

He Reads His Bible

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[0 : 00] Tonight we are going to continue our series which is called Flesh and Blood Jesus. And the aim of this series is for us to think through some of the different ways in which Jesus's humanity is revealed to us in his words and actions.

It's always crucial for us to remember that not only is Jesus the Son of God, but he is also the perfect human. In Jesus we see everything that humanity is meant to be.

So last week John looked at how Jesus played. This week we are going to look at how Jesus engaged with Scripture and our title is, He Reads His Bible.

So this evening as we look at this subject we are going to go on a wee journey together. And the journey is going to take us from eternity to history into history to maturity to Calvary, which is another name for the cross.

So when we say Calvary we are referring to the cross, from history to maturity to Calvary, to a community, to Monday morning each week. So we start in eternity.

[1 : 21] Now when I say to you the phrase, the word of God, what do you tend to think of? What pops into your mind?

A common answer would probably be the Bible. That might be the first thing that comes into mind. We always talk about the Bible as the word of God. We might think of perhaps prophecy.

If you think of people like Isaiah and Jeremiah, they declared to people, you need to hear the word of the Lord. Or maybe we would think about preaching.

What is it that he was meant to do to herald the word of the Lord? And these are all absolutely true. But when you see that phrase, the word of God, more than anything else, you should be thinking of Jesus Christ.

In fact, even more accurately, what you should be thinking of is God the Son. When we hear that phrase, we need to think of God the Son.

[2 : 31] And this is where we need to think about the very nature and being of God. That is why our journey starts in eternity. Now the fundamental nature of God is that he is one substance, three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That's what we call the Trinity. That is who God is. One God, three persons of one substance, one power and one eternity.

And this three in one is the absolute of all reality. From all eternity God has been and he will be Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now for us, God is utterly above us. When we think of God, we are thinking of something that is bigger, greater, higher and more profound than we could ever take in.

So we try to talk about God, but at a kind of base one level, we think, well, he's just, we're just a tiny, tiny spec compared to God.

[3 : 43] He is utterly beyond us. If you look at us, we're just this sort of teeny little spec that exists for a brief moment. And you compare that with God in his infinite power, glory and majesty.

And when you kind of think of it at that level, it's easy to conclude, well, knowing God is utterly beyond us. And many people have come to that conclusion. They think of God, they think of eternity and they think, well, we just can't know anything about that.

It's utterly beyond us. But the amazing thing is that that is not the case. The conclusion you cannot know God is incorrect.

Humans can gain knowledge of God. But the fundamental reason why that can happen is because God has revealed himself.

Without that revelation, we would know nothing of God, but with revelation, knowledge of God becomes possible.

[4 : 52] Now, if we come back to the Trinity, if I just share that screen again, if you can see that, okay, we come back to the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit.

Each person, Father, Son and Spirit is equally and fully God. So Father, Son and Spirit all share the same nature. You mustn't think of God as like that the Father is the one who's really God and then the Son, maybe a bit less in the spirit, a bit less.

That is absolutely not true. Father, Son and Spirit are all equally and fully God. However, they are nevertheless distinct. And so there's some things that are unique to each.

So for example, the Father alone is Father. And as part of that, that equality, but at the same time that distinctiveness of each person, there are certain aspects of God's activity that are particularly associated with different persons.

So that means that for a particular element of what God does, the emphasis is going to fall on one of these, maybe the Father, maybe the Son, or maybe the Holy Spirit, depending on what it may be.

[6 : 16] An illustration that theologians often use for this is in regard to our minds. So I have one mind, but certain activities will place emphasis on a particular aspect of my mind.

So if you give me a maths or an engineering problem, then I will think if you ask me to recount what I did last week, the emphasis is on remembering. And if you give me a choice to make, then I will exercise my will.

That's a very small illustration of the fact that in certain aspects of who God is and what God does, the emphasis will fall on to one of the persons.

Now, the reason that I'm saying all that is that when it comes to God revealing himself, we've been talking about revelation, the fact that God reveals himself. And that work of revelation, it falls, the emphasis of that falls to one of the three.

Which one is it? Well, it's God the Son. The primary agent for revealing God is the second person of the Trinity, God the Son.

[7 : 34] In other words, revealing the triune God is primarily God the Son's job. And the Bible uses a key word to describe what that job is.

In a way, it's like a job title for God's, God the Son's work of revealing. What is that term? It is the term, the word.

The word is the word that is written in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. That is all referring to God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

That term word is expressing the fact that coherent, understandable, receivable communication about the infinite eternal God is being revealed to us and it's being revealed through God the Son.

He is the word of God. And as John says shortly, no one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side, that's again referring to God the Son, he has made him known.

[8 : 51] That's summing up everything I'm trying to say that the revelation of God is primarily accomplished through the agency of God the Son.

Now that revelation, and we're talking about revelation, revelation happens in two ways. We've got two great terms for describing it. One is general revelation. The other is special.

General revelation is the way in which God reveals himself through the created word. Special revelation is God's word revealed, is God revealing himself through the scriptures, which are written communication of God.

And Hebrews chapter one tells us that both of these are centered on God the Son. Long ago, at many times in many ways, God spoke to us, to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son. That's referring to special revelation, whom he appointed the aid of all things through whom also he created the world.

[9 : 58] So here you have special revelation, and you have general revelation. The key point is that they're all through God the Son. God's revelation is in and through Jesus Christ.

Now, this is really important for us in terms of how we understand the Bible. It's important that we don't separate the Bible as the word of God from Jesus as the word of God.

In fact, the Bible is the word of God because in it, in the Bible, in the Bible as the word of God, Jesus Christ is speaking to us.

In the Bible, Jesus, the word of God is speaking to us and revealing God to us. In other words, the Bible is not an amazing book of words. The Bible is the words of an amazing person, and we mustn't separate the two.

And the whole of the Bible is pointing us towards God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. It's important when you think of the Bible that it's not just that Jesus appears for a wee bit of it in the middle. The whole thing is focused on Jesus.

[11 : 30] I'll try and just show that to you here in another of my odd diagrams if I show it to you. So here we have God the Son, who is the word, and he is the one through whom God the Trinity is revealed.

So whether it's a general revelation through the created world, it's only through the word that we can see more and understand more of God. Whether it's through general revelation or through special revelation here, it's all centered on the word on Jesus because it's through him that God reveals himself.

In terms of special revelation, everything is pointing to Jesus. The Old Testament scriptures are pointing forward as this little arrow here shows. The Gospels is where Jesus' life and ministry is recorded, and then the rest of the New Testament is explaining the implications of that.

So there's a sense in which it's looking back. The point I'm trying to make is that it all centers entirely on Jesus. Everything in the Word of God, the Bible, is pointing us towards the Word of God, God the Son, because it's only in him and through him that we can know the God who is infinite, eternal, and utterly beyond anything that our minds can take in.

And all of this is why we can call the Bible the living Word. The Bible is a living Word because it's the words of a living person, God the Son.

[13 : 11] And it's an amazing thing to recognize all of this because it's telling us that God up here in his unreachable, indescribable, immeasurable massiveness, in his incomprehensible magnificence, in his immeasurable power and glory, he is revealing himself.

And the reason he's doing that is so that you can know him. And the personal responsible for that is God the Son, God's great communicating Word. He is the one who makes God known.

But what's even more amazing is what John says next, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

That takes us to the next stage of our journey, God the Son, the eternal Word, he went on a journey, he entered from eternity into history.

As John says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now, as you may know, that word dwelt literally means tabernacled, which is kind of the journey language, the idea of a tent that moves from place to place.

[14 : 36] So we're thinking in terms of our journey. What was the journey that Jesus had to go on? Well, it was the journey of becoming human.

In other words, it was the journey of becoming one of us. Now, it's inescapable that being a human involves a journey. We are all born as infants, but we're not born to be infants.

Our birth is a starting point. It takes us from infancy to maturity, both physically and mentally. So we grow physically. We start with a DNA in our genes that provides the building blocks for our bodies, our cells, form and are organized into tissue and organs.

And through this physical growth, we learn to roll over, to stand up, to walk, and eventually we become tall and strong. And we also grow mentally. So we learn to understand voices, we learn to speak, to solve problems, to make decisions, and to have relationships.

That's the journey of being a human. And the key point is that in order for the Word to become flesh, it means that Jesus took exactly the same path.

[16 : 01] He was born into history as infant flesh, and from there he grew physically and he grew mentally.

We read that together in Luke chapter 2, where it says here, Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature. Now, stature just means he grew taller.

So he learned stuff in terms of wisdom. He grew mentally and he grew physically. He became a man. And it's important to remember that Jesus grew in exactly the same way that we grow. So he had to eat in order for this to happen, to grow in stature, he had to eat to get energy.

And for this to happen, he had to absorb information, just like we do. And that's how he grew in wisdom and how he grew in stature.

The baby in the manger couldn't speak, he couldn't walk, he couldn't read, he couldn't preach, he could not articulate God's eternal purposes. Behind that word flesh there is weakness, infirmity, limitation and an inescapable need to grow.

[17 : 27] Now, all of this is reminding us of two crucial truths about Jesus. The first is that in Jesus, there is no ungodness, there's no semi-godness. In other words, when we talk about Jesus, we're not saying that he's like God, or that he's mostly God, or that he's similar to God.

We are saying he is fully and truly and perfectly God, which is why if you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus.

But secondly, and just as importantly, in Jesus, there is no unhumaneness, nor is there any superhumaneness.

He's not some kind of mixture of superhumanity or demigodness, like these kind of mythological figures that you hear of in literature. He was not a human with physical super strength, nor with mental superpowers. He was fully, truly and perfectly human.

The only difference is that he's not broken by sin. And that is why if you want to know what true humanity is really like, you also look at Jesus.

[18 : 54] Now, as you may be thinking, you might be thinking to yourself, well, hold on a minute, Thomas, you've brought us to a little bit of a confusing and complicated position here.

We've been talking about Jesus, we've been talking about becoming flesh. But on the one hand, we're saying that you have the eternal Son of God, Jesus, the Word of God, through whom the greatest knowledge of all, the knowledge of God is revealed.

So we're saying, okay, through God the Son comes the greatest knowledge that humanity can ever have access to, the knowledge of God. So we've got that here on one side.

But on the other hand, we're saying we now have the incarnate Son of God, the Word made flesh, the human Jesus, who as an infant doesn't even know how to read.

And like the rest of us, he needs information if he is going to know anything. In other words, the one who knows everything is now the one who needs to learn everything.

[20 : 14] How did he do it? Well, in terms of everyday stuff, he learned to talk from his parents, just like you did.

I'm sure he learned to walk by falling over a lot, just like you did. He would have been taught to read, just like you were. He would have learned Carpentry from Joseph, just like we learned our jobs and skills from others, and he would have learned the social customs of his day from the community in which he lived, just like we do.

He would have learned the everyday stuff from the people around him. But in terms of the most important stuff, how did the baby in the manger who couldn't speak become the preacher who, as Peter said, had the words of eternal life?

How did that happen? Well, I think the answer is, he read his Bible. That takes us to the next step on our journey.

Jesus has gone from eternity into history where he was born an infant flesh, but from that point, he grew into maturity.

[21 : 44] We don't know a huge amount about the early years of Jesus' life between his infancy and the beginning of his public ministry when he was aged 30.

If you think about the life of Jesus, we know a little bit about ages 0 to 2, pretty much, when he was born and he was under threat.

He was under threat to Egypt, the visit of the wise men. That all happened in the first two years in Bethlehem. We then know an awful lot from 30 onwards or around 30 when he had a three year public ministry.

But this bit in the middle, there's just a big gap, apart from a tiny wee incident when he was aged 12, which we read about in Luke chapter two.

So we don't know much about what actually happened in those years, but what we absolutely do know is the fruit of those years.

[22 : 52] And what is crystal clear is that by the time Jesus reached human maturity at the age of 30, he knew his Bible.

In fact, he knew it better than anyone who has ever lived, which is of course why the people who met him came away saying, no one ever spoke like this man. How did that happen? Was there a moment when God zapped Jesus' brain with all this knowledge?

No, I don't think there was. And I think the account of Jesus asking questions when he was 12 years old shows that he learned gradually. It wasn't sort of just zapped into his brain in a moment by God.

Jesus learned things gradually. But the key point is that when Jesus read his Bible, when he read the scriptures of the Old Testament, everything he learned came together with perfect clarity, coherence and understanding.

In other words, the information that Jesus read in the Bible clicked. Now, why did that happen? Why did the Bible click so perfectly in Jesus' mind?

[24 : 08] Well, I'm probably oversimplifying it a wee bit and there's probably more to it than this. But I think the reason that the information in the scriptures clicked so perfectly in Jesus' mind is because when Jesus read the Bible, the word of God was coming home.

And the result was the most mature human mind that has ever lived.

All of this means that we can see that the Bible has a crucial place in the life of Jesus. And I want to just highlight some of these things and they're going to take us to the next stage of our journey, which is to Calvary.

So I'm going to give you five things very briefly, five ways in which we see the Bible so crucial in Jesus' life. Jesus learned the scriptures. This is what we read in John.

And if you look, you see in verse 46, he was in the temple, he was sitting among the teachers, so he was listening to them, hearing what they were saying. He was asking them questions. So Jesus engaged in discussion.

[25 : 28] He absorbed information. He sat, he listened, he thought, he worked at learning what the Bible said. But he didn't just learn the scriptures.

He also obeyed the scriptures. We can see that in so many different places. Here's an example in Luke chapter five, a man came to him full of leprosy. When Jesus healed him, Jesus said to him, go and show yourself to the priest and to make an offering for your cleansing as Moses commanded.

Here's an example of Jesus making sure that a specific requirement of the Old Testament was kept. In other words, Jesus didn't just do his own thing. He followed what the scripture said.

Often we ask the question, what would Jesus do? Well, the simple answer to that question is keep God's word. But equally, Jesus did not conform to the additional requirements that the Pharisees had added to scripture.

More widely, Hebrews chapter four verse 15 tells us that Jesus was without sin. And that, of course, is another way of saying that he kept every single aspect of God's law.

[26 : 44] He followed and obeyed the scripture. Number three, Jesus used the scriptures. So throughout his ministry, he quotes from the scriptures.

But what I want us to notice especially is that Jesus used the scriptures in moments of crisis. Another example is the temptation. When the devil came and tempted Jesus three times, Jesus responded in exactly the same way each time he quoted from the Bible and said, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone.

Jesus countered the attacks of the devil by using the Bible. Another example is on the cross. Jesus is crying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was in Psalm 22 and in his dying moment Luke tells us that Jesus used a verse from Psalm 31.

He called out with a loud voice, Father into your hands, I commit my spirit. That comes from Psalm 31 verse five. The crucial point is that in these crisis moments, Jesus didn't summon a legion of angels.

He didn't call down fire. He didn't give a mighty show of strength. He grabbed the words of scripture and he used them. Number four, Jesus proclaimed the scriptures.

[28 : 05] It's sometimes easy for us to forget that Jesus was a preacher. In fact, he was the greatest preacher ever. He took passages from the Bible and he preached them.

And we have an example that recorded on the screen in front of you here in Luke four. And as he did so, he proclaimed good news. And I think that's just such a simple but vital point to remember that when Jesus went around preaching, he went around to tell people that something utterly brilliant is happening.

And in that good news, Jesus gave people hope, which they desperately needed to hear. But at the same time, he also explained how the good news fitted together.

And so here's an example from Luke 24 when Jesus met the two on the road to Ames. And it tells us that beginning with the prophets, Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted or you can equally translate as he explained to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

So that's really important because in the good news, Jesus gave people hope. And in the explanation, he gave people answers.

[29 : 28] And that is an absolutely brilliant combination. And it's something that surely everyone longs for. And then fifthly, Jesus fulfilled the scriptures.

You see this at various points in his life at his birth. You see that when we look at the Christmas narrative at the start of his ministry here before you have a count of him standing up in the synagogue.

He reads from Isaiah the prophet and he concludes by saying today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And we see the same as he went towards the end of his ministry.

He said, we're going up to Jerusalem. Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. And of course, the great climax of that fulfillment of scripture is in his death and resurrection.

As he said on the road to Emmaus, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter his glory.

[30 : 32] The journey that Jesus took was one where the word became flesh and it, he went along the pathway that the scripture set out and it was a pathway all the way to Calvary.

Now, at this point, I want to try and bring everything that we are saying together. We're taking this journey from eternity into history, into maturity, all the way to Calvary.

So from eternity, God is revealing himself through God, the Son, the Word of God. That revelation has happened in history through the creation in general and through the scriptures, especially.

The first part of those scriptures, the Old Testament is pointing forward to the fact that not only God's words, but also God, the Son himself is going to enter into history.

At the incarnation, the Son has taken that journey, he's entered history and from that point, he's now on a journey to maturity. That journey to maturity involves learning all the basics of life from the people around him and the environment he lives in.

[31 : 45] And it led him to learn the most important questions in life from the scriptures and he found their origin and their home in him. Those scriptures taught him his mission and by the time Jesus reaches maturity and begins his public ministry, he knows who he is, he knows why he's come, he knows what he has to do and it all comes together on the cross.

We see this culmination of the journey that he's taking. He's gone from eternity into history to maturity. It reaches the point, the climax point on the cross where God's plan of salvation was fulfilled, where the word who was always with the Father, who became infant flesh, has now become mature flesh, is crucified and risen flesh as the exalted God-man.

He's now the King of the universe, he's the savior of men and women. Everything that God wanted to happen has now happened and it's being revealed and implemented and accomplished through the word of God incarnate, accomplishing what was anticipated by the word of God written and the result is that the great revelation of God is complete.

The word of God eternal became the word of God incarnate. He's fulfilled the word of God written so that the infinite triune God can be revealed.

But the utterly, utterly incredible truth of it all is that what all of that reveals is that the eternal, unfathomable, unmeasurable God is actually the God who loves you so much that he will give his son to die for him.

[33 : 40] The ultimate revelation of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is showing us what God is really like and it's showing us that he's gentle, kind, brave, trustworthy, compassionate, merciful, humble, tender, protective and he loves you so, so much that he will die for you.

In fact that's the whole reason that he took this journey so that he could stand in your place and make you his own forever and it all makes absolutely perfect sense because if we go back to what John said, he told us that the word became flesh and dwelt among us, we've seen his glory, glory as of the only son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now just compare that with the world around us, especially our media and our social media. There's hardly any truth, fake news, conspiracy theories, lies, broken promises, skepticism and really quite alarming misinformation and there's even less grace. People are ridiculed, they're mocked, battle lines are drawn, mistakes are laughed at, people's faults are highlighted, there's no mercy, it is absolutely brutal and in contrast to all of that, we have Jesus revealing the God who is full of grace and truth.

Absolutely full of it and boy how we need him. So the word of God eternal revealed the word of God in history, he became the word of God made infant flesh, he grew into the word of God made mature flesh, now he is crucified and risen as the exalted word made flesh but the journey doesn't stop there because the risen word of God entrusts his word to a community and the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit recorded the real-time historical words and actions of the word made flesh and through the ministry of the apostles in the church, the church and the apostles, the explanation was given as to what all this meant for us and how it all fits together and that revelation has now been passed on and on and on.

The church has the written words of the risen word in her hands and that community includes us and what do we have to do with it?

[36 : 35] We do exactly what Jesus did. We learn the Bible as disciples who learn from him, we obey it as saints who want to be different from the world around us.

We use it as believers so that we trust him and live out our lives in his way. We proclaim and explain it as witnesses and heralds and we fulfil it.

And that I think is one of the most amazing things of all that you are fulfilling God's plan. The very start of God's plan all the way back in the Old Testament, he said, I will be your God, you will be my people, you are fulfilling that as his child today.

And that's why the last stop of our journey is Monday morning because through everything that Jesus, the Word of God has done, you can go into Monday morning as a child of God.

And as we do so, we need to have the Word of God dwelling in our hearts, written on our hearts, filling our minds and always on our lips.

[37 : 48] Jesus as the Word of God needed the Word of God, used the Word of God and fulfilled the Word of God. Wouldn't it be so amazing if that's exactly what we all do this week as well?

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so, so much for your great plan of salvation, for your extraordinary mercy and for the way everything has fitted so perfectly together.

We thank you for your Son, the Word who from all eternity has been in your bosom and yet who came to be one of us and who took that journey so that we might know you.

We pray, oh God, that that living Word, our Savior Jesus, would become more and more precious to us all and that you would shape every aspect of our lives.

And we thank you that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Amen.