

SERMON TITLE- "CoF #4 God The Son"

TEXT- Hebrews 1:1-4

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

BY- James Toews

DATE- Oct. 11, 2010

Some time ago I heard an interview with a preacher named Tim Keller. He has a very successful church in NYC and is clearly a great communicator. He told a story about a conversation he had with a group of skeptics. He asked them what it would mean to them if the Bible were true. The answer was, "That would be like having the father I longed for but never had."

What was that person saying? Having a reliable authority in one's life is something that we all crave. Not all the time, of course, but when things get dicey we want to be able to go somewhere for "true" answers.

But there is another side to that answer- far fewer people than we wished, have a father that is remotely ideal. The world is full of imperfect and frankly downright abusive parents.

Last week the topic as we are going through our CoF was- "Who Or What Is God?"

It was a journey in the OT from-

-the God who is, the "I Am",

-to the Creator God,

-to the God of our fathers,

-to the NT where Jesus tell His followers to simply call God, "Father."

Now all that I have just said is a reminder that God the Father is not merely your image of what a father is- the Biblical picture of God is about what we all know a father is supposed to be.

To some degree last week's sermon touches a chord that is relatively easy to respond to. Within the human heart there is a deep longing to connect with God.

In Ecclesiastes there is a powerful statement-

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11

Because God is beyond fathoming all kinds of arguments ensue when we talk about Him- even the question is God a Father or a Mother? Should we use She or He when we talk about God?

Those are good questions and presume that God is our parent. Why argue?

While we, of course, barely scratched the surface of last week's question, we are moving on today and are going to tackle a more contentious question- Who Is Jesus?

Watch Video

Who Jesus is, is a far more challenging question than "who is God?" It is challenging because it faces different problems.

On the one hand, people argue about whether or not the God of the Bible exists. Once there is an agreement that God of the Bible exists a lot of things fall into place. The Keller story illustrates that. When it comes to God the primary question almost always is- does God exist?

On the other hand, almost no one argues that Jesus didn't exist. That is taken for granted. But who was Jesus? That question creates all the problems.

Our ICOMB CoF states it like this-

God the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to the world born of the virgin Mary. Jesus inaugurated the reign of God, proclaiming repentance from sin, announcing the release of the oppressed and good news to the poor, and calling disciples to follow his way as a new community. Jesus responded to the violent evil powers by taking the cross in order to die for the sins of the world and reconcile creation to God. Jesus gained victory over sin, death, and Satan as God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him to God's right hand where he intercedes for the saints and rules forever. ICOMB

Note first of all, that the ICOMB CoF answers the question by telling a story. Notice how the North American CoF answers the question-
God the Son

The Son, through whom all things were created and who holds all things together, is the image of the invisible God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus took on human nature to redeem this fallen world. He

revealed the fullness of God through his obedient and sinless life. Through word and deed Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. Christ triumphed over sin through his death and resurrection and was exalted as Lord of creation and the church. The Saviour of the world invites all to be reconciled to God, offering peace to those far and near, and calling them to follow him in the way of the cross. Until the Lord Jesus returns in glory, he intercedes for believers, acts as their advocate, and calls them to be his witnesses. North American CoF

This follows the pattern of the Creeds and specifically the Apostle's Creed-

Apostles Creed [early version 215 AD]

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

It says the same thing but one is a narrative while the other states propositions. We are mostly following the narrative answer but there are some questions where propositional answers really do have their place.

The Biblical pattern of explanation is to tell a story from which propositions emerge rather than a series of propositions disconnected from the story.

One of the things that I hope we take from this study is the importance of not just reciting facts to people- but rather telling the stories of God in our lives. Lists of facts are important but without a story- they are simply statements.

So in keeping with the ICOMB CoF we will begin our answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" with a story that finds that question being asked.

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." Luke 9:18-19

This question was asked over and over again during Jesus' ministry. Here is another attempt to answer the question.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. Matthew 13:55-57

There you have it- a question and some answers.

So let's begin with the simplest answer and work forward from there by pulling out a couple of propositions.

#1. Jesus Was A Person

This sounds like an obvious thing but there are several important reasons why it needs to be stressed.

Because of Jesus' claims, because of the miracles that He did, because of what happened later, the idea that Jesus was not really a person very quickly became part of the legends that surrounded Jesus. Like the disciples' report, there is a natural inclination to immediately go to the spectacular answers to the question. **"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."**

Those are very dramatic responses.

This happens with a great deal of regularity even with people far more ordinary than Jesus. This week we were reminded that had John Lennon been alive, he would have turned 70. To mark this all kind of extravagant accolades were made about him. He was indeed a pivotal figure of the 60s but so easily this turns weird. John Lennon was also profoundly ordinary.

In the ancient world the inclination to make extravagant claims was often fueled deliberately. Caesar and Pharaoh made claims that they were deity.

If Caesar claimed to be a god it seemed only natural that Jesus was some kind of God.

In the ancient world that quickly translated into an idea that is not in the Bible- that Jesus was not a regular person.

The NT goes to great lengths to challenge this.

Jesus is first introduced as a person who had siblings and lived an ordinary life. Jesus' critics thought that by pointing this out they would be undermining who is was. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Book of Hebrews, which makes the most amazing claims about Jesus cannot be clearer on this point-

[Jesus] . . . shared in their humanity . . . Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:14-18

and later-

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15

Jesus the fully human person is critical to understanding who He was and is.

The Bible works very hard at describing the story of a person who walked around the world of His day as a fully human being.

We have to begin there. Jesus was a real person who lived and walked on earth just the way you and I do today. The answer to "Who is Jesus?" must begin there because that is where the Bible begins its answer to the question and an answer that does not begin there begins on the wrong foot.

But Jesus, as He asks His disciples to answer the question, pushed Peter and the question and Peter's answer takes us forward-
"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." Luke 9:18-20

This leads to a slightly more controversial answer to "who was Jesus?" Jesus presses Peter- and Peter's answer takes us forward.

And the answer is-

#2. Jesus Was/Is God's Son

This statement doesn't start off being controversial. Those who might grant that God is our Father or Mother would grant that not only is Jesus God's Son- so to are all of us.

Last week I talked about the OT fact that God was overwhelmingly the God of our fathers and that the NT is where the shift to God as our father takes place.

But God the father was not foreign in the OT. When Jesus began talking about God being His father, He didn't get challenged too hard on that point.

But Jesus did cross a line that set off the controversy. Not only did Jesus claim to be a child of God in a generic sense- He claimed to be God's Son in a very specific way. Jesus claimed that God was His actual Father- not born from a human father but from divine conception.

This causes all kinds of problems. If you remember the video you will have seen one of the girls make a face at the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin.

And this is where the first big challenge of Jesus Biblical identity starts to flare up.

From the earliest times critics of the Biblical Jesus made fun of the idea that Jesus was the biological Son of God.

Christians, from the beginning, therefore made this one of the first statements of claim in their CoFs.

The idea that Jesus was of divine offspring begins to mark off the dividing line of arguments around Jesus.

Actually, while it is controversial, the idea that Jesus was of divine birth, was and is OK with a lot of people.

In ancient times the Greeks and Romans had all kinds of legends about their heroes being the offspring of gods. Even in the

Bible there is a peculiar reference in Genesis 6 that seems to allude to this kind of idea-

Genesis 6 tells this story-

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Genesis 6:1-2

I have no explanation for this and only note it by way acknowledging that the idea that some people were of divine origin was not, in itself all that hard to accept for a lot of people.

But Jesus' claim was different from this. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God the Creator in a very specific and extraordinary sense of even that special idea.

This moves the question of who Jesus is to another, even more challenging level. The Book of Hebrews says it like this-

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Hebrews 1:1-3

Do you notice the story being told here?

If you were OK with things to this point- this now takes the, "who is Jesus?" question into a whole new realm. Jesus as **"the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word"** is a whole different claim. Now Jesus is the Creator of all things- He is the "I Am."

In other words-

#3. Jesus Is God

What does that mean? Here people struggled to use their own words and literally fought battles to the death over the jots and tittles of the Greek alphabet.

As a side note, it seems to me that many of the battles were truly misguided. As people who see the Scriptures as God's sacred writings, what reason would there be to try to go beyond what is written here? Now to be sure, all kinds of conflicting theologies did emerge in the early centuries- just as they exist today. We need to

answer those questions. But in matters of mystery, such as this, surely there would be wisdom in sticking to what is already written.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell the story of Jesus as a profoundly human being but the Gospel of John begins at a different place. John opens his gospel with this description of Jesus-

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:1-5

John in the clearest way he can takes Jesus right back to creation to the creating of the world by command.

One might think that such a dramatic statement about Jesus would be as far as one could go in creating a challenge but there actually is one more. This is-

#4. Jesus Is The Saviour

Jesus, the Saviour, does take even the dramatic Jesus is God claim to another level. This is the point at which the ultimate ramp-up of the question comes. Jesus the Saviour makes the ultimate call on our lives.

When Jesus teaches and preaches across the countryside, He proclaims the Kingdom of God, He teaches the Kingdom moral code, He heals the sick- and He says, "Follow Me."

Now "follow Me" encompasses all of these things but in the context of Jesus the Saviour it has a very specific meaning- following Jesus takes us through the rescue zone.

There are all kinds of stories that could illustrate this, but a local one comes to mind. Len Hannah was fishing off the West Coast and one day, as he was fishing the fog rolled in. Now the fog in that area truly makes one blind. There he was stuck out on the ocean and he knew that to get back home he would have to find his way through a narrow passage in the rocks. Missing that narrow harbour but even 10s of meters would mean becoming just another wreck off the deadly West Coast of the Island. As I remember the story, Len bowed his head and prayed and another boat appeared out of the fog and asked if they needed help. This boat had one of the early GPSs

and by following that boat closely, Len and his friend were able to find their way back into the harbour.

How were they able to manage this? By following someone who knew the way.

There are many aspects to who Jesus is and many explanations of how to interpret His ministry. These are important but I think that they have a profound way of boiling down to the command, "Follow Me!"

And why do I follow Jesus? Because He is the Saviour.