

Jesus: Try Him Again for the First Time • July 30, 2006
Guest Speaker • Laird Crump

I have been a pastor for a number of years, and as one who does a lot of teaching and training I like to study the methods of various teachers. Some methods are rather conservative and predictable but I must admit that throwing fudge, like Ken Davis does, is not something I learned in Seminary... but I like the idea!

Now I confess that I haven't got a clue as to how to make fudge. I was going to wrap up some oxo cubes and throw those out and tell you it was fudge but my wife said that was just downright cruel!

I would though like to borrow Ken's idea. I can't make fudge... but I am a breakfast guy (lunch and dinner too if you couldn't guess). So I thought that I would ask some questions and whoever gets the right answer will get a box of cereal. Sound OK? For those of you who missed breakfast today you might want to pay close attention.

I want you to guess the product by it's slogan, the advertising slogan used in the commercial. Some of these are current and some are a blast from the past.

So, I'll say the slogan and you yell out the cereal.

“He likes it, hey Mikey” -- *Life cereal*

Two scoops of raisins in a package... -- *Raisin Bran*

They're Grrreat -- *Frosted Flakes*

Silly Rabbit, _____ are for kids -- *Trix*

Magically delicious -- *Lucky Charms*

Taste them again for the first time -- *Corn Flakes*

Interestingly many of these slogans stick with us and make an impact of some sort on us. But this last one for Corn Flakes caught my curiosity enough for me to actually buy a box and try them again for the first time.

Sure I grew up on Corn Flakes like many of you, but with competitors like Lucky Charms with little marshmallows, or Fruit Loops with tons of sugar... Corn Flakes began to lose their appeal. A lot of us often choose taste over nutrition. It had been years since I had a bowl of Corn Flakes. So I bought a box, and poured a bowl of corn flakes, added some milk and a little sugar... and you know what? They tasted wonderful. I had forgotten how good they tasted, and how good they were for you, until I tried them again for the first time.

You know my experience with Corn Flakes is reflective of a common human problem. It is a common human problem the marketing team at Kelloggs recognized. It is

The Problem of Familiarity.

You've heard the phrase "familiarity breeds contempt". Well contempt may be too harsh a word but familiarity does cause us often to let go of some things that are really important and worthwhile and profitable for us. Familiarity does cause us to take a lot of things for granted. And I must confess that familiarity has created a lot of issues for me in terms of my faith development. You see, I was born and raised in a Christian home, for which I am very thankful. But that meant that Jesus was regular talk in our home. Now get this - familiarity with Jesus has caused me to assume I know more about him than I really do. I have experienced him in the past and therefore I tend to assume that I know all there is to know about him. My familiarity with him sometimes causes me to make

Assumptions

and Generalizations

about Jesus that may or may not be accurate.

Now, your issues might be different from mine. Maybe you were not raised in a Christian environment and your impressions of Jesus may have been formed by popular opinion, or a movie you saw, or something a teacher or professor said about Jesus. But my guess is that most of us get caught up in making assumptions and generalizations about Jesus. When it comes to Jesus, most of us have seen the movie but never read the book!

I have discovered that I have a real need to go back to the Jesus of the Bible and try him again for the first time. I need to discover and re-discover who Jesus really is and what he is like and get in touch again with how he wants to shape my life. Does that make sense to any of you? Can any of you relate? Maybe like me you find that it would be helpful to take a fresh look at Jesus.

In order to help us do that, Ken asked me to speak today on a key conviction TOB has about Jesus. If you were to examine a core belief TOB has about Jesus you would find that...

TOB believes...

Jesus Christ was and is God

Jesus was conceived by God and born of the virgin Mary

Jesus lived a perfect life and never did anything that was wrong

Jesus voluntarily gave up his life in payment for all the wrong doing in our lives so that we could be forgiven and be restored into a proper relationship with God

Jesus rose from the dead authenticating that he was indeed God

Jesus will return one day and take his followers to heaven

Any person can become a Christ-follower by sincerely accepting what Jesus has done on their behalf and by inviting Jesus to take the leadership in their life.

These thoughts are in some ways simple, yet incredibly profound.

Understanding statements like these is important because many people have many different impressions and assumptions about Jesus.

As one person said, "God made humans in his image and ever since Jesus set foot on planet earth we have been trying to return the favour".

Take Duff McKagan, bassist for Gun's N' Roses, for example. Listen to his impression of who Jesus is:

"I think the Bible's a good story, you know? I mean, Jesus was --- well, back in those times, the Romans were just squashing everybody, and there came this guy who had positive thoughts. I think that's all there was to it. And he turned all these people on to positive thoughts. All of a sudden all the people were going, 'this guys #*~*^# groovy.' And the Romans were like, "not that groovy because he's #*~*^# taking over all our people we're squashing, so we're gonna kill him.'

He was just a positive guy who wanted to spread love and goodness. And the Romans did not dig that. And they #*~*^# squashed him like a grape."

Is that really true about Jesus Christ? Was he just a regular guy who had positive thoughts that ticked off the Roman government so that they wanted to kill him? And where did Duff McKagan get that impression? Who taught him about Jesus?

Who first told you about Jesus?

One of my earliest recollections of Jesus was from a bedtime prayer my mother sang to my sisters and me before we went to bed and actually we have continued to sing with our children. It is called "Jesus tender shepherd". It conjures up pastoral images of a loving shepherd caring for a little lamb.

One of the first images I had of Jesus was of a tender shepherd.
I appreciate that image and it still warms my heart to this day.

But is Jesus a tender shepherd? Is that all he is? Is there more to Jesus than a grandfatherly figure that pats little boys and girls on the head before they go to sleep?
What was the first picture you saw of Jesus? What did he look like?

I recall a pale faced, sad looking, other worldly middle-aged man with very fine features and clean long blonde flowing hair. Did Jesus really look like that? Probably not. In fact we have no idea what he looked like. We can only conjecture.

Personally my guess is he was bald

Some people see Jesus as a warrior.

Others still see him as a Mr. Rogers kind of person who loves his "neighbours".

But if he was so nice and preached such a nice message, how come his contemporaries executed him. No one would think of executing Mr. Rogers! (Well maybe a few of you sicko's out there would)

Athletes have an interesting take on Jesus.

Norm Evans, former lineman for the Miami Dolphins wrote a book called "On God's Squad". In this book he writes this of Jesus:

"I guarantee you Christ would be the toughest guy who ever played the game... if he were alive today I would picture a six foot six inch, 260 pound defensive tackle who would always make the big plays and would be hard to keep out of the backfield for offensive lineman like myself". Norm Evans – On God's Squad

As much as Jesus is the central figure for the whole human race, we must realize that for the most part, many of us really struggle with who he is and what he is like.

Who is this guy, Jesus? He almost seems to defy description yet millions of people are followers of his. He is such a complex person but at the same time rather simple. His complexity caused one person to write: "If Jesus had never lived, we would not have been able to invent him".

Well, in order to come to grips with who Jesus really is I think it is extremely important to go back to the Bible and to look at Jesus from that authoritative source. To begin this investigation I want us to look at what I think is one of the definitive passages in the Bible about Jesus Christ. The passage is Colossians 1: 15-23. This passage is the basis of what TOB believes about Jesus.

Colossians 1:15-22

¹⁵Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. ¹⁶Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.

¹⁸Christ is the head of the church, which is his body.

He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything. ¹⁹For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross. ²¹This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, ²²yet now he has brought you back as his friends.

He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

Now, I see this as a definitive passage about who Jesus is because some profound statements are being made here about Jesus. This passage declares loud and clear that

Jesus is Supreme!

The word supreme does not refer to one of Dianna Ross' backup singers. It means:

the highest, the best, the ultimate, the absolute, the greatest, the matchless, the untouchable, the unbeatable, the superlative... do you get the idea?

The Bible tells us in this passage that Jesus is supreme because of a number of things. You can study this on your own later but allow me simply to point out a few highlights about Jesus.

Understanding Jesus

1. Jesus Christ is supreme because He is God.

Look at verse 15 please.

¹⁵Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation.

Two powerful statements are made here to support this claim.

“Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God”.

The word “image” used here is the Greek word “icon”. You all refer to images on your computer as icons. The icon on your screen represents the whole program that is behind that icon. Double click on the icon and, boom; the whole program is opened up to you. We use the word icon to refer to statues or any kind of artwork that provides a likeness to a person. What the Bible is saying here is that Jesus is the icon of God. God of course is invisible. We can't see him with the naked eye. But God loved us so much that he himself took on the form of humanity so that we could understand him. The theological term for this is “the incarnation”. That means “God in the flesh”. God became visible to us in the person of Jesus Christ. This passage is emphasizing that Jesus is both the representation of God and the manifestation of God. Jesus is the full, final and complete revelation of God. He is God in the flesh, God with skin and bones. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If you want to know how God treats people, look at how Jesus treated people. If you want to know what God thinks about certain issues, look at what Jesus says about certain issues. If you want to know how God feels about certain things, look at the emotions of Jesus and you will get a very clear picture of what God is like because, as the Bible declares here, Jesus is God!

Now how do you feel about this? Have you ever thought about Jesus this way before? The Bible tells us here that Jesus is not just a good guy, but that he is God, God in human form.

Note the second thing said here about Jesus.

Jesus is eternal. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation.

Jesus did not just pop into being as a creation of God. He, being God, has always been. Jesus is not just one of a series of emanations descending from God.

Because he is God, he has always existed and always will be the exact image of God. When Jesus became a man he did not then become God. But when he became a man he put the image of God and the possibility of knowing God well within our grasp, in a form we could understand and relate to.

Now another major statement about Jesus from this passage is that...

2. Jesus Christ is supreme because he is the creator of the universe and the one who holds it together.

Look at verses 16-17

¹⁶Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.

Here the Bible outlines why Jesus is supreme over the universe.

Jesus created the universe

Look again at verse 16. Jesus is the person of the trinity that was responsible for creation. This Jesus who walked the earth, created the earth and the whole universe! He invented it. No doubt some of you have already been up to the cottage and have looked up at the clear night sky and the beautiful stars. It is breathtaking isn't it? The Bible tells us here that Jesus is the artist who made all that stuff

Jesus is the one who holds the universe together

He is the glue that holds the universe together. It is Jesus who maintains the delicate balance necessary to support life in our world. Jesus is the one who holds all of the atoms of the universe together and the one who prevents the planets from exploding or crashing into one another.

I am not a scientist but I do marvel at how Jesus holds all things together. He has intricately designed atoms to hold together. We have discovered the immense power of splitting the nucleus of those atoms but we have no real explanation as to why matter is the way it is. Theoretically, all atoms should be flying apart.

A physicist at AT & T laboratories wrote this as he contemplated why things hold together the way they do:

***"You grasp what this implies. It implies that all the massive nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Indeed they should never have been created, and if created they should have blown up instantly. Yet here they all are! Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together. The nature of the inhibition is also a secret... one thus far reserved by nature for herself."* (A physicist at AT & T laboratories)**

That "inhibition" he speaks of is actually Jesus. He is the one who hold all things together. All the atoms of your body would fly apart if it wasn't for Jesus holding you all together. I could stand to have Jesus let go of about 20 pounds of those atoms!

Here is another profound statement the Bible makes about Jesus in this passage

3. Jesus is supreme because He is the reconciler between a Holy God and a messed up humanity

Why did God take the form of Jesus? Why did God become a man? What was the purpose of God coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ?

In a word, the answer is “reconciliation”. God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile humanity with himself. Look again at verses 19-22.

¹⁹For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross. ²¹This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, ²²yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

Wow! Now look at the words used to describe humanity here. Three descriptive phrases are used.

- ***Far away from God.***

That is a good description for most of us.

- ***Enemies.***

What is an enemy? Someone who is on the other side of a moral issue.

- ***Separated*** from God.

Now look at the descriptive words for what Jesus has done.

- ***Reconciled.***

- Made ***peace.***

- Brought you back as ***friends.***

God has always been there extending his love and peace and purpose to us. We were the ones who have drifted away from God. We were the ones who put a rift in the relationship in the first place. But it is Jesus who reconciles us to God.

Essentially, the word “reconcile” means “to change or exchange”. The concept really implies a change of relationship. When people change from being at odds with each other to being at peace with each other they are said to be reconciled. When the Bible uses this term it refers to the restoration of a proper relationship between God and each of us personally.

Technically the word used here in this passage in the original language has a prefix on it to increase the intensity of this idea, meaning to be thoroughly or completely reconciled. Just like a young person would speak today, they wouldn’t simply say “reconciled” they would say “totally reconciled”.

Because Jesus is God the creator of and the one who holds the universe together, he is able to reconcile messed up people with a Holy God. He is like an irresistible mediator who makes such compelling arguments that we want so much to experience peace in our relationship with God

as opposed to being far away, enemies or separated from Him. That is the role that Jesus can play for each of us.

There is so much to understand about Jesus but this passage from the Bible gives us a great place to start.

Jesus is God.

Jesus created the universe and holds it together.

Jesus is the reconciler.

Jesus is supreme.

Now we've looked at some pretty heavy stuff here today but let me attempt to draw a few applications.

Does all this even matter?

Why is it important that we have an accurate understanding of who Jesus is?

If any of this stuff is true about Jesus then that means I need to treat my investigation of him and my journey with him with a lot of care and intentionality. You may not agree with what I have presented about Jesus today and that is OK... as long as you continue to check him out with sincere care and intention. If Jesus was, as Duff McKagan said "just a guy with positive ideas" then it's no big deal. But if he is what the Bible describes then it would be a very good idea for us to be responsible in doing our homework about him. That is one of the key reasons why TOB exists... to help people check Jesus out in a safe environment.

But let me tell you another reason why I think it is important to think accurately about Jesus.

Christ and Culture – Richard Niebuhr

In 1951, years before I was born, a dry and deep theologian wrote a dry and deep book called

"Christ and Culture"

The authors name was Richard Niebuhr. But this book contained some incredible insights. Niebuhr was years beyond his time in terms of understanding culture and the impact Jesus could have on culture. In this book he sites five paradigms or motifs of how people interpret Jesus and Jesus' role in shaping people who in turn shape culture. Here they are:

Christ against culture

– People who hold this view see Jesus as pretty much against everything and anything in culture. I know a lot of church people like this. They feel that the world is going to hell in a handbasket and that there's nothing good in it. These are the kinds of people who remove themselves from society and cloister in some remote

community. This is so contrary to the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus didn't run away from people, he ran to them. He celebrated the good things of culture.

Christ above culture

– People who see Jesus this way, see him as a positive force but one that doesn't really care about what is happening on planet earth. So essentially, what Jesus says about life doesn't really matter.

Christ and culture in paradox

– People who hold this view of Jesus are what we call dualists. They have a spiritual life and then a physical life and the two seldom merge. Jesus is nice but only on Sundays please!

Christ of culture

- This is an interesting and subtle paradigm. This view says; Jesus is a really good thing of culture... but so is physical fitness and so are piano lessons and so is a good education... Jesus is just **one of** the good things of culture. In my opinion, this is how many Canadians think about Jesus. He's a good guy, with some good ideas, but let's not get too radical because other things in life are equally important. This attitude also creeps into the church, strangely enough.
- Some Christians view going to church like going to the gym or going to the dentist. Functional and helpful but not life transforming.

Niebuhr offers a fifth paradigm and it is one based on the teaching of this passage.

Christ the transformer of culture

- This view accepts the supremacy of Jesus Christ. People who see Jesus this way, as the Bible presents him, recognize that this same Jesus who created the world and holds it together can also re-create my world and hold me together.

This same Jesus who has reconciled me to God can use me as an agent of reconciliation in this world and to bring about much good in his name and through his empowerment. I really think that. Jesus is not just "a" good thing in culture but rather

the highest, the best, the ultimate, the absolute, the greatest, the matchless, the untouchable, the unbeatable, the superlative...

Jesus is Supreme!

And if that is the case, then connecting with Jesus Christ in a personal way is **the** most rewarding and fulfilling aspect of life.

I must admit that I *believe* the "Christ the transformer of culture" paradigm but often *live* according to the "Christ of culture" paradigm.

Maybe like me you are realizing more and more that if Jesus really is who the Bible declares him to be, then I would be very wise to keep him front and center in my life and follow his lead. If he is supreme, then I need to make him the supreme priority in my life. This is tough stuff to work through but does that makes sense? Here are some questions I am asking myself to help me work this stuff out in my life. Maybe these are some questions you might want to ask of yourself too.

Life Application

What is my view of Jesus Christ?

How did I come to that conclusion?

Is my view of Jesus in keeping with the teaching of the Bible or based on popular opinion?

Does my life reflect the supremacy of Jesus Christ?

You know, I have found it very easy in my Christian journey to take Jesus for granted and become a little too familiar with him. I need to discover and re-discover who Jesus really is and what he is like and get in touch again with how he wants to shape my life. I have discovered that I have a real need to go back to the Jesus of the Bible and try him again for the first time. How about you?

We have studied a lot of heady theological stuff here today. But the thought that this Jesus – God with skin and bones actually loves us is incredibly moving. I hope you can really grasp this truth this week. To think that the one who created the universe and holds it together actually cares about us is a mind boggling thought. I hope you can understand how much God cares for you. To think that this Jesus died and rose from the dead so we could be forgiven is an amazing thought. To think that God loved us so much that he sent Jesus into our world to help reconcile us to himself is overwhelming. Jesus would rather die than spend eternity without you. I hope this week that truth really sinks in.

An old theological professor was asked after his years of studying Jesus, what was the most profound thought he had ever encountered. He paused for a minute and then replied – “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so”. I hope this week you will try Jesus again for the first time.