

God Incarnate

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[0:00] Well, we're on the lifelong quest of getting to know God. We're using J.I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*. And the lesson last week was so critical in this matter of knowing God, that if we're going to know God and worship God aright, then we must limit ourselves to what God has said about himself.

We can't imbibe our imaginations about what we think he is like. Or what we think God ought to be like. Or what we would want him to be like.

We do so to our own peril. Isaiah 29.16 says that we inevitably turn things upside down as though the potter were thought to be like the clay.

So when we start trying to figure out God with our own mind, we turn the tables and we make him out to look a whole lot like us. You thought I was altogether like you, he says in Psalm 50.

You're mistaken. I'm not like you. There's none like me. So in this issue of knowing God, we're shut up to God's word, his own word about himself.

[1:18] We're to leave our originality, our creativity at home and to be content simply to think God's thoughts after him.

That's what we have in scripture. His own thoughts revealed to us. And so we don't want to bring some original thought about God. We're content just to think God's thoughts after him as we receive his word.

To go beyond what is written then is to start to fashion an idol in our minds. And as we saw last week, idols always obscure and detract from the glory of the true God.

They don't enlighten or enhance his glory as it is claimed. They darken and hide and soon will not be worshipping the only true God, but rather a God who only exists in our own imaginations.

So let's conduct a test. Let's give an assignment to 100 of the world's smartest people.

[2:25] Let's put them on this earth and tell them that they can only use their minds and their observations of what they see and think on the earth and to tell us who God is, what he's like.

That's your assignment. How many of the 100 will get it right? Zero.

Well, let's take the next generation and take the 100 smartest of the next generation and give them the same assignment. How many will get it right?

Who God is? What is he like? The assessment of the word of God in Romans 3.11, quoting from the Old Testament, there is no one who understands, none who seek God.

Man left to his own thought would never come to the knowledge of the one true God. Paul's indictment on human wisdom is found in 1 Corinthians 1.21.

[3:36] The world by its wisdom did not know God. So where is the wise man? Where is the scholar?

Where is the philosopher of this age? Well, God's put them all to shame, you see, as they continue to come up empty on the most vital question of all. What is God?

So man starting from himself can never reach up to the right knowledge of God. Worldly wisdom doesn't lead us to the knowledge of God.

It rather leads us astray from the true knowledge of God. Man's mind is fallen. He's darkened in his understanding.

And that's true even though God has placed us and these hundred smartest people on a planet that he made and that is everywhere displaying his eternal power and his divine nature.

[4:39] And over their heads is the heavens that are day and night shouting that the hand that made me is divine. And still, man with his unaided reason does not get God right.

Paul says in Romans 1, what happens when you've got man with his unaided reason set down in this earth with all of its testimonials to the glory of God?

What happens? Well, they suppress the true knowledge of God seen in creation. They pervert it and distort it. They discard it as something not worth keeping. They exchange the truth of God for a lie. They exchange the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

And they end up worshiping and serving the created things rather than the creator. So, God displays his glory in the heavens.

[5:40] And what does man do? With his unaided reason, he bows down and worships the sun, worships the moon, looks to the stars for guidance in his life, hugs a tree, and generally worships created things rather than the creator.

So, general revelation, the revelation that God has made generally to all men in nature is insufficient in and of itself to lead fallen man to the right knowledge of God, to get to know God. No, for that we need special revelation. We can't know God unless God tells us about himself in words, verbal revelation.

And that's what he's done in our Bibles. God has given us his written word that we might know him. That was last week, chapter 4. And so, we were challenged.

If we would know God, we need to spend much time in his word where he tells us what he's like.

But he's done more than give us his word. Today, we'll see that God has also given us his son that we might know him.

[6:54] And then next week, chapter 6, we'll see that God has also given us his Holy Spirit that we might know him. So, it's the whole question in these three chapters are being answered.

How is it that we come to know God? Well, only through the scriptures, by scriptures informing our minds, by the son that he gave to us that we might know him, and by the spirit.

So, today, he helps us, he brings us to get to know him by giving us his son, his one and only son.

So, we come to chapter 5, entitled God Incarnate.

Now, most of these chapters of Knowing God were taken right out of a monthly publication of the Evangelical Magazine in Great Britain. Only later were they collated into one book, put in the cover of Knowing God.

And it seems that this chapter must have been published in a magazine around December, because it has a very Christmas flavor to it. But the truth of it is timeless, and we'll do good to study it in May.

[8:07] Packer begins by considering some of the stumbling blocks that people trip over when considering the claims of Christianity in the Bible. So, you've heard them, things that are too hard to believe.

Take the death of Christ, to believe that by the death of that one man, the eternal destinies of an innumerable amount of people will be changed forever from hell to heaven.

Just by that one man's death. That's too incredible to believe. Or the resurrection of Jesus. How can a dead man come alive to never die again?

It simply doesn't happen in this world. It's completely outside the realm of our experience. As is the virgin birth. I mean, how could such a biological impossibility ever occur on our planet?

And then his miracles, the multiplying of the bread and the fish, his walking on water, his raising the dead. These things are just too incredible for many to believe.

[9:14] So, they don't. They reject Christianity out of hand. Now, Packer says, what do we do with all these objections to Christianity and to our message?

Well, he says that, in fact, the real difficulty is not any one of these at all. The real difficulty, the greatest stumbling block of all, is with the Christmas message of the incarnation.

That Jesus of Nazareth was and is both God and man. That Jesus is at the same time, both God and man, is the deepest mystery of Christianity.

And it's this mystery that Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah Witnesses, and liberals of all stripes refuse to believe.

And so stumble into hell. Because Jesus says, if you do not believe I am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins. And so they don't believe that he is God.

[10:22] Now, all of these other difficulties usually spring from unbelief in the incarnation. When the incarnation is believed, then all these other difficulties seem to be dissolved and just go away.

In other words, if Jesus of Nazareth is just a man, then indeed, it is difficult to believe all that the New Testament says about him. About him. And what he did.

But if he is God, then there's no problem believing it at all, is there? I mean, it all makes sense then, and it all fits together. If he is God, the creator, and without him, not anything was made that is made, then it only makes sense that he should be able to make a few more loaves and fishes. Or that the water should obey his will when he walks on it. He's the creator, after all. And it knows and responds to the creator's will and wishes.

And if he's infinite God, then it's not hard to believe that his death has infinite value to save all kinds of people.

[11 : 32] As many people as trust in him will be saved through the merits of his blood, because it's infinite blood with infinite merit. And if he's God, the author of life, it's not difficult to believe that he should rise again after dying.

The greater mystery is that the author of life should ever die at all. And Packer sums it all up this way. The incarnation is in itself an unfathomable mystery, but it makes sense of everything else that the New Testament contains.

So, what's the problem with Christianity before men? They have all their objections, but Packer says, the real linchpin, the one right down at the bottom, is they don't believe that Jesus is God. Because that would unravel all the other problems. So he's choosing his fight carefully. He goes for the jugular, if you will. To win this battle is to win the whole war.

To gain this point, that Jesus is God, is to gain all the other points along with it. So, he comes to the Christmas story.

[12 : 42] And he says the details of it are well known to us. They're given in Matthew and Luke's Gospel. But his real concern, and the real concern of the New Testament, is the identity of that child.

And he has these two basic points to make about who this baby is. Number one, the baby born in Bethlehem was God. He tells us that the scriptures refer to Jesus not as a son of God, but as the son of God.

And it stresses the uniqueness of his sonship. Now, we all who have trusted in Christ have become sons of God, children of God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

So, we have become sons of God, adopted sons. But we are not to be confused with the son of God. There's only one of them.

The eternal son of God. So, that's the language the New Testament uses. The son of God. And when the New Testament speaks of the son of God, it's referring to him being fully God.

[13 : 55] Now, he wants to demonstrate that. Because Jews and Muslims rightly understand the New Testament's claim, that Jesus claimed to be fully God. And so, what they say is that you and I are polytheists.

That we believe in many gods. More than one God. We have two gods, at least, when we talk about God the Father being God, and Jesus the Son of God being God. They say, well, then you've got two gods.

And so, they understand the claim of the New Testament correctly, in that Jesus is God. But they come to the wrong conclusion, that that means that we have more than one God.

Others say the fact that he's called the Son of God, implies that he's less than God. I mean, you've got God, the big guy, and then you've got the Son of God, something inferior to God.

Not quite on the same level as God. The Arians and their stepchildren, the Unitarians, the Jehovah Witnesses, the liberals of the day. So, Packer turns us to John's Gospel.

[14 : 56] Let's turn to that opening chapter of John's Gospel. And where Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with the story of Christmas, of the Incarnation, John omits that.

By the time John writes, he already knows Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel, record those facts. He doesn't need to repeat them. Rather, he jumps immediately to, who is this child?

The one in the manger. He shows us who this baby is. Now, the first title that he gives to Jesus is not the Son of God, but it is the Word.

The Word. Let me just turn you to chapter 20 and verse 31, where we see John's, the whole aim, the purpose for John's Gospel being written.

Why is he writing this Gospel? Well, he's dealing head on with this issue of who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Chapter 20 and 31. He says in verse 30, Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

[16:22] That's his full deity name. And that by believing, you may have life in his name. So, he's writing to convince his hearers that Jesus is the Son of God, that promised Messiah who is God, so that by believing on him, they might have life.

Now, that phrase, the Son of God, had a connotation on it in John's day. The Jews used this title, the Son of God, as a title for the Messiah that they were waiting on, but it was a purely human Messiah.

And so, they too used the phrase, the Son of God, but by it, they thought of a human Messiah. The Greeks of the day were using, in their mythology, they had sons of God as well.

The products of some heavenly deity, having relations, physical relations, with a human woman, and thereby, the child that came from them was a Son of God.

So, you had these wrong views of this phrase, current in the day. And John, as he starts his gospel on who Jesus is, wants to steer completely clear of these misconceptions of what the Son of God means.

[17:40] And he will show us that it means nothing less than the full deity of Jesus. Now, notice, as I said, the first title he gives him is not the Son of God, but the Word.

The Word. In the beginning was the Word. Now, in the Old Testament, the Word was always the way that God expressed himself. He expressed himself through the Word.

He told us his mind. How do you get to know God? He speaks, and the Word reveals him. And so, Jesus is the expression of God. Jesus is God revealing himself.

And so, notice the things that are said about the Word in these opening verses. First of all, in the beginning was the Word. So, he's already there at the beginning.

What does that mean? He's eternal. That's something that's only positive of God. He is the eternal God. In the beginning, when other things got their beginning, he already was.

[18:43] Number two, he's personal. Because in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. He's with God. He's the person who's with another person.

And here we have the mystery of the personal distinctions within the one Godhead. Verse two goes on to say, he was with God in the beginning. So, there's more than one person here.

There's plurality. Thirdly, we see his deity. And the Word was God. The end of verse one. He's with God, but he's not non-God or a lesser God.

He is God. And so, each phrase is just packed with a new reality about this baby, Jesus of Nazareth. He's eternal.

He's personal. He is deity. Though he's distinct from God with his own personality, he is God. And so, John wants us to know right up front, the one I'm writing about is God from the beginning.

[19:51] Furthermore, he's creator. Verse three. Through him, all things were made and without him, nothing was made that has been made. He's God's agent in creation.

He is not created. He's the creator. He's the life giver in the fifth place. Verse four. In him was life and that life was the light of men.

In him was life. Created things do not have life in themselves. They are given life. They have life through this person.

But in him was life. He is the word who gives life. And then he's the revealer referred to here as the light of men.

And verse 14 tells us he is incarnate. That this word of whom I've just spoken became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the father full of grace and truth.

[21:03] So the word is fully God. He partakes of all the attributes of God. And so these statements rule out a mere human Messiah which was the expectation of the Jews and they rule out some intermediate which was the Greek mythology of the day that he is a son of God.

Some superhuman being that is that is neither God he's not quite there but he's more than man so he's one of these intermediaries. No, he is God.

Later in verse 34 of this same chapter John will call him the son of God. So the word is the son of God.

Everything that's said about the word is true of the son of God. So whenever we hear this word the son of God John is telling us he is God. Fully God.

The baby in the manger is Emmanuel God with us. Now that's just half of the story. The other half the baby in the manger was God made man. He's really human.

[22:14] The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. So in becoming man he didn't cease being what he always was God.

He remained what he was God but now he also becomes something that he had not been yet man. So the incarnation is not subtraction it's addition.

He doesn't subtract his deity to come down and become a man. No, there's no subtraction in the incarnation. It's all addition. He is God. As much God as the Father and now remaining as much God as the Father he becomes as much man as you and me.

It's addition. He takes on to his divine nature a human nature and they're mysteriously woven together in the one person.

Two natures in the one person and that not just for 33 years but forever and ever there is a man a real man at the Father's side this morning who's been tempted in every way as we are and so he's able to help us in our temptations.

[23:27] He's able to save us as the one mediator between God and man. Now if you have trouble understanding this Packer says get in line. He doesn't even try to explain it.

He says the scriptures don't explain it to us. They just state it. So it is ours to believe and to wonder at to adore to worship and if we will only believe what we understand fully with our mind then we will remain unbelievers all of our life.

The most critical truth about God you cannot fully understand that God became a man but you must believe it in order to receive eternal life.

That's why John wrote his gospel that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God the son of God and that by believing you might have life in his name.

Well some people see that God is Jesus is God and Jesus is man they see those claims in the Bible in the New Testament and they try to understand it.

[24:42] And so they come up with their theories that Jesus emptied himself of deity when he became man. The kenosis theory and Packer goes into great detail to shoot that right out of the water Jesus didn't empty himself of deity if so then we don't have a divine savior.

If he doesn't have all the attributes of deity then he's less than God. If he emptied himself of some of his attributes then how here's the point here's why Packer is arguing so strongly that Jesus did not empty himself of some of his attributes as God.

Because if in becoming man Jesus emptied himself of some of his deity then he's less than God.

And what does that have to do with a book about the knowledge of God?

what's the connection? Well the implications for knowing God are profound because to yield this point is to yield the fullest revelation that we have of God.

The revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. So we've looked at general revelation and man left to himself does not come to know God by his own reason.

[26:04] We looked at special revelation in scripture that God tells us about himself in the scriptures and we'll see more of our need for God even in doing that. But turn with me now to Hebrews 1 where we see that he's also given us the son to reveal himself to us.

And it is absolutely important that we understand who this son is as God if we would have a right concept of who God is. So Hebrews 1 and verse 1 it's talking about the different ways that God has revealed himself to us and he says and the writer says in Hebrews 1 1 in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways but in these last days that's from the time of Christ's birth that started the last days 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. So you see the two different ways of revelation that he's speaking of.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets and so he told us who he is. through the prophets. He spoke his word to the prophets and we have the prophets words.

That's one way he revealed himself. But now in these last days he's spoken in a different way. He's spoken to us by his son through his son. He not only tells us about himself he does something even better and fuller.

[27:51] He visits our planet in the person of Jesus Christ and in Jesus he shows us what God is like. For Jesus is God.

And that's what he emphasizes in verse 3. The son is the radiance of God's glory the exact representation of his being. And the rest of Hebrews upholds his full deity.

Hebrews chapter 1 I mean even calls him God down in verse 8. All the brightness of God all the glory of God shines out from him who is the radiance of his glory.

Colossians 1.15 adds he is the image of the invisible God. So God is invisible. How will we ever come to know him? Well he sends us prophets and the prophets tell us what he's like.

So we have our Bibles. We have our Old Testaments. Oh but then in the fullness of time he sends his son that we might see him.

[28:57] This invisible God has now become man that we might see him and learn of him. Who he is. What he's like. He lived among us for 33 years and the one who lived among us was not some lesser God.

He is the image. The exact representation of the invisible God. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

There's no aspect of Godness that is lacking in Jesus Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. Colossians 2.9 So that's revolutionary.

This invisible God who tells us what he's like now comes to us and shows us what he's like. And the representation between Jesus and God is so exact that if you have seen Jesus you've seen the Father.

That's what he told Philip. We looked at it last week so we won't go to John 14 again but Jesus said if you've seen me you've seen the Father. If you really knew me you would know my Father as well.

[30:12] So how do we know God? Well we saw last week through the scriptures it's God's word to us and if we would know him better we ought to spend time in the Bible.

And now this week we learn how do we know God? Well he visited us in his son. So if we would know God better we need to spend time with Jesus. God incarnate.

And in knowing him you'll know God for he is God. He is the word of God the expression of God the perfect representation of God.

He's God's last word to us. Prophets yes many times many different places but now at the end the last word. He gives us his son the fullest the brightest revelation of himself.

Look at John 1.18 again we're talking about how do we know this invisible God and John and Hebrews John 1 and Hebrews 1 have many similarities and here in verse 18 after telling us who the son of God is who Jesus the babe is the word become flesh he says in verse 18 no one has ever seen God but God the one and only who is at the father's side has made him known.

[31:46] So who's best qualified to teach us about God? Nobody's ever seen him except for one the one who's in the father's side in the father's bosom we speak of bosom buddies the closest relationship and there for eternity the one and only son was in the bosom of the father lying on his bosom the closest relationship he's right there with him forever and ever and then he came down to show us and tell us and to reveal God don't you think he's qualified to do the job?

He's been with him for all eternity and now he's sent and what does he do? He who is at the father's side has made him known it's the same Greek word from which we get the word exegete exegetis what's exegetis?

It's something preachers should do isn't it? We know that much well it's what a preacher does in his study first of all and it simply means to get to the meaning of the text to uncover the meaning what does this verse mean?

That's exegesis ex is out and it's to draw out of the passage the meaning not eisegesis where we read into the passage our thought but to draw out of the text itself what it means that's exegesis and what this verse is telling us John is saying that Jesus has exegeted God to us he has come and told us what he is who he is so that we understand God just like I trust that you understand something more of John 1:1 when we draw out of the meaning I trust that we understand more about God when we see and listen to Jesus Christ who is God he has made him known he has made him clear he has made him understood that's what Jesus does not just to Bible passages but to God himself he exegetes

God he's the explanation of God so no one has ever seen God but he has and he makes him known to us no one knows the father except the son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him so he comes from heaven to do so isn't that a wonderful thing when we're talking about knowing God that God has sent his son that we might know him I have an uncle who lives in Washington Illinois I like for you to know him and so I tell you all about him I say he's about five foot seven he's got silver hair he's a very friendly guy he's loving he's kind he's nearly blind he's a good storyteller he's got a great sense of humor he used to do an impersonation when we were kids of

