesus hung around with people who were different; that Jesus hung around with people who had disabilities; that Jesus got tired – all of those things...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; or hungry, thirsty, you name it. I think there is always a bit of a risk if we try to dig too deeply into the psychology of Jesus, because there is a lot that we don't know, that we are not going to understand, that maybe we cannot quite put together. We can go some of the way, but not all the way into understanding what went on inside his head, but I do think it is legitimate for us to look at the plain evidence that the Gospels give. In that respect, maybe we turn to kind of our key passage for today, which is... Actually, we could go either to Matthew 24 or to Mark 13 because these are both chapters in which, very near the end of his life, Jesus is talking about the end of the world.

REGGIE SMITH

When Jesus talks about the end of the world, Jesus is trying to give us a panoramic view of what is to come, and he is trying to pull us into this large world because he knows that we cannot fully understand it; but he wants us to be participants, not just spectators, and so he tells us about the end of the world. He tells us this grand drama that is going to happen to kind of pull us into this wide, panoramic, kingdom of God that is going to be happening.

DAVE BAST

Yes, yes, right; people sometimes kind of think about the end of the world and they sort of have what I call a Star Trek vision that we just keep going on and on. We get more technologically sophisticated and we move out into space and God drops out of the picture; and no worries, you know. We are just on our own as humanists. Jesus paints a very different picture. It is triggered by the disciples asking him about the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, and he says: You know what? This is all going to be destroyed. It is going to happen in your lifetime; but that is only a kind of preview; that may be the end of your world – the Jewish world of Judea and Jerusalem, but there is a bigger picture that that points to of what is going to happen when I come back; and this is the language that he says:

(Mark 13) ²⁴ In those days following that distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ²⁵ The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁶ At that time, people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory, ²⁷ and he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Wow, big stuff...

REGGIE SMITH

Then Jesus... Big stuff, big stuff; but then he ends it like this: Then Jesus says, this is going to happen, but I do not know when: ³² But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows; not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard; keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. What?!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so, let me get this straight, Reggie. Can I run this past you again?

REGGIE SMITH

Run it past me.

DAVE BAST

He says: I am going to wrap things up; the end will happen when I reappear on the clouds, in the heavens, with the angels, reaping in all the saved, but I do not know when that is going to happen; only God knows that.

REGGIE SMITH

What happened to the map? He just gave us this grand scheme, and then said: Ah, I don't know. Uh, we need a little bit more detail, Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, and there it is in a nutshell. He claims knowledge only God could have, but at the same time he claims a very human ignorance. How do we hold those two things together? Does that really matter? Is there an important clue for us in this revelation that Jesus gives us of himself – of his own limitations? And that is what we want to explore next on *Groundwork*.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

And I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

So, let's address the central question of Jesus' apparent omniscience as God – his all-knowing nature, especially about the end of the world – and yet, his self-confessed ignorance, not knowing when it would be, and even saying: That is not for me to know, not even the angels know this. So, it is like he is putting himself clearly on a human level. I am way down here; the angels are above me, and they do not know it; only God knows it; kind of at the top; it is sort of like privileged information. You have no need to know, as they say in the military.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right; that's right.

DAVE BAST

What do we do about that, and why does it matter that we should sort of struggle with this question?

REGGIE SMITH

I think it is okay for us to struggle with that to know that Jesus was just a person who accepted some limitations. He embraces the fully human condition, and that is kind of hard for us because as human beings we want to know everything. We have cell phones, we have TV, we have radio, we have Twitter, we have Facebook, and we get a sense that Jesus is not that concerned – is not that interested in knowing everything.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I like that. It is almost as if he is comfortable with his ignorance.

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And it is an aspect of his trust: You know, I can leave that in God's hands; so, yes, that is great. One of the things I love is Church history and the history of doctrine in particular; and the early Church really struggled on this point of how do we explain Jesus? How do we describe him? If you read any of that, and I know you know this, too, from seminary and whatnot, they had trouble coming up with the exact formula of Jesus-God and Jesus-man, and how that fits together.

REGGIE SMITH

Right; yes, that was always the struggle in all of the church councils to understand Jesus as fully divine – God, power, omniscience, omnipotence – and the other side is this Jesus vulnerable, weak, human. We have to live with that tension; and again, we do not like to live with tension because tension means ambiguity, it means mystery, it means accepting it as it is; you are not going to get any more information other than this, and when we accept that Jesus is fully man/fully God and we accept the tension that we live with, then we have a sense of: Do we embrace it? Do we trust? Do we have confidence that this is the Jesus that God chose to present us with?

DAVE BAST

One of the ways the Church Fathers proceeded was to sort of rule things out of bounds because there were lots of explanations that fell short of what the Bible really taught. We mentioned one of them earlier: The idea of *docetism*, as you said, it is from the Greek word that means *to seem*, and that is the idea that Jesus only seemed to be a human being; secretly he was God in disguise. On the other extreme, they also rejected the idea that Jesus was just a good man who was specially filled with the Spirit, or chosen by God, or adopted into kind of the divine family; and the Church Fathers said: No, that is not right either. He always has been God. There never was a time when there was not the Son with the Father and the Spirit; and so, the Church councils hammered that out, but once they did that – basically in the fourth century – then in the next century they started arguing about: Well, okay; he is fully God/fully man, but how does that interact? How do those fit together?

REGGIE SMITH

That has always been an issue, and because we are so prone to go one side or the other, saying: Let's just settle for certainty; and I think that God in all his wisdom, and also the Church Fathers, would not let us get away with that. They said that we have to kind of live with this whole paradox of living with Jesus as both and that tension...

DAVE BAST

Right; I also think it is possible to go too far, and they certainly, I believe, did go too far by excommunicating each other because they had different definitions; but one thing that they did insist on was that Jesus had to have a complete human nature in order to redeem human beings; so that is a key point.

I also think, though, if we get back to this question of knowledge – of Jesus' knowledge – there are a couple of things we can say about it, and one is: Maybe we overdo a little bit our understanding of the Gospels' evidence of his intuition or his knowledge about people and events. Maybe it was not so supernatural as it was just an example of how keen an observer he was of human beings.

REGGIE SMITH

People could not believe how much he knew them or how well he knew them; whether it was the woman who comes to the well and he knows about her life and he knows about her husbands; whether that is Zacchaeus, who he goes to his house and says: I am going to stay with you because I want to know who you are; and how the Pharisees, the scribes – the teachers of the Law – could not figure out: Why does this guy know people so well? Jesus just had a keen sense of knowing what are the hearts and desires and motives of the human heart and human beings.

DAVE BAST

And as far as knowing about his own future, certainly he knew he was the Messiah, I believe. He had that sense of calling. God confirmed it when he was baptized: This is my Son. Listen to him. And Jesus knew the scriptures.

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

You know, you think about the time when he was only 12 years old and his parents found him in the Temple talking with the professors and astounding them with how... So, he knew from the scriptures what was going to happen to the Messiah; He had that God-given insight. So, again, a lot of his knowledge was picked up the same way we can pick up knowledge, just by observing people, knowing the Bible, knowing what is inside that book and the human heart.

The other thing, though, I think we should take into consideration is the fact that God definitely limited himself when he became a human being. The incarnation necessarily entailed divine sort of shrinking down and giving up some of the things that were his.

REGGIE SMITH

Right; you could almost say that Jesus kind of digitized himself; he became smaller in order for us to become bigger; and even taking in the incarnation that God decides to wrap himself in human tissue and blood and sinew, and at the same time, in Philippians 2, where he empties himself – he accepts that divinity is not going to be the game here. I have to empty myself of myself in order to save these people – sinful – did not have it all together – he shrinks himself and becomes like one of us. We have no idea how much that took for him... or how much he loved us to do that kind of thing.

DAVE BAST

You remind me of a bumper sticker I saw once that said: God is too big to fit into just one religion; and I remember when I saw that thinking to myself: I don't believe only that he fit into just one religion; I believe he fit into just one body – one human body – one man, Jesus Christ. So that involved an incredible self sacrifice on God's part – an incredible limiting; so, we can embrace that, I think, about Jesus; and I actually think it is beneficial to remember this, how Jesus accepted these limitations in becoming human; including limitations to his own knowledge, because for one thing, it can maybe make us a little bit humble in what we claim.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen; and so, we need to be humbled every now and then, because I think that we live in a culture, especially in these modern times that we are addicted to knowledge, and addicted to knowledge in order to control people – addicted to knowledge to get ahead – to get an advantage; but knowledge does not save us at the very end. It is Jesus who saves us. This one who shrinks himself into human bone and flesh and becomes like one of us, but at the same time he gives himself – he gives himself over to the wrath of God – when God turns his back on him and he takes it. That is what the cross... That is the strangeness of the cross – that he does that and allows us to be brought to the face of God. When we get that sense of why the incarnation and why Philippians 2 – the emptying – the *kenosis* – it brings us a better sense of why God came to be like a man.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and the next time you meet a know-it-all Christian who seems to have all the answers, maybe you could just drop this gentle reminder on him: Well, even Jesus did not have all the answers, so perhaps we should not claim that we do. I am always moved when I think that Jesus did this all, as you pointed out, in order to save us. That he went all the way – became completely human – like us in every respect, says the Bible, except for sin – because, as one of the Church Fathers said: What he did not assume, he could not redeem. If

there were part of us that he had left out – if he did not have a real soul – if he did not have a real spirit – if he was somehow different on the inside – then he could not have saved that part of us. He had to take it all on in order to become us, to represent us, to redeem us – to set us free from sin.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, it is a sense of that Achilles heel that was still exposed, and it became a problem; that Jesus did not allow himself to have an Achilles heel to be exposed; it was total.

DAVE BAST

And then, finally, I think, too, Hebrews reminds us: Just remember; he is just like us in every way so we can come to him. Whatever is going on, he can sympathize with our weakness, and he is a great high priest who can bring us home to God.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen; and the Lord knows we need to be brought home to God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks, Reggie, and thanks to you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. Don't forget, it is listeners asking questions and participating that keep us relevant; so tell us what you think of what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages for future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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