

Christ Real

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[0 : 00] I want this evening to start, we're starting a series in our evening worship up till the end of May, early June on the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

We were looking previously at the doctrine of God and so it kind of is a compliment to that and an extension of that when we look at the person and work of Christ and that is going to be something that identity, we'll at least do some of these, we'll look at some of these passages and some of these characteristics of Jesus Christ in their Bible studies that they do on a Sunday evening.

There's two main reasons that we want, I want to do this. Well, can I tell you what we're going to do tonight? We're going to do tonight the incarnation of Jesus Christ, okay?

So Jesus becoming flesh, so you might have guessed that from maybe both the title and also the reading. It's an amazing passage of scripture and it's the kind of passage of scripture that you're a little bit afraid to touch because it's so perfect and it's so good.

I'm only going to focus on two small parts of that so please bear with me and do pray that the Spirit of God will take that and make Jesus Christ very real to us and that we will see things that maybe we don't or haven't seen up till now.

[1 : 26] But why do I, there are two main reasons for wanting to look at the incarnation of Jesus Christ, why that's so important to us and looking at the person of Jesus Christ.

One is because it's absolutely, our understanding of Jesus is fundamental, it's foundational to our faith. So if we don't understand Jesus, we're going to struggle as Christians.

If we don't look through the prism of Christ, it's always going to be difficult for us to live as Christians. So it's very foundational to have, as we saw this morning with Daniel, this relationship with God, we have this relationship with God through Jesus Christ, it's always going to be difficult to maintain and develop our faith unless we learn more and understand more about Jesus Christ.

You can never become, you can never become, and I can never become, I hope, blasie about Jesus. We can never think, well, let's move beyond that.

Let's move into something deeper. He's eternal and we will never stop learning about him. But also I think very importantly because the second thing is that, two main reasons for this is that our understanding of Jesus Christ will impact the way we express our faith to other people.

[2 : 47] You see what I'm saying there? The more we understand about our relationship with Jesus, the more we understand what it's like and what he is like, the better we will be able to share our faith in Jesus Christ with other people.

And that is hugely significant. And we are, given the opportunity, we're praying tonight about opportunities to share our faith, we are not telling people if they ask, or we're not just telling people if they ask, well, I go to church.

And we're not saying that we just, we believe in the teaching of the Bible. And we're not saying that we come from a Christian home and a Christian family.

And we're not saying we're religious and we're not saying we just go to church. We're saying in our, when we are given the opportunity to share our faith, we're saying that we are followers of Jesus.

That Jesus is Lord and He's our Lord. And that's very important because that immediately cuts through a lot of this, the kind of junk in people and people's arguments.

[3 : 53] And it takes us to the core of our faith. And we must be able, we must begin to be able to say as Christians that we're more than just church goers, that we're more than just Christian, whatever people's understanding of that is, but we are followers of Jesus Christ.

And we are worshipers of Jesus Christ. Now that will unsettle some people. But it's the very basis of our faith. And so I want us to look at Jesus Christ.

And the more we understand Him, I think the better we will be able to share our faith with other people, our faith in Jesus Christ. Because you're Christians, you know, you're a Christian, if you're a Christian, you're a Christian.

People were first called Christians in Antioch. That is, they were followers of the Christ one. They were followers of Jesus. We're worshipers of Jesus. That's what we are.

That's what our identity lies. Whatever else we are, whatever else we do, we're followers of Jesus Christ. We are, Jesus Christ is our Lord. And so in these sermons, we'll be kind of dipping our fingers a little bit more.

[5 : 00] And that's all it can ever be, dipping our fingers a little bit more into the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And we're looking for, and I hope you're praying that you will be transcendent on, we will all be being transformed by our knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Because that will impact on our ability to mission, on our ability to share our faith. And more importantly, on the confidence we have to share our faith.

That we will be confident of this person, this great person, this real person, Jesus Christ. He is so important. And I hope we'll be looking at why he's so important.

And John's Gospel was written, really, for this very purpose. John 20, verse 31 says, But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

That's what we're hoping to do, to have a deeper belief in faith in Jesus Christ. So John chapter one is speaking about Jesus becoming flesh.

[6 : 05] Jesus, the incarnation, what we call the incarnation of Jesus. And I really want to just say, deal with two areas, which I hope we'll cover it. And therefore, two sections of John chapter one.

Okay, we're not going to look at the whole section, there's too much in it. But we are going to look at verses one and two, and the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God, he was with God in the beginning.

And we're also going to look at verses, particularly verse 14, the word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So two things that I want to say about the incarnation that are very important for our understanding of Jesus. One is that he is really God, and the other is that he's really human.

Okay, these are two very important truths. I'm going to put it in lay person's terms. There's all kinds of doctrinal statements that have been written about these things.

[7 : 05] But we're going to look at in this, that Jesus Christ is really God. That is of first importance. Andy Pearson, last Sunday evening, spoke about the, what word did he use?

The kind of temporary bookstalls that you get in the street, and he was referring to the Jehovah's Witnesses, and how they denied the reality of God, or Jesus is God.

And so we're looking at that hugely important thing, and we need to clear the decks, and remind ourselves of this fact.

That Jesus Christ is really God. You know verse 14 says, the word became flesh, and the word is just another name for Jesus, which we'll speak a little bit more about as we go on.

But we're told in verse one, in the beginning, was the word with a capital W. And the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning, through Him all things were made.

[8 : 19] So you know, if we're going to speak to Stephen Fry, we're going to need to take him back to this. We're going to move him away from his idea of an evil creator, God, and we need to take him to this place where Jesus claims, where the gospel claims, where the Christian message is that Jesus Christ is God, He is pre-existent.

So Jesus came, so Jesus came. Okay, people will talk about Jesus, He's a nice guy, He's a good person. He's decent chap. But here we're told that He was with God, He was in the beginning.

So we've got the language that transports us back to Genesis chapter one. So the Genesis chapter one says, in the beginning was God, in the beginning God.

And so we're transported back there, say, right, the very beginning, so is Jesus. Jesus was right there at the very pre-existent. We take a reverse, we go into reverse gear, and we move right back to Genesis one, and Jesus is there.

He is existent. He is the means by which the whole universe was created, and He is there as God. So beginnings are always important for us, aren't they?

[9 : 33] We're always looking to Genesis, I don't mean the biblical Genesis, but to the Genesis of things, to find out what they are and what they mean.

And Jesus is at the beginning. He is pre-existent. So He didn't just, He just wasn't just born of Mary, but He pre-existed as God.

And that immediately of course takes us into a kind of Trinitarian language which we'll not go into this evening. It's pre-existent. And He was divine. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So this was Jesus Christ, the Word who spoke the world into creation, and He is the life and the truth and the light of this universe.

So all that we spend a number of weeks talking about the doctrine of God, so all that we can take of the doctrine of God and His character, all things we look to, we can attribute them to Jesus as well.

[10 : 35] So remember some of these things that Jesus is eternal, God is true, Jesus is unchanging, Jesus is sovereign, Jesus isn't solitary, Jesus is close to us, but also He's transcendent and He's glorious.

He's all seeing, He's all knowing. We can take all of the summary of the character of God that we were looking at and a million other truths beside and we can apply them to Jesus. And Jesus is divine.

So begins to remind us of the kind of saviour that we believe in and that we understand. And I hope it will begin all to come together as we go through it.

He's a pre-existent divine being, but He's also a communicating God. He's really God who communicates Himself.

Given this name, the word, because He's a communicating God, He speaks creation into being. Isn't that a remarkable truth?

[11 : 35] He simply speaks the creation into being and God said. So God speaks, I mean that takes creation and creativity into a completely different league for us.

And then He speaks to Adam and Eve that He's created those in His image. He communicates with them. He's in relationship with them.

And then when they rebel against Him, He's, what are we told? Where are you? He speaks into their rebellion and He looks for them and He asks for them.

And He speaks into that situation, where are you? And He speaks through the progressive revelation of Scripture and prophecy and in promise and through the people of God.

And ultimately, of course, this word, Jesus, this communicating God, speaks through Himself, speaks through His incarnation and speaks through His life because He's the revelation of God.

[12 : 46] So you kind of got, if you want to know more about God, then you look at the word. The word is Jesus Christ and the word speaks of who God is.

So if we want to know about God, we go to Jesus Christ. There's nothing more needed. There will not be further revelation of God because all we need to know about God is revealed in Jesus Christ.

So He really is God. And that is hugely significant for us in our understanding of His person as we go, we'll go on in weeks to look at His work also.

So He's really God, but He's also really mankind. He's man. He's a person as well. It's important.

He's not a ghost. He's not an apparition. He's not half man, half God. He is man and He is God.

[13 : 48] Verse 14 says, the word became flesh and made us dwelling among as we have seen as glory. That's hugely important.

The word became flesh. So this was God, the Son's initiative. We remember that. This cruel, capricious, vicious, jealous, evil God that many speak about.

He's the one that breaks into our lostness and He takes the initiative and He becomes flesh. He's born. He's born into humanity.

God with us. It was always in the plan, wasn't it? It was always, it was in the temple imagery that this would be a temple that would be in the middle of God's people that was a symbol of God being with us.

It was in the prophecy of Emmanuel that we sing at Christmas time. God with us. It was a rewinding back to what it was in the garden.

[14 : 47] God with us. And here is in a far greater way than even God walking with Adam and even the garden. This is God becoming flesh.

This is God making his dwelling. Tabernacle, that's the same word, the tabernacle living with dwelling among his people.

And that helps us to reflect on again some of the arguments against God that people have and some of the arguments against Christianity because we find that this is God who comes among us.

So just look at this, God becoming a man by looking at two statements of unbelief.

Some that we have, I'm not sure we all have them to a greater degree, greater or lesser degree, but some that other people have as well. And the first is God doesn't care about me.

[15 : 49] Okay? Many people will say that. God doesn't care about me. If you're sitting here this evening, I think God doesn't care about me, he's interested in me. I think we need to remember what the incarnation speaks into that statement of unbelief.

And within that God not caring about me or about people, I want to say two things. The first is identity. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

So identifying with us is a very crucial part of the incarnation. The roots of human rejection, why do you reject somebody?

Why do you not like them? Or what do you say when you reject someone? He's not one of us. They don't belong. They don't belong to me.

They're not one of my gang. They're not one of us. And that is what, that is the seed of rejection of many people of the gospel and of Jesus Christ, and of God.

[16 : 58] Much atheistic thinking will be on the lines of God doesn't care because he's not one of us. He's a distant, far away God in our lives. Christ answers that by becoming one of us, becoming human being, a human being.

He's sinless, but I'm not going to speak about that tonight. I'm going to speak about that next week when we look at the virgin birth. But he was sinless. But yet he was a man.

He was a man. I am a man. He was a man. So he brought great dignity to manhood, but he was born of a woman.

He had the genetic heredity of a woman, of Mary, yet without sin. We recognize that. He was umbilically connected to humanity through Mary and became flesh through being born of a woman and giving great dignity to woman kind and to mankind and an interrelatedness with both.

And he was able to, sorry, Georgie, he was able to, he identified with us.

[18 : 21] So if he was alive today, he too would have a mobile phone. Okay. So he was man, born of a woman and connected with us with the same anatomy, the same physiology, same biochemical makeup, genetic code, central nervous system, all the things that make us what we are.

Jesus Christ took to himself. He was truly a real, he took on flesh. He was born and he was born into poverty. He was born into an underclass, born without status.

So we can't say that he had special privilege even though he was the son of God. And he grew up in a family and he grew up and he learned and he learned obedience and he learned and developed and he deducted and he reasoned and he had logic and he became someone who, who understood what God was doing in his life and he was dependent from the day one in the Holy Spirit to be the one who would open up God and open up the truth of God to him.

And yes, he had a unique awareness of the Father of that, we have no doubt, but nonetheless, he was totally, he made himself totally dependent on the Spirit of God to learn and to grow and to develop and mature.

That was why he prayed so much. That's why he spent so much time in the, in the Spirit's presence and in the Father's presence through prayer. He identified with us in that way.

[19 : 55] He was hungry. He was thirsty. He slept. He wept. He was joyful. He bled. He was flogged. He was born. He died. He lived.

He loved. He had friends. He was, he celebrated. He mourned. He was tempted. You know, all the things that make us what we are without sin, he experienced and he knew.

You know, we talked today in its very trendy in churches to talk about incarnational ministry. You know, Jesus is the great example of incarnational ministry.

He comes among us and identifies with us. He leaving glory behind and made his home in humanity. Never again or not to have a body.

Never again not to be flesh and blood. Remember that. He was never, not, he doesn't ever go back to his pre flesh and blood existence.

[20 : 50] Identity. God doesn't care about me. Well, we need to deal with this willingness to identify with us and I'm not going into anything beyond that really to the cross this evening.

But also a affirmation. It speaks of affirmation. When we think that we're insignificant or we think that we're just specks of rubbish in a massive big universe and that God can't possibly care for my life.

This is great affirmation, you know. Not only does our lives matter, but our bodies, our flesh and blood life matters as well.

Sometimes we've kind of, what's the word? We've made Christianity all about spirit. You know, all about soul.

All about maybe just our brains or our intellects. And we've failed to take it down to an incarnational level of body, flesh and blood. That is good.

[21 : 49] That when he made these things, when he made us, he made us flesh and blood and he made us good and Jesus taking on flesh reminds us of that. That our bodies and flesh and blood is good.

Yes, sin is coming and evil is coming and infected that and diseased it and broken it. But physical life matters. And he hasn't just redeemed you mystically or spiritually.

He redeems us physically, physical life matters. We're going to live in a new creation and a new heaven and a new earth. We're righteous and so well, but it's a heaven and an earth.

It's a physical universe and we'll have a resurrected, redeemed and transformed and glorified body just as Jesus Christ did even though it might be different. So it affirms the value of our beings and the value of eating and drinking and laughing and crying and life as it is as we have it.

That we're not just mystical, spiritual beings that all we are redeemed all. He's really man. God doesn't care for me, people say. I think his incarnation reminds us that that is not the case in and of itself, but obviously as it goes towards the cross.

[23 : 06] But then the second statement of unbelief is I don't care about God. I don't care about God. And that's maybe slightly more problematic.

You know, it's not all sweetness and light. It's kind of nice talking about the incarnation and talking about his identity with his an affirmation. And so far that's quite easy, isn't it? But we do have a problem.

We have the problem of evil and we have the problem of sin. And we have the problem of people who reject even this incarnational identifying, affirming God.

See in verse five, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Or in verse 10, he was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

Or in verse 11, he came to that which is his own, but his own did not receive him. So you've got this problem identified that there is evil in this world which Christ came to deal with, but it's evil that doesn't recognize Jesus Christ and doesn't care about God and doesn't want to know God.

[24 : 22] But we know that that's why Jesus Christ came and that there's, we must do certain things when we face up to the reality of evil. We must recognize mystery.

I've no doubt that the origins of evil are a problem. We mentioned that briefly this morning. But they are a bigger problem for atheists than they are for us.

But you know, where there is a relational, perfectly good God who creates mankind in his image and not only mankind, but the angels to worship and adore him and but to be in relationship with him.

The antithesis I think must be there that allows evil to form. That is, there must be if we are free and if God has made us free and God has made us independent, then there must be at least a possibility that as free beings we will rebel against his perfect goodness.

Otherwise I think we would be robots. I think the antithesis of evil is always in a world where there is absolute good and it maybe moves us towards why that was the case.

[25 : 49] The antithesis is deceived, overcome and rejects his goodness. And the incarnation that we have points us towards an answer.

It points us to an answer that I find that this is really difficult to explain because I'm not quite sure if I've got a sort of diamond head. But it seems to me that we would never have truly understood either the depth of his love nor indeed would evil actually ever have been dealt with and destroyed if Jesus didn't come to redeem his people to come on our behalf.

This is if in creating humanity or creating created beings, evil became possible and it was kind of drawn out as it were like a sting.

But it could only be dealt with fully by God himself and it could only deal with it fully by redeeming the humanity that had chosen to rebel against him.

In other words, the God of Eden, I may be on dangerous theological ground here, but the God of Eden is not quite as glorious if we can talk in these terms as the God of Gethsemane.

[27 : 29] There's a deeper expression of God's love in Gethsemane because of the cost of what he's doing and the fact that he's internalizing and taking and paying the price for evil and dealing with evil in himself because we can't deal with it.

There's a greater expression of his grace and love in Gethsemane than even there is in Eden. And so the problem of our not caring about God because of the reality of evil is something that we need to face up to.

We need to face up to our own guilt against this God and this feeling that we often have that we don't care. Now don't be pious with me and don't say, I never feel like that.

I never feel like a rebel. If you haven't felt like a rebel against God, I doubt there's any spiritual life in you whatsoever because we are sinners and we are rebels against God and we are guilty before God and he wants us to recognize that and accept his diagnosis of our need.

There's many times that we feel in darkness that we don't understand and that we have not received him. And we need to confess there's times that you will say because I know that I have said I don't care about God.

[28 : 59] I don't care about grace. I don't care about the incarnation. There are much more important things to do tomorrow.

But that is part of the reality of the incarnation is that he came to deal with that kind of attitude in our lives and to redeem and to buy back and to change us, recognize our guilt but also recognize where his glory lies.

And with this I finish, you know, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only. What's he speaking about there? Is it the glory of his incarnation? I don't think so. If you look at John himself and he speaks a lot about glory in John chapter 12 in verse 23, he says, the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.

What was that hour? That was his death. It was his crucifixion. That is really where his whatever else manifests the glory of God, nothing quite manifests it like the cross itself, like the lamb slain.

And so he became flesh. He became flesh so that we can see his glory and his glory is he's a substitute for us. He became one of us in order to redeem us.

[30 : 18] That's what is glory. The glory is in the cross. If you want to share your faith with somebody, don't tell them about daffodils. Don't tell them just about God who is nice and who creates.

Tell them that the glory of God is at the cross is in this redeeming power that is this lamb slain. We're not going to use that language because people aren't going to understand it. But we're going to, we're going to stand in front of a mirror and we're going to learn the kind of language that Joe blogs our friends in the street will understand.

We're going to use the language of substitution and we're going to show them that this is where he came. He came and he internalized. Now, I'm going to use a picture.

I hope it's not a reverent. I'm going to use, I've used it in one of the sermons that I'm doing for the BBC. But you know, in cartoons, there's some great things in cartoons and they tell great people, you know, I really love in cartoons when the cartoon character takes a stick of a dynamite that's just going down.

It's about to blow up and they just swallow it. And it blows up inside them and nobody else is affected. They internalize the damage and the pain of that explosion.

[31 : 30] It's in another film as well, a cartoon. But it's brilliant. It's a brilliant picture of taking the explosion, taking the damage, taking the cost, taking the pain internally.

And that is the counterintuitive reality of the cross. That's what his glory is revealed, where Jesus sees evil and in his incarnational substitutionary glory, he takes the cost as a human because he had to be human if he was going to be our substitute and if he was going to be dying our place, he takes that upon himself on the cross and see many people see that as the greatest weakness of the gospel.

It's counterintuitive, isn't it? For as it's the greatest strength of the gospel, that's the place where the gospel is glorious. That's where God reveals his glory, the glory that he had before the creation of the world.

But it's revealed perfectly when he eyeballs evil on the cross and death is defeated. Grave is emptied of his power.

The atonement, the substitution of God, the second Adam, call it what you like, is God providing the answer in himself, reconciling us to himself, becoming a curse for us.

[32 : 56] And that is why the incarnation matters so much because he's doing it in our place. He doesn't do it on a page of a master's degree summary.

He doesn't do it in theory. He doesn't do it from heaven. He does it by becoming flesh, identifying with us in order to redeem us.

So it's very important, the incarnation, hugely important. So as we close, can you remind yourself that when Jesus speaks the word, that is the voice of God.

So Jesus isn't just the cuddly big brother that we have, that we can take or leave or reject or ignore depending on how we feel.

It's the voice of God. He says, yes, he's a brother, yes, he's incarnate, yes, he comes among us, yes, he understands us, but he's still God. Credible truth.

[34 : 00] And he's real. The incarnation is about a real historical becoming flesh. You don't make that up.

There is no parallel to the incarnation. There's nothing in any other world, religion, any other thinking that parallels to this reality of Jesus Christ.

He takes the initiative on our behalf and he knows and he understands because of that. And so he says, you know, cast your burdens on me because I understand.

I know. Do that this evening. What you're struggling with is, what's difficult in your life? What's a problem to you? Is it too great for Jesus?

Is it, is your understanding of Jesus too spiritual that you just go and worship Him with grand words that you've heard from the Pope or someone else? He says, I know I understand.

[34 : 56] I want you to bring, cast your cares upon me because I understand because he became one of us. He knows what it is to be tempted, to time pretend that he doesn't know and don't keep away from him and he's unique.

It's God reaching down from heaven, not us trying to reach up. We're just prachal about trying to reach up to God and trying and somehow earn his favour.

He says, don't do that. I've come down. I've come down to redeem you. And I hope that this evening you can see his glory. There's a very important word there that John uses in the middle of verse 14.

He says, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only. Now that may have been in the transfiguration, but it was also surely at the cross.

And I'm hoping that tonight everyone here can be included in that we, that we are people who have seen the glory. We can say that we're not among those who don't understand, who have not received them and who don't believe.

[36 : 09] I really hope and pray. And I hope and pray that if you don't, if you can't count yourself among those who are the we, we have seen his glory at the cross and in salvation, that you, maybe not physically, but that you will get on your knees.

And ask God to show you who he is. Amen.