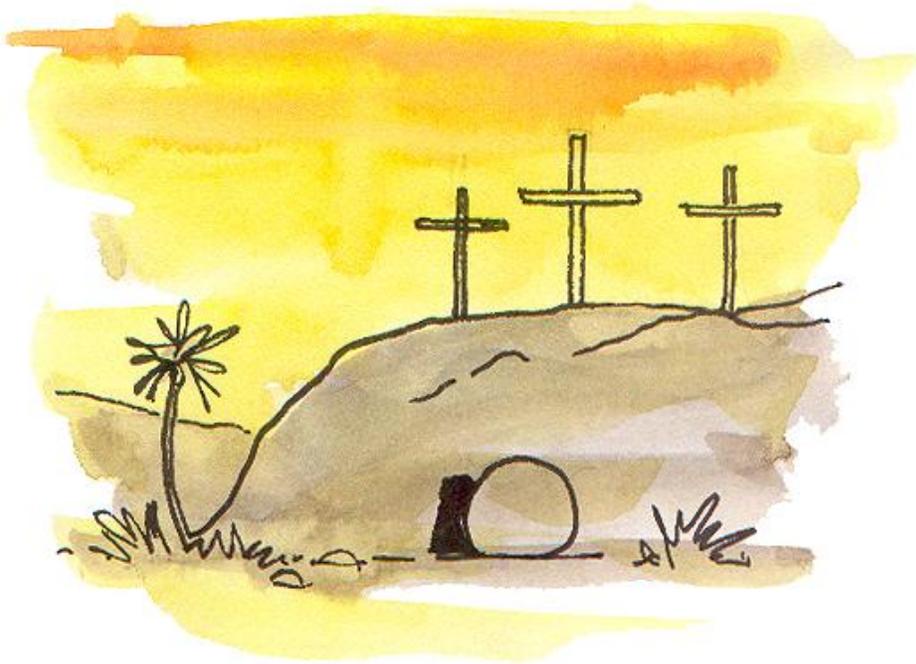


THE MAN OF THE MILLENNIUM



*A series of sermons by
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The Man Of The Millennium - Chapter 1

"The Pre-Existent Christ"

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Turn with me in your Bible, in the New Testament, to the Gospel of Luke. This is not our text for today, but it is an introduction into what we'll be looking at in the weeks that lie ahead, as we study the Person, and the work, and the character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke chapter 24 - it's only but one verse that I want to read with you - Luke chapter 24 verse 18, and you'll remember that this is after the crucifixion, the death of our Lord Jesus, and now He has been resurrected and He's on the road to Emmaus. There are two who meet Him on that road, and we know the story that He walks with them, and He talks with them, but they don't know - they don't recognise - the Lord Jesus Christ. They turn round to Him and ask Him a very strange question in verse 18: 'And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?'

I wonder as we sit, and as we look forward into the future of these studies in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we ended our message last Lord's day morning with the words of the Apostle Paul, when he said his wish was that he may know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death. That was his desire, but I wonder are we like those on the road to Emmaus, like Cleopas - and as we look into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ through the word of God, through the scriptures - do we see the Lord Jesus Christ as a stranger? We may be saved, we may be born-again by the Spirit of God, we may know the word of God, but is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ - not simply what He has done, but who He is - is that strange to us? Do we really know what He is all about? We're going to look in these next few weeks at 'The Man Of The Millennium'.

Leonardo Da Vinci, just before he was about to depict the face of the Lord Jesus Christ in the fresco of The Last Supper, he himself went into solitary confinement. He bowed before the Lord, and he prayed, and he meditated before he would paint the face of the Lord. And after some time in prayer, meditation and fasting, he arose from his secret place, from his closet, he lifted his brush and was about to give expression to his devout thoughts of the Lord Jesus - but his hand trembled. He couldn't paint. And I trust, as we come to look at the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that his attitude will be our attitude that is befitting as we look into the face and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we consider His perfection, His suffering, as we begin to unveil His blessed Person. And my prayer for us all today is that the Holy Spirit, whose delight it is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to as many as will come unto Him, that He will let His glory shine before us and into our hearts.

We're looking today at 'The Pre-Existent Christ'. What does that mean? Well, it simply means His existence before He was born. The poet Milton put it like this: 'Before He forsook the courts of everlasting day and chose with us a darksome house of clay' - before He took upon Himself the form of man, the flesh of man, before He became a human being, before the incarnation that we've been thinking about at Christmas time. It's put well in an old Latin inscription that's been chiselled into marble, and it epitomises the teaching of the pre-existence of Christ so well - listen to this carefully, this is what it says: 'I am what I was, God. I was not what I am, man. I am now called both, God and man'. You could put it like this: that the Lord Jesus Christ - He became what He was not, but He did not cease to be what He always was. He became man, He was clothed in the likeness of sinful flesh, human flesh, with human blood, human bones - all that it entails to be a human being, He took it upon Himself, He became what He never had been before, yet He never ceased to be what He always was - God of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ - I'm sure I don't need to tell you - was unique. He was unique for many reasons, but one of the reasons is this: that every man that has ever come into the human race, every man had a beginning, every man had to enter into birth and into the world as a new being, but His birth was not like that. His birth did not mark His origin. Only the Lord Jesus Christ could say, 'My life did not begin when I was born', only the Lord Jesus Christ could say that He had a pre-existence, that He was before He was born into humanity. Now let's think about this, for I believe we live in an age when people don't like to think, and people live from the media - from sound bites - and even in education now they don't learn anything, but they're given everything on their plate. But if we are to understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is and what He has done, we must use our mind by the help of the Holy Spirit. How could there - think of this - how could there have been an incarnation if Christ did not previously exist? How could there be a Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - if there was no Son of God before He was born to the earth? If Christ did not exist before Bethlehem think of the implications of it! I believe, that we would be of all men most miserable, that our Christianity would fall to pieces, that the structure and skeleton of our faith and everything that we believe would plummet, and would be buried dead, because it would be meaningless.

But what is the reality? What does the Bible teach about the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ? Someone has put it like this, that 'He in His blessed body, in His blessed person - the Lord Jesus Christ was the meeting place of eternity and time. He was the blending of deity and humanity. He was the junction of heaven and of earth'. But if we look at the history books, and if we look, sadly, at the history of the Christian church, we see that not everyone believed this. We see that there were many - and they were called heretics - who believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was not God. They believed, perhaps, that He was an angel, perhaps, that He had some existence in the past, but at some point in history, in eternity past - if I can say it - He had a beginning, He was created, He was made.

In the 4th Century AD there was a man called Arius, and believe it or not he was an elder within the church in Alexandria, a presbyter. And he began, within his church, to teach that although the Lord Jesus was the Christ, although He was the Son of God, He could not be co-eternal with the Father, but He was only a creature. Believe it or not, we have Arianism with us even today - we can see it in Unitarianism, we can see it in some of the cults that knock your door month after month. And 'Yes, there is something special', they say, 'about the Lord Jesus, there's something different' - maybe they'll give Him the title 'Son of God', maybe they'll give Him the title 'Angel of Jehovah' - 'but He is not God of God, He is not co-eternal'.

But what can we know - because what is important is not what men say, and not what the history books say, but what is important is what God says, and what the Lord Jesus Christ has said of Himself - what can we know about the Lord Jesus in His pre-existent state? Well, if we go into the Old Testament Scriptures, we find there a verse that we have repeated over the past few weeks about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in Micah 5 and verse 2, this is what it says: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel', listen to this, 'whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting'. Way back in the Old Testament Scriptures, in the book of Micah prophesying the birth, not just the place where the Lord would be born - but he actually tells us, the Holy Spirit of God through the prophet Micah, that this one that would seem to have His beginning in this little stable in Bethlehem, that He is from of old, from everlasting. I wonder are we like Pilate today? You remember as the Lord Jesus Christ stood before Pilate, and as Pilate was hearing all the accusations of who this man said He was, and what He did - and then he was hearing all the accusations of the Jews, that He was an imposter and a blasphemer - Pilate looked square into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ and said to Him: 'Whence art Thou?'. Who are You? Where have You come from? Where has Your existence begun?

Turn with me for a moment to John's gospel chapter 8, for it's important that we know these things and we know what we believe. John chapter 8 and verse 57, we'll begin at verse 55 to get the context, and the

Pharisees, as you'll remember, many times were astounded and astonished at what was coming from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. For at times it seemed to them He was claiming to be God, He was claiming to be the Son of God, and here they're astounded again when He says: 'Yet ye', verse 55, 'have not known him; but I know him' - speaking of Abraham - 'and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am'. You'll know that the word 'I am' was the Old Testament name for God that was given to them in the book of Exodus, the covenant God, the eternal Jehovah, Yahweh, the One who was, the One who is, the One who ever shall be - eternal. And here, as the Lord Jesus Christ looks into the face of His accusers, He says, 'I am He - Jesus, Jehovah, Salvation. The One who was, and because I am the One who was I can remember Abraham, I know Abraham, I talked to [Moses] through the burning bush'. Before Abraham was, He was.

But turn with me again to John chapter 17, for we have here the Lord Jesus Christ praying to His Father just before He was about to leave earth, to die, to be resurrected and then ascend to heaven. And if you were to go home and read this whole chapter, chapter 17 of John, you would see here that as the Lord anticipates His departing from the earth He begins, in prayer before His heavenly Father, to yearn for the glories of the relationship that He had eternally with His Father in heaven. But, oh, that relationship - it had been interrupted, it had been interrupted when He took upon Himself flesh and came to the earth, and left heaven. But as we look at Him here, we see in verse 5 that He says this: 'Lord, Father, glorify thou me with the glory I had with thee before the world was'. Did He begin in Bethlehem? Did He, as some say, at His baptism take upon Himself, when the form of a dove came upon Him, the Holy Ghost - did He become the Son of God then, when His Father said 'Behold, my beloved Son' - is that when He became the Son of God? No! 'Father, glorify thou me with the glory that I had with thee before the world began'.

Look at verse 24, He talks about the love that he had for His Father, and the love that His Father had for Him, and He says: 'For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world'. What do we know about Him? You don't need to turn to it, but if you were to go back into your Old Testament and to Isaiah chapter 6, we read there the account that in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah says 'I saw the Lord, I saw God and He was high and lifted up, and His glory filled the whole of the temple' - and you remember it says that he fell on his face, and he worshipped. Many have speculated who that was. Was it the Father that was seated on the Throne? Was it the Holy Spirit? Was it the Trinity that was there, that we believe in? But if we go into John's gospel again and chapter 12:41, John tell us, 'These things said Isaiah, when he saw his' - Jesus' - 'glory, and he spoke of him'.

What is the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ? Did His life begin in the manger? Did He become the Son of God at some point in His life? Was He only an angel that God had blessed - He had a beginning, He was created at some time - is that what the word of God teaches? No! The word of God teaches that He was the throned King of kings and Lord of lords. The word of God teaches that He was the Word of God, the Logos, the expression of God - John 1 verse 1: 'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God' - look down the chapter - 'and the Word became flesh', Jesus Christ, 'and dwelt among us, (and we beheld him, even the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth'. He is the Son of Man, He said in John 6, 'I am that bread from heaven, the manna from God sent down from above'. He began - He was up there without beginning, coming down to this earth. He said, 'I am the sent one, I am come unto you that you may have eternal life and I know whence I came and where I go'. Look at the book of Hebrews, read it from cover to cover, and you will see there that the Lord Jesus, He is portrayed as the revealer of God, the brightness of the glory of God, the express image of the person of God. He is described as the Creator of the universe, that without Him - the Lord Jesus Christ - was not anything made that was made. I believe this: that it is not so much His pre-existence that we believe in, but it is His co-eternality. Oh, sure He may have pre-existed, but He may have been created at some point - and we don't believe that. The

Bible teaches that He is co-eternal with God, for He is God! Without beginning or ending of days, God of God, Light of Light.

You see, what He was like before He was born into this world is described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9, listen to it: 'He was rich'. Can you grasp that? How was He rich? You know, many-a-time the Lord spoke of His home with His Father, and He talked about My Father's house - and He was rich in His Father's house, because in His Father's house He had home-love. He said, 'Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world', and there in that home, in that relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there was perfect, unblemished, holy love reciprocated from one to another - a relationship that we cannot understand, and will never be mirrored in any family on earth. That's how rich He was - He was rich in His Father's house because it was a home of harmony, and He said in His prayer that 'I and my Father are one'. Unity! Sure, weren't They united in redemption - the Father planned it, and the Son said 'I will go', and He yielded to its plan, and the Holy Spirit vented and bent all His fire and power in executing that salvation on you and on me.

Did He not pray for us, that we all may be one as He and His Father are one? But in His home, He was rich - not just because of the love and the harmony, but because of the resources and the riches that He had there. Do you remember when they came for Him in the garden of Gethsemane, like He was a criminal or a robber, and Judas had betrayed Him - and He turned to those who came for Him, and said, 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than 12 legions of angels'? That's how rich He was - that He had whatsoever He desired, whatsoever He asked - so much so, that He says to us as His disciples, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you'. Oh, there was nothing refused the Son in the heavenly home, there was such perfect love, such beautiful, tranquil harmony there in heaven - but this is the wonder of wonders of the gospel, the message of condescension: that He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The hymnwriter put it like this:

He left His heavenly crown,
His glory laid aside.
On wings of love came down,
And wept, and bled, and died.
What He endured no tongue can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell.

Now don't think this: when He came to this earth, He didn't lay aside His deity, or He didn't cease to be what He was, but what He did do was: He became poor. He laid aside the splendour and the prerogatives of deity, He chose not to exercise His infinite power, He covered over and [closed] His supreme majesty and glory, He renounced the glory of a heavenly being for all that He became - a man. The amazing thing about the Lord Jesus Christ coming to earth is not only the fact that He came to die upon a cross - but grasp this: it is amazing to me that He came to be born...to be born! He gave up riches, the riches of a heavenly life, for the oblivion of an earthly human birth, the humiliation of poverty stricken and sorrowful life - but this is the wonder of wonders, Christian today: He being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! Oh, I can't understand this. What love, what boundless love, from heaven to a manger, from great riches to the poor, my Saviour came to seek and save. From the azure walls of heaven, to a sin cursed world - what redeeming love there was that He left the ivory palaces, all that He had there, He laid aside so much, and humbled Himself to be cursed by the curse of our sin at Calvary! Who is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Isn't this wonderful - what Jesus did to save your soul from hell! And if you're not saved today, oh I hope you can see it, and I hope it touches your heart to see the love of God, in Christ, for you!

But let me say this, in closing, you know the first appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth was not in the virgin birth. If you go into the Old Testament scripture you will read about 'theophanies' - and that simply means this 'appearances of God'. You have it in the burning bush, you have it in the angel of Jehovah that came to many of the prophets and men of God of old. And that was the Word of God, the Son of God, the manifestation of God to human beings, it was the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-existence. But when Christ was born, listen to this: He assumed upon Himself humanity, not simply the form of humanity, because He came as that before - but He came in the flesh, and the perpetuity of humanity, everything that humanity entails, except sin, He came as. He could have come as an angel, but if He had come as an angel He couldn't die - and if He came as an angel, He couldn't bleed, He couldn't be the substitute for human beings, He couldn't die for our sins. As Hebrews chapter 2 says and verse 14, 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil...For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered...he is able to succour them that are tempted'. What a Saviour we have!

No angel could our place have taken -
Highest of the high, though he be.
The loved one on the cross forsaken,
Was one of the Godhead three

Our Father, we thank Thee that we know that the Lord Jesus came from heaven. We remember that Adam had a body prepared for him before he had life, but the Lord Jesus Christ had a body prepared for Him from all eternity, that He might come to take upon Himself flesh, that He might take upon Himself our sin. We thank Thee that He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End - and may we as we see Him, as well as saying that He is altogether lovely and we worship Him, may we rest in the joy of who He is. Part us now with Thy blessing we pray, in Jesus name, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2000

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The Man Of The Millennium - Chapter 2

"The Deity Of Christ"

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Now turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews and chapter 1. And as I've already said this morning we've been looking at a series of studies entitled "The Man of the Millennium", looking at the person, the character and work of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. We've looked already at the subject of "The Pre-Existent Christ", who He was, and what He was before the world began, and before He came into human flesh here upon the earth. We're going to look this morning at the subject of "The Deity Of Christ". If you don't know what that means, that simply means this: how the Lord Jesus Christ was, and is, God. So let's look at Hebrews chapter 1 together, verse 1: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Then turn with me - keep your finger in Hebrews chapter 1 - turn with me to the book of Romans, Romans chapter 9 - Romans chapter 9 and verse 5, we'll read from verse 1 to get the context. Paul says: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

Let's have a word of prayer together: Our dear Father in heaven, we come before Thee and we ask for Thy help - we need Thee as we turn to Thy word. And Lord we hear the word to us, that came to Moses: 'Take off the shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground'. Lord we are on holy ground when we consider the person of Thy Son, we pray that we would be reverent as we walk, as we think, as we meditate, as we contemplate the great Saviour that we have. May He come, may He presence us by His Spirit, Amen.

Who was the Lord Jesus Christ? This is a question that many ask - in fact the Lord Jesus Christ asked it Himself: 'What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?'. He asked His disciples on occasions: 'Whom do men

say that I am?'. And the question that echoes across all of humanity and all of our world today - there cannot be another important question, more [important] than this: 'Who was Jesus?'. For if Jesus Christ is not God, if He is not deity, then Christianity is the greatest farce that has ever appeared upon the face of the earth. Our faith is a farce, everything we believe - and in fact, what we are as Christians, as Christ's ones, as the followers of Christ, are nothing more than idolaters for worshipping what is only a mere man. But if He is God, then those - whether in religion, or philosophy, or downright atheists - are the profoundest of liars and blasphemers that the world has ever seen. But worse than this: if Jesus Christ is not God, then He is a blasphemer - He is an imposter and He is a liar! If He is not God then He certainly is not good, but He was either a liar or a lunatic.

I hope you can see that the deity of Christ is the key doctrine of the scriptures. You could almost say that there is not a more important doctrine within the word of God, than the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is testified to be God of very God. Reject it and the Bible becomes a confused fairy tale of lies. Accept it and it becomes the ordered revelation of God to all the world, to all men, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God the Son. The basis of Christianity is found in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, simply this: 'God manifest in the flesh'. Jesus, we believe, the word of God testifies, the church fathers have written: Jesus Christ is God displayed in the flesh.

There are many testimonies that we can read about Christ's deity - and in fact some unbelievers have tripped over themselves, even infidels have tried to out-do each other, in applauding the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to a few of them: Lord Byron, the poet, said this: "If ever a man was God, or God was man, Jesus Christ was both". Napoleon Bonaparte, the ruthless conqueror, said this: "I know men, and I tell you Jesus was not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions, but that resemblance does not exist. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions would die for Him". That's unbelievers now, but sadly admiration is not what the Lord Jesus Christ wants. And people across our world - whether in religion or academia - can praise this Man, who they believe is a man alone, but it doesn't matter, Christ wants our souls, not our admiration.

There's the testimony of unbelievers, but we find also the testimony of believers. Alexander White, the great Christian writer, said this: "The longer I live, the firmer in my faith I am rooted in the Godhead of my Redeemer. No one, short of the Son of God, could meet my case. I must have one who is able to save to the uttermost". We have the testimony of unbelievers, we have the testimony of believers, we have the attack of modern denials and unbelievers. Graham Scroggy (sp?), the great preacher, claimed that the last battle of the whole of the Christian age, as the first, will rage around the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen to some of the cults and what they say about our blessed Lord: Spiritism asserts that 'it is an absurd idea that Jesus was more divine than any other man'. Christian Science claims that 'Jesus Christ is not God, as Jesus Himself declared, but the Son of God'. Seventh-Day Adventism says that 'Christ inherited a sinful nature' - and that's a quotation, and what they do is deprive Him of His Godhead, His deity, and debase Him to the level of a sinful man like you or I. Jehovah's Witnesses boldly state, I quote: 'Jesus was not God the Son'. Christadelphianism, on the upsurge at the moment in our province, denies the deity to Christ in these words: 'Jesus is the name of the virgin's son, and not that of an eternally pre-existent God who came down from heaven and in some mysterious way became incarnate flesh'.

Do you see now why so many in our world, the ordinary man in the street, is confused about the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is this man? What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He? Is He the mere son of human flesh, or is He the Son of God? Many voices in our new world clamour for our attention and our instant allegiance without thinking this thing through - and so many sign the card of this religion or the other religion - and maybe even we do it in our own faith, we adhere to these things without thinking them through with the word of God open before us. I want us to meditate on Hebrews chapter 1, if you turn to it with me,

as we look, not just at the testimony of Christ's deity from unbelievers and believers and even the modern denials of those that do not believe who He was, but I want us chiefly to see this morning the testimony of the holy scriptures - the word of God. Now let me say this, as we have read in the book of Romans, that the testimony of the Bible is emphatically and dogmatically: 'Christ who is God over all, for ever praised. Amen'.

Look at Hebrews 1 for a moment, look at verse 2, this person - speaking of Christ: 'Hath in these last days [God has] spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds'. Now this is the first thing I want you to notice from Hebrews 1: He - the Lord Jesus - is the revelation of God. God, who in the Old Testament and in other dispensations, spoke to mere men and mortals and those that cried on His name, by prophets and all sorts of ways - God now comes to a dying world and speaks to us through His Son. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. Now I don't mean this: I don't mean that He's merely the instrument by which God speaks to us, but I mean that His very character, His very person, the essence of His being is the very character of God, by which God speaks to us. Christ is the full expression of the Father's heart. What is it that John said in chapter 1? In the beginning was the word - we thought about it a few weeks ago - the word was with God, the word was God. What is a word? A word is the expression of our thoughts and our feelings - you could say that a word is the expression of what we are inside. And Jesus Christ as the incarnate word of God was the expression in flesh, in humanity, of what God was and who He is.

Isn't it wonderful? Look at verse 2 and 3: "[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" - verse 3 - "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." - verse 10 - "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands". Not only does the Lord Jesus display the revelation of God, but He displays the very power of God! What does the writer to the Hebrews say? 'By whom he made the worlds...upholding all things by the word of his power'. Listen, the Lord Jesus Christ is and was the Creator of all things. He is the sustainer, the upholder of all things - all that exists in our universe owes its existence to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the originator and the Lord of all the universe and all its laws. He is its bond of unity, He is its axis of harmony, He is the Creator - God blessed for ever! He displays the mighty power of God. Verse 3 says that He is the express image of God's person, it says that He's the brightness of God's glory. Not only is He God's revelation and the power of God displayed, but He Himself in His bodily form manifests the glory of God!

I want you to think about this. He is the brightness of God's glory - do you know what the word 'brightness' signifies? It means to send forth a light, a light radiating from a luminous body - and if you think of a luminous body, like a torch, as being God and the light that comes from it is the expression of what He is and who He is - that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the out-shining of God's glory, Christ is the divine glory - that Shekinah cloud that rested upon the tabernacle is fully manifested within the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glory of God which no man can see, and no man can live, shines forth in the fullness and the perfection of His blessed Son.

Oh, can you see the matchless character of Jesus? Can you? There is no one like Him. Pilate said, and asked: 'This man, is He not without fault?'. Do you see the masterly teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ? They said: 'Never a man spoke like this man'. The common people heard Him gladly, His words were like honey as they fell from His lips. Do you know what Charles Darwin said - and you know who he is, he thought of the theory of evolution - he said this: 'A man shipwrecked on an unknown coast and desert island should devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary has reached there'. What did he mean? He meant that the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ was masterly, the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ was revolutionary and transforming in its substance, that the world, now even - with His teaching - as it was in the Acts of the Apostles, is being turned upside down, by His masterly teaching.

Do you see the marvellous influence of the Lord Jesus Christ? What do I mean? Well Socrates, the great philosopher, he taught for 40 years. Plato taught for 50 years. Aristotle for 40. Jesus Christ for 3 - and He transcends the 130 years of the others combined! He wasn't an artist, but the greatest artists in the world have painted some of the fairest paintings of Him - Raphael, Michelangelo, Da Vinci - all of Him, the greatest works of art. He was not a poet, He was not a musician - but Dante, and Milton, and Shakespeare could all bring, [or] they thought they could, exhaustively in their words what they thought of this blessed man Jesus Christ. Haydn, and Handel, and Beethoven, and Bach - they all resounded this great man.

But sure, He was only a carpenter in Nazareth, wasn't He? Was He? Could a mere man have this matchless character? Could a mere man emit such masterly teaching and have such marvellous influence as this blessed man had? Methuselah, we read about in the book of Genesis, he lived for 900 years - he never said a word worth writing down - he lived nine centuries and never did a single act worth repeating! But He lived 3 years - the Lord Jesus Christ lived 3 years in the face and publicity of the world - He split time in two, and the world has never been, and will never be, the same again.

Look at Hebrews again, verse 3 tells us: 'Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high'. He is the express image of God's person, that is why He can sit at the right hand of Majesty. Do you know what that Greek word 'express image' means? It has the idea of a mark left by a seal, or by a stamp. The literal translation is that He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the very impress of His substance - the Lord Jesus is God in essence. What did Wesley say? 'God of very God, Light of Light'. He's not simply the Son of God - but He's God the Son, God the Son.

But look again at verses 8 to 10 of Hebrews: 'But unto the Son he saith' - this is God the Father saying to the Son - 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord...'. In verse 8 the Father calls the Son 'God', in verse 10 the Father calls the Son 'Lord'. Can you see the majesty of His person?

The New Testament writer here quotes Psalm 45, and Psalm 45 is one of the most definite statements regarding the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, where the Father testifies to the Son openly that He is God! You can say all you like - whether it's the Spiritists, or the Christian Scientists, or the Seventh Day Adventists, or the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Christadelphians - no matter what it is, you can say all you like, for God says to His Son: 'Thou art God, Thou art Lord!' Christ is the supreme Sovereign, and His kingdom, and His government, and His reign shall know no end. And if you look at verses 10 to 12 you can see the immutability of His person: 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail'. The writer quotes Psalm 102, He speaks of Jehovah's immutability, His unchangeableness - how all may change, but Jehovah never changes - but he applies it to the Lord Jesus. 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee' - he is laying down that all may change, but Jesus never! He changes not, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And because my Lord never changes, His ability never abates, His character never changes, His faithfulness never fails, His perfection never perishes and His virtues never vary. In Him, blessed God-man, there is no shadow of turning for He is very God of very God - do we not, this morning, want to fall at His blessed feet and say with doubting Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!'. He is the Alpha and He is the Omega, He is the beginning and He is the ending, the first and the last - He is eternal God! He has the divine prerogatives of creation, He is life-giving, He can say 'Have life', He can say 'Thy sins be forgiven thee', He can pronounce judgement, He can receive worship!

There is a theory among theologians concerning the second chapter of the book of Philippians. That where it speaks of the condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it says these words in verse 8: 'He humbled himself', they read it that He emptied Himself of His deity. What do we think of that? We think nothing. For He could never cease to be what He always was! He humbled Himself, but He never ceased to be what He was in nature. For if you look at Philippians chapter 2 and the [sixth] verse, you'll see this 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider it equality - to be grasped at'. We thought, the first week of our studies, that in eternity past He was rich - but for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. But do not, for one moment, think this: that Christ Jesus was stripped of His deity - never! But He voluntarily, of Himself, suspended the use of some of His divine attributes - for a season - but He never ceased to possess them! They may have been veiled, but believe you me they were there.

Do you remember - let's think - do you remember how He exercised His power over nature? How He exercised His power over demons, over angels, over disease, over death? Because He is God! He is omnipotent, all-powerful - 'All power is given unto Me', He said! Do you remember how He said, and John said of Him in John chapter 2:24, that He knew all men. He could see what they were going to say before they said it, He could see with His 'laser' eyes right into their hearts and souls - the depths of their person and motives. He knew all men, He was omniscient, all-knowing. Do you remember in the great commission? He declared, 'Go you into all the world and preach the gospel, and lo, I am with you always!' He was omnipresent, and that is why we can say that we know He is with us! Only God could create the world! Only God could raise the dead! Only God could judge a world of sinners! That is why, when His disciples and helpless sinners fell down before Him and worshipped Him, He received it.

Let me ask a few questions as we finish. He was the One who said, 'Before Abraham was, I am' - could a man say that? He was the One who said to the Lord, in prayer, 'Glorify Me with the glory I had with Thee before the world was' - can a man say that? He was the One who said, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest' - could a man say that? He said, 'Which one of you convinceth me of sin?'. He said, 'I will come again!' - could a man say that?

Why does He need to be God? Could He not just be a good teacher, or a prophet? Would it not satisfy Christians if He was simply a good man, that was an example for all the world? Why does He need to be God? Let me tell you this: He needs to be God because I want a God to be my Saviour! The Unitarians say - and this is a quotation - 'I am my own saviour'. God help them! For I don't want a mere man as my Saviour, I want the greatest kind of Saviour, and only God can save me to the uttermost! Only God can forgive my sins. Sure they asked Him, 'Who can forgive sins but God?', and He forgave sins because He was God!

Why does He need to be God? Because the world needs a Saviour God. I don't just need Him, you don't just need Him, but the whole dying world - where the anarchists cry 'Let social order go!', where the criminals have no responsibility for their existence, where the poor are struggling, the masses are fighting against injustices and inequalities, the academia are testing everything under the microscope to see if it be so, and modern society in all of its finery and dignity of neo-new-paganism, and atheists by the ton around us, and a planet with an aching void of agnosticism in the depths of its soul - who do they need? Do they need a man? Do they need a prophet? Do they need a teacher or a leader? Who will we give them? Will we give them the Christ of the philosophers? Will we give them the Christ of the theologians? Will we give them the Christ of academics? Or will we give them the Christ of God, from the gospel? You see the world needs Him. The world can't have a man, they must have the God-man.

But finally, only a Saviour can change your life - [a Saviour] that is God. Only God can save me, He did so many miracles in creation and everything else, but one of the greatest miracles is this: the miracle of His

grace. That He redeems, He can save all kinds of men everywhere - good and bad. The self-sufficient: the one who says, 'I don't need God. I'm good enough, I go to my church, I do everything well' - God saves that man, but it needs God to save him. The person who is moral, who thinks that they live uprightly, who thinks that they do their neighbour no wrong - it will take a Saviour who is God to save them! A chemist can take the black oil and make it clear, transparent paraffin - that's what the chemists can do, and the scientists - but it takes God to make a sinner clean. It takes a Saviour who is divine! Only God can make a filthy drunkard a missionary, or a pastor, or a church leader! Only Christ, who is God, can take Saul, a bigot and a murderer, and make him the greatest apostle! Only God can take John Bunyan, a drunkard and a swearing rogue, and touch his heart, his mind, and his tongue to write Pilgrim's Progress. That's why the Psalmist cried: 'This poor man cried and the Lord heard me!'. Have you heard this cry: 'Jesus, I'm a drunkard, can You make me sober? Jesus, I'm unclean, can You make me pure? Jesus, I'm profane, I'm a blasphemer, can You help me pray? Jesus, I'm lost, can You save me?'. Yes He can, for He is God - God, blessed forever.

Christian, think of this for a moment: you're going through sickness, you're in hospital, there's problems in the family, there's problems in the home, there's problems in the mind - who do you want, a man or God? I want God. I want God with us. I want the God, the omnipresent God-in-man who can say, 'I am with thee always, even unto the end of the age' - that's who I want. I want the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. I want Him.

He had no cornfields, He had no fisheries - but He could spread a table for 5000 and have bread and fish to spare. He walked on no beautiful carpets, or velvet rugs - but He walked on the waters of Galilee, and they supported Him. And when He died, few men mourned for Him, yet the sun was darkened with a black mourning garment. When He hung upon that cross, few men shook and trembled for their sins - but the whole planet quaked as they realised - the whole of nature - who it was that was dying, God forsaking God! Who can understand it? Corruption couldn't get hold of His body, and the soil that had been reddened with His dear, ruby blood could claim it in the dust - but it couldn't claim His body! He wrote no book, He built no church, but He changed the world! Could only the son of Joseph and Mary do that? Was it merely the blood of a man that was poured out at Calvary? What thinking human being can keep from exclaiming 'My Lord and my God'!

Let me finish with this story. When Julian the Apostate, who sought to destroy Christianity, was on the march in his empire - there was a member of his army who was a Christian. And he was being tormented by the rest of the army, and one man came up to that Christian soldier and said this, 'Where is your carpenter now?'. His answer was this: 'He's making a coffin for you and your emperor'. A few months afterwards Julian received a mortal wound in battle, and realising that it was his death, he took his hand and dipped it into the blood of his wound and he threw it up, toward heaven, exclaiming as he did so: 'Thou hast conquered, oh Galilean!'.

He is our Lord, and He is God - blessed be His name. Let us pray together: Oh Jesus Christ, Thou Son of God and Son of Man, Thy love no angel understands, nor mortal can. Thy strength of soul, Thy radiant purity, Thine understanding heart of sympathy, the vigour of Thy mind, Thy poetry. Thy heavenly wisdom, Thy simplicity - such sweetness and such power in harmony. Thy perfect oneness with Thy God above, the agony endured to show Thy love; Thou who didst rise triumphantly to prove, Thou art the living God - before whom death and hell itself must shake and move. Thou Son of God, grant us Thy face to see, Thy voice to hear, Thy glory share - never apart from Thee, ever Thine own to be, throughout eternity.

Our Father we thank You for the One, having not seen, we love Him. He is the altogether lovely One to our souls, and Lord we thank Thee that He was not a mere man, but He was God - and as God, we fall at His feet

as dead, and we worship Him. Take us now to our homes in safety, we pray, in that lovely name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2000

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The Man Of The Millennium - Chapter 3

"The Humanity Of Christ"

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Now let's turn in our Bibles to the reading for our subject today, Philippians chapter 2, Philippians chapter 2 - and let me say that there isn't much practical implications of the messages that I'm bringing to you in these weeks, as we study the Man that made the millennium, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are studying His character and His person, but the reason for doing it is not that you go away from the meeting and say, 'Well, what am I going to do now? How am I going to change my life? How am I going to obey what I've heard in the word of God?', that's not the purpose of these studies. They're not studies of exhortation, but they are studies of devotion. In order to understand this blessed Person whom we say is our Lord and our God, in order that we may be drawn in worship to Him - if there is any purpose that I want out of these studies, it's this: that we will be caught up in love, and wonder, and praise of our blessed Lord Jesus. Let us read this passage together, beginning at verse 5 of chapter 2: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

Our Father, we pray, as we come to Thy truth now, that the Holy Spirit would reveal Him whom He delights to reveal - the Lord Jesus Christ. Fill, we pray, with Thy Spirit, in Jesus name, Amen.

The humanity of Christ - I mentioned, I think it was last Lord's day morning, that in the 4th century AD there was a man called Arius who was a presbyter, or an elder if you like, of the church in Alexandria. And he began to propagate the view that Jesus Christ, though he was the Son of God, could not be co-equal with His Father - and therefore He must be regarded as, not God, but simply a creature, a great creature He may be, but only a creature. Arianism, as it was called, could be classified as the ancestor of modern Unitarianism today. Then, also in the 4th century, a man called Apollonarius (sp?) - bishop, or elder of Laodicea in Syria - wrote against Arianism and other heresies that were around in his day, but in his zealotry to maintain the truth that Christ was God he went overboard, and said that Christ had a human body but He didn't possess a human spirit. That's a warning to us all: that in our zealotry to counteract false doctrine we need to beware that we don't go overboard to the other extreme. And what Apollonarius was saying was this: that because Christ Jesus did not have a human soul and spirit, he was denying His true and complete humanity. Then in the 5th century, another man called Nestorius, who was a church father in Constantinople, he taught that Christ was both God and man, but that Christ consisted of two separate persons - two people, and at one moment in Christ's life the God-person would come upon Him, and at another moment the man, Christ Jesus - His humanity - would be displayed. Instead of two natures, he taught two people in the figure and in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this same era of time lived a man called Eutychios, he was a monk in Constantinople, and he was such a zealous foe of Nestorius, who said that there were two people in Christ, that he proposed that the human nature of Christ was absorbed into His divine nature - in other words, the two became a cocktail, and you couldn't tell what was divine or human, they were both mixed together.

Now the early church met these heretics with four adverbs, which briefly and conveniently define what the two natures of Christ are, and how we are to understand them: that He is both God and man. They said this: that when the Word was made flesh, the divine and the human natures were united, truly - remember that word - truly, that was to oppose the Arians, who said that He was not God. Then they went on to say: that the two natures of God and man were united in Christ perfectly - that was to oppose the Apollonarians. Then they said: that the two natures were united undividedly - that was to oppose the Nestorians, who said that there were two people in the person of Christ. And then fourthly, they used this fourth adverb: unmixed - to oppose the Eutychians. If you didn't understand all that, don't worry, because I find it hard to understand. But what I do understand is this: that from the dawn of time, and from the birth of Christ, men and women have disputed that He was God and He was man.

This man that I mentioned, Apollonarius, bishop of Laodicea, said that Christ couldn't have a human soul, because he believed that the soul was the seat of sin - and therefore the sinless Son of Man couldn't have one! We could sympathise with that - it's not right, it's false doctrine, but we can understand how a man, in his logic when he's trying to put these two things together, that Christ was God and Christ was man, can come to logical conclusion like this. Christian Science believes what Apollonarius believed then - and you find that there's nothing new under the sun, and everything that was believed then by the false doctrines [is] around today. Christian Science says this: 'Christ is spiritual, He was a spiritual body, not a human body' - and they deny the reality of the Lord's physical body and His true humanity. And this is what the word of God says, John the Apostle in 1 John 4 verse 3 said it to the heretics then, and we can say it to them now: 'Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: this is the spirit of antichrist'.

So if that is what the Bible does not say about the Lord Jesus, what does the Bible say? And what do we believe? Someone has said this: 'We allow His humanity to fade away before the majesty of His divinity'. We get so taken up by the fact that Christ is God - and He is God - that we ignore the fact that He is described as the man, Christ Jesus. What does the Bible say about His humanity? Let me go through a few things, and if you're taking notes I would advise you to do it. He is man, because the word of God says He has human ancestry - you go through the Gospels, particularly the first chapters, and you see that He was born of the virgin Mary, He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. The Gospels refer to His brothers, and His sisters, and His immediate family - and we read in the beginning chapters of the Gospels, His genealogy and lineage is fully recorded and outlined for us there. He had human ancestry.

Secondly, He had a human appearance. If you think of John chapter 4, so far as the woman of Samaria was concerned, Jesus was - at first glance - just another hated Jew for her. There was nothing special about His appearance, nothing unusual about Him. You remember the two dispirited disciples that walked along the road to Emmaus, and they recognised Christ who was with them, only as a stranger - another fellow citizen - and they couldn't understand why He hadn't heard what was going on in their home town. Even after the resurrection, you remember, Mary mistook Him for the gardener, when the disciples returned from their fishing expedition, they mistook Christ for simply another man - all of which combined to bear witness to the humanness of the physical appearance of Jesus Christ. That is why Isaiah said this: 'He had no form or comeliness, that when we should see Him we should desire Him'. He had human ancestry, he had a human appearance.

Thirdly, He had a human constitution. And that simply means this: that the Lord Jesus Christ possessed all the central elements of human nature - whatever it is to be man, apart from sin, Jesus Christ was that. We are made up - we are tripartite beings - we are made up of three things: body, soul and spirit. All human beings are made of those three things. If you look at Matthew 26, you find the Lord speaking of His body, He said: 'For in that she hath' - speaking of Mary anointing Him - 'she hath poured this ointment on my body'. You read of Him speaking of His soul in Matthew 26, 'Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful,

even unto death'. And then in Luke chapter 23, we read of His spirit: 'And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'. Remember when He addressed doubting Thomas - what did He do? To show that He was risen from the dead, He appealed to His humanity, to the reality of His human body as a basis for the belief that He had risen from the dead: 'Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself, handle Me and see'.

Now we need to be careful, because when we distinguish between a human nature, we need to make sure that we distinguish between a human nature and a sinful nature. They're two different things. You see, human nature did not need to be sinful in nature! Sin is not a necessary element of human nature, but it is a Satanic intrusion within the Garden of Eden, into the soul of men. He was human by His human ancestry, by His human appearance, by His human constitution - but I want you to see this: also by His human reputation. He called Himself the 'Son of Man'. Now often people think that this proves Christ's humanity - the title 'Son of Man' hasn't really much to do with Christ's humanity, it's a prophetic title that was given to the one, the Messiah who would come and fill up all the prophecies of the prophets in the Old Testament. You find in the book of Ezekiel and the book of Daniel, that both Ezekiel and Daniel are called 'Son of Man, Son of Man, Son of Man', because of the prophetic nature of those books. But innate within that title the 'Son of Man', it must give a reference to His humanity, because a prophet had to be human. Also, Christ was designated not just man by Himself through the favourite title that He had, but He was designated man by others.

Let me say this: if Christ was not human - listen to these biblical truths that are at stake - the death of the Lord is at stake, because only a human being can die; the resurrection of the Lord is at stake, because only a [human] corpse can be resurrected; His claim to Messiahship disappears, because the Messiah had to be a man; His fulfilment of the promises to be the descendant of David to sit on the human throne - it's obliterated! His offices of prophet, priest and king disappear; the virgin birth is a farce - the fulfilment of these Scriptures: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed' - there would be a seed, a human seed, that would conquer Satan. And even after His resurrection, Christ Jesus went out of His way to prove the genuineness of His human body. Listen to the titles that we read of Him in the Gospels: Son of Man; the Man, Christ Jesus; Jesus - just 'Jesus', and some people despise calling Jesus simply 'Jesus', but don't despise it, because it identifies Christ with your humanity! - the Son of David; Man of Sorrows.

But fifthly, not just a human reputation, about what He said about Himself, and about what other men said about Him: but we read within the word of God that He had human infirmities. You see, scripture provides abundant evidence that our Lord was subject to all the ordinary, sinless infirmities of our human nature. This is mind-boggling, listen to this quote: 'There is not a note in the great organ of our humanity', says one writer, 'which, when touched, does not find a sympathetic vibration in the mighty range and scope of our Lord's being - save of course the jarring discord of sin'. Like every other man, He hungered - you read about it in Mark 11:12 - but you know the word of God, God's revelation, says that God is never hungry. But Jesus hungered. After a strenuous day's work and travel, it says in John 4:6, that He was weary - but God, the word of God says in Isaiah 40, can never be weary: 'Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding'. The Gospels tell us that He slept, yet the Psalmist tells us that God neither slumbers nor sleeps! The Gospels tell us that He was moved with compassion and sympathy, that He wept. The Gospel tells us that He craved human sympathy, it tells us that He was tempted - yet James tells us that God cannot be tempted! He was a man whose eyes flashed with anger over the desecration of His Father's house, and the hardness of His people's hearts. And finally of all, John 19 tells us this: that He died - and God cannot die. He had human infirmities.

But sixthly, He had human limitations. Now we need to think [about] this, and grasp this: that although - as we studied last Lord's Day - the Lord never gave up anything of His divine powers, one of the ways in which

He humbled Himself, that we've read about in chapter 2 and verse 8 of Philippians, is to become subject to human limitations. As a child, He submitted to the ordinary laws of human development. He - the word of God teaches - learned knowledge as the other boys and girls of His day did, and Jesus increased, it says, in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man - He learned! Like ourselves, He was not self-sustained - what do I mean by that? I mean this: that we read of God that He has life within Him - He doesn't need life from an outside source - He is the source of life! But we read within the Gospels - and this is mind-blowing! - that Christ needed prayer and communion for support of His spiritual life, and in all of His great life's crises He resorted to prayer for guidance and for strength - because He was subject to human limitations of power. Hebrews 5 and verse 7, listen: 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared' - Christ was in the garden, I believe, and as He was looking forward to what He would suffer at Calvary, there in Gethsemane He was near unto death and He feared that He wouldn't get to Calvary! - and He had to pray to God to strengthen Him to get Him through it. The Bible teaches that He did not exercise His omnipotence that He had, but He exercised prayer. He obtained power, never from His divine nature, in a human sense, not from the divine works that He performed - they did not come from within Him, in a sense, but they came out of prayer to God. Read how many times He looked up to heaven and prayed!

Now, it's confusing, very confusing. And I look at this, and I say to myself, 'Well' - like these heretics of old, you try and legitimise it, and logicise it, and work it all out in your mind, and you say - 'How could He be God yet have these limitations?'. But the fact is this, and we've looked at this verse three weeks in a row, but it gets deeper in our understanding as we look at the Christ: 'He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor'. He voluntarily subjected Himself, not to use these things, as part of His humiliation.

And He went, seventhly, through human suffering. Think of this: though He was God's Son, He did not exempt Himself from suffering - and the very fact that He was a sinless human being, I believe, made Him more sensitive to pain. And being in agony, He sweat as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground - Augustus Strong says this: 'Because Christ was God, did He pass unscorched through the fires of Gethsemane and Calvary? Rather let us say, because Christ was God, He underwent a suffering that was absolutely infinite'. John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, said this: 'He suffered not as God, but He suffered who was God'. And, with the exception of being sinful, everything that can be said about you and I as human beings could be said about Jesus Christ.

Now, I want us to turn now to look at how the two natures of Christ relate to one another. You see, we read within the word of God that this man, Christ Jesus, was God manifest in the flesh. Wesley put it like this:

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,
Hail the Incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.

God with us. The Belgic Confession of AD1561 put it like this: 'We confess that He is very God and very man. Very God by His power to conquer death, and very man that He might die for us'. Daniel Webster, the great statesman, was one day dining with a company of literary men in the city of Boston, and the conversation turned upon Christianity - and as the occasion was in honour of Mr Webster himself, he was expected to take a leading part in the conversation. And he frankly stated, around that table, his belief in the Godhood of Christ, and his dependence upon His atonement. A Unitarian minister opposite him said this: 'Mr Webster, can you comprehend how Jesus Christ could be both God and man?'. 'No, Sir. I cannot understand it', replied Mr Webster, 'and I would be ashamed to acknowledge Him as my Saviour if I could comprehend it! He could be no greater than myself, and such is my conviction of accountability to God, my sense of sinfulness before Him, and my knowledge of my own incapacity to recover myself - that I felt I need a super-human Saviour!'

Now I'm not going to say that I can explain the two natures of Christ to you, because if I could I would be as great as Him. But one thing I know is this: that I need Him to be God and man! You see, it's just as wrong to say that Christ was God and yet not man, as it is to say that He was man and yet not God. The first thing I want you to notice about the two natures of Christ is this: that they are mysterious. What did Paul say to Timothy, 1 Timothy 3 verse 16: 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh'. Now what is the mystery? The mystery is this: that I can't pluck a plant from the soil, or take a beast from the field, or a bird from the air to illustrate to you in some natural way how Christ can be both God and man in the one person. What I would do by doing that, would be to confuse, rather than clarify. And we must therefore do something - it's very hard for us, as sinful human beings, to do this - we must admit that we can't understand it. It's like what we were talking about - the Trinity - you don't understand it, but it's in the word of God so you believe it! We talked on Monday evening about God being sovereign, and choosing men for salvation - but we also saw that we have a responsibility to believe and obey the Gospel. We can't understand the two, we can't reconcile it - and we cannot reconcile the two natures of Christ in God, but it's in the word of God and we believe it!

The two natures of Christ are mysterious, but the two natures of Christ are actual. Some believed He was a ghost, He just looked like a man - He was God, but He was an angelic figure, He wasn't flesh and blood like you or I, but you've got to see this: Jesus was truly God, and whatever it is to be God, Jesus is that absolutely - but He was equally man, and whatever it is to be man, without sin, He was it! His humanity and His deity were distinct, separate, each nature retained its own normal attributes. Two natures, not two persons, two natures in the one person. James Stocker (sp?) put it like this: 'Christ was not half a God and half a man - He was perfectly God and perfectly man'. The divine didn't permeate the human, nor did the human be absorbed into the divine - it wasn't a shaken-up cocktail of a mixture, and God and man in the one person. That's not what it was - and the Son of God was not changed into a human being, nor did the man Jesus rise to the state of deity, as some believe - listen to what Spurgeon says: 'Remember, Christ was not a deified man, neither was He a humanised God. He was perfectly God and, at the same time, perfectly man'. Robert Clarke said this: 'As to His deity, He had no mother. And as to His humanity, He had no father'. And these two natures were so really bound together, as to constitute them in one person acting with a single consciousness, a single will. So we shouldn't really call Him both God and man, as if there were two persons residing in this body - but He is the God-man! And although He possessed these separate and distinct natures, He didn't act sometimes by His human nature, as a man, and other times by His divine nature only - He acted in all things as one person! Let me illustrate it for you: He's asleep in the stern of the boat - why is He asleep? Because, like you after a day's work, He's weary. He's lying in the stern after a day's service - and in a moment around Him, there's a squall that rises, a storm. And the raging storm bursts, and the disciples panic and waken the Saviour - and, in a moment, He stands and stills the raging storm! Thus the reality of His humanity is seen against the background of His divine power and prerogatives.

Chrysostom, the great church father, put it in a beautiful paragraph, and I want to read it to you: 'I do not think of Christ as God alone, or man alone, but both together. For I know He was hungry, yet I know that with five loaves He fed 5000. I know He was thirsty, and I know yet that He turned the water into wine. I know that He was carried in a ship, yet I know that He walked upon the sea. I know that He died, yet I know that He raised the dead Himself. I know that He was set before Pilate, and I know that He sits with the Father in His throne. I know that He was worshipped by angels, yet I know that He was stoned by the Jews. And truly, some of these I ascribe to the human, others to the divine nature - for by reason of this He is said to have been both God and man'. So we cannot say that when Christ stilled the storm He was divine, and when He was asleep in the boat He was human. He was human, because in everything He did He was the God-man, two natures in one person - you can see it in John 3 verse 13, where we read this: 'He that came down from heaven', Jesus Christ, 'even the Son of man which is in heaven'. Do you know what that's saying? That where He stood, and in John 3 where He utters those words, at the same time He is in heaven. Now you

explain that to me...the only way that it can be explained is this: that the two natures of God and man dwelt within this one single person. Richard Glover said this: 'Jesus Christ is completely God as if He were not man, and completely man as if He were not God'.

But let's see, again, the two natures are not only mysterious, but they're necessary - and this is so important that you grasp this, and if you don't listen to anything else I say all of today, listen to this: the value of the atonement, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, His efficacious shedding of blood on our behalf - it only makes sense if Christ is both God and man, because the atonement must have value for God, and have value for man. And had He only been man, His death would have meant no more than that of another martyr who gave his life for others. And if He had only been divine, He would have had no real link with humanity, and His death would have been devoid of any redeeming quality. But in the union of these two natures, the atonement, the death of Christ, becomes - not only available - but infinite in its efficacy. Apart from it, Christ could not have been a proper mediator between God and men, if He was not both God and man. The fact that He is both God and man is essential to His priesthood - because you must have a priest that is a man, He had to be a man to be a priest. He had to be God, however, to have an everlasting priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

Are you hurting today? Are you? Are you sad? Listen: His twofold nature enables Him to touch the worlds of both God and man simultaneously, and His deity affords Him an equal dignity with God, while His humanity gives Him a perfect sympathy with man! Listen: 'Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, or tested, he is able to succour them that are tested...For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted, and tested, like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need'.

Robert Stevenson was a famous Scottish engineer, and he was the grandfather of the well-known writer and author Robert Louis Stevenson, and a hundred years after his birth a great demonstration was held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to commemorate his death. And there was a huge procession with banners honouring the distinguished engineer, and in the procession was a group of peasants who carried a small banner on which was written the words: 'He was one of us'. They were citizens of the tiny village of his birth, and they had come to do him honour. They had a right to call him one of them because he was - really - one of them.

Back in 1959 a man called John Howard Griffin changed himself from a white man into a black man. And, feeling that he could never understand the plight of the blacks in America unless he became one of them, he darkened his skin with oral medicine, and sunlamp treatment and stains, and he became a black man. And he travelled through the whole of the south of the nation of America, and the results to him were unbelievable: he received treatment that was almost inhumane, there were vehicles which he wasn't allowed to ride in, there were restaurants he couldn't eat in, there were hotels he couldn't sleep in, there were toilets that he couldn't go in! He was persecuted, he was slighted, he was cheated - and Griffin wrote about his treatment in a book, and he entitles it this: 'Black Like Me'. And Jesus says to you today, 'I am human, like you'.

But suppose - and we're closing now - suppose He had been only human, only human. How could He have helped us? Because His sympathy would have been of little avail - we need not only human sympathy, we need divine power! And when we're assured of His human sympathy, we know that He's willing to help and save us. But when we are assured of His divine power - we know that He is able to save us! And His willingness, and His ability combined make Him our all-sufficient Saviour!

There was a Harvard graduate, and he was a man of letters - James Eds (sp?) - and he used to sell newspapers every day at the corner of 12th and Olive Streets in St. Louis, and he said this: 'I've begun selling

papers among the newsboys of the downtown streets because I want to be one of them, to share their trials, to better understand their lives that I may possibly benefit them'. Do you know what Napoleon said? He was no Christian...'The nature of Christ's existence is mysterious I admit, but the mystery meets the wants of man'.

Now let me - I said I was going to finish, but I told a wee lie there - just one more thing: the two natures of Christ are eternal, and this possibly is the greatest thing. Jesus neither laid aside His deity when He came to the earth, nor His humanity when He returned to heaven. He remained a man, and it's the teaching - the clear teaching of Scripture - that the Son of God assumed, forever, humanity of which He partook at His virgin birth, and His incarnation is in perpetuity - it's forever! Now listen to this: in the Ascension of Christ, humanity attained the throne of the universe! Forever, clasped permanently together in an eternal embrace that never shall be sundered, is the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ - and we can say 'Hallelujah', that there is a Man in the Glory.

The night was long, the shadows spread as far as the eye could see,
And I stretched my hands to the human Christ, and He walked through the dark with me.
Out of the dimness at last we came, our feet on the dawn-warmed sod,
And I saw by the light of His wondrous eyes, that I walked with the Son of God.

Lord Jesus, we fall at Thy feet, and we exclaim in worship and adoration, 'My Lord and my God'. And may, Lord Jesus Christ, we know Thee more, follow Thee more nearly, and love Thee more dearly - and help us not to squander the knowledge of Thyself that Thou hast given to us - and take us with Thy blessing now, in Thy dear name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2000

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The Man Of The Millennium - Chapter 4

"The Childhood Of Christ"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to Luke chapter 2 - Luke's gospel and chapter 2 - and we're going to begin to read at verse 40. Luke chapter 2 and verse 40: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Let us pray: Our Lord Jesus Christ we come before Thee, and we have read within Thy holy word of Thy blessed childhood. Lord we have found it, in weeks gone by, difficult to take in the magnitude of the incarnation of Thy being - yet Lord Jesus, we seek to understand Thee in the little measure that we can, to take strength, decipher guidance, and have blessing within our hearts, as we contemplate the holy Child, Jesus. Lord, give us of Thy Spirit, that we may say nothing amiss, that we may not speculate with our sinful imagination - but Lord that we would understand what Thy inspiring Holy Spirit would wish us to understand: that our Saviour was a child. For we pray in His name, Amen.

The words that we have read, in Luke chapter 2 and verse 40 right through to verse 52, is about all that we know from the word of God about the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, these few verses assure us of the fact of what we were thinking of last Lord's Day morning: that the Lord Jesus Christ was a man - He had a childhood. But what I want us to think about this morning is this: that although the Lord Jesus Christ was a perfect child, we must never forget that He began as a child. He didn't burst [in] upon the world as a full-grown human being, a full-grown man. He was not like the Greek demi-gods, who descended from heaven, and came in the being and appearance of a full-grown person with many supernatural powers and abilities. But the Lord Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, He actually submitted Himself, He humbled Himself to the sinless limitations of growth and development that we read about in this passage. Look at verse 40, it says: 'And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him', verse 52, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man'. He, the God of all time, the pre-existent Christ, the Divine, the One who always was, who is, and always shall be, the One who could say 'Before Abraham was I AM' - He submitted Himself to the limitations of growth and development inherent in the membership of the human race. It's amazing, isn't it?

But you need to be careful what you read about the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are many apocryphal legends, stories and fairy tales that are told. And like many other biographies within the word of

God, when you read them - about John the Baptist, and you read them about other characters and prophets and so on - you find that many of those other biographies give a feature, at least a cameo, of the childhood of the primary character of the book. They tell of his beginnings, but then they tell of how he grew into his infancy, into his childhood, and then into his youth as he matured. But within the gospel biographies there are no stories about a maturing child - and the silence of the gospel writers, I believe, is so significant when you consider so many of the stories that float about, about the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm sure you've heard of the Apocrypha - it's a part of the Scriptures that we do not believe in, the part that was rejected by the early Church as being not real, false, made up, speculation. But there are two apocryphal books that are entitled 'The Gospels of Infancy' - do you know what you find within them? You find stories about the Lord Jesus Christ in His childhood, and when other boys and girls ran at Him, or interrupted Him in the Nazareth streets as He was playing, He would look at them with disdain, strike them down in death. What blasphemous fables! Blasphemous nonsense! Attributing to the child-Christ puerile displays of divine power and even acts of vengeance.

But this is the reality - and this is sometimes the thing that we, as Christians, can't get our minds around when we talk about His childhood: that there are no extraordinary, amazing incidents recorded within the word of God. Why? Because none happened, none happened. The silence of the inspired writers assures us that His growth, His development as a child, was as a normal child - not as some youthful prodigy of God. There was nothing, nothing unnatural about the progress of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not advance in 'turbo' above all His fellows in His growth, or in His mind at that point in time. Yet, on the other side of the coin, He was not immature by one second, or by one day - but we simply take what the word of God says, 'He grew in body, He waxed strong in spirit, and He increased in the wisdom of His mind'.

Now the first thing I want you to notice is this: that He had a Nazareth home. You can turn to Luke chapter 4 - two chapters from the one that you're at, at this moment in time - and from verses 16 to 30, you can read when you go home, about the home of the Lord Jesus Christ in Nazareth. The word of God tells us that Nazareth was a small town, it was a despised village that was inhabited by a rough, wild, rugged, rustic people. This was the home of the Christ-child. Do you remember Nathaniel's question? 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'. And that shows you the mind of the Jews, as they thought about this hovel of a hole of a place - Nazareth - it was a place that nothing good could be spawned in. The word of God teaches us, contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, that Jesus Christ was the eldest of a family of at least eight, maybe more, children. Matthew names His brothers and His sisters, he says of His brothers, 'James, Joseph, Simon and Judas', and he adds 'and his sisters are they are not all with us'. Think of it: the little, despised, town of Nazareth, a large family within a little home - and in that Nazareth home, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal One, the Eternal Christ was being disciplined in the life of a common, large family living in a small hovel of a home, living in close quarters with sinful boys and girls. Yet He emerged out of His youthful experience with this record of Him: that He was without sin.

Do you remember your childhood? Maybe it's asking too much of some of you! But do you remember it? Do you remember the days where there was big families and small houses? And here we have that Christ lived in these humble beginnings, not in a palace, not in a stately home, not in a royal domain, but He lived in a little house.

And we read within the Gospels that the influence, and the example of the teaching of His holy mother upon Him, and upon His infancy, must have played an important part within the whole of His development as a human being. Everything indicates that Mary was a holy woman, a devout woman, one of these rare women that saw their calling as to bring a child into the world, and to bring it up in the way that it should go, in godliness and holiness. And she took as her calling the privilege to prepare a noble life before God - and she immersed herself in it! How different it is today: mothers in our world no longer immerse themselves in their children as much as they used to. Oh, they want to immerse themselves in their career - but Mary immersed

herself in the privilege of preparing the noble life of the Messiah! He lived in a small home, He lived in a despised town, He grew up under the holy hand and influence of Mary, that holy woman of God. And oh, some of us, we look at our beginnings - don't we? - we look at where we've come from, some of us are even ashamed to say where we were born, perhaps, or our family background - but I am tempted to say this, with the poet:

When I am tempted to repine
That such a humble lot is mine,
Within I hear a voice which saith,
'Mine were the streets of Nazareth'.

Think of this: Paradise, the Eden of God that was in the beginning in the book of Genesis, for a short space of time in the most despised place within Palestine, was restored in that little home! Have you got it? The Christ of God among men. And in Mary's home there was a holy hush, there was a holy reverence, there was a holy awareness of the presence of someone other - some transcendent being - though He was only a child, for that short span of His infancy, there within Nazareth, Eden was restored.

He had a Nazareth home. But I want you to see, also, that He had a natural development - this is important. You see, we read a few weeks ago, that it says of him that when He became human, He became man, He had to be made like unto His brethren - that means us. He had to be made like us in every single way, except for sin. Oh, grasp this: that He humbled himself, He submitted and relegated Himself to the level of the natural laws of a human baby! The poet says:

He came, but not in regal splendour dressed,
The haughty diadem, the Tyrian vest.
Not armed in flame all glorious from afar,
Of hosts the Captain, and the Lord of war.

He did not come in that way! He came as a child. He was neither premature nor immature. What I mean by that is simply this: that at five days old, He was just what a five-day old child should be - not a day more, not a day less. At 12 years old, He was just what a 12 year-old should be - not a year or two in advance, or in pre-maturity. No! But this Christ-child, the holy child-Jesus, you could take Him at any year of His life you like - He was neither a year younger, nor a year older in His appearance or His ability. As Paul said, like us all, when He was a child He spake as a child, He understood as a child, He thought as a child, but when He became a man He put away childish things - but never forget this: that my God and my Saviour was a child! Can you grasp that? He had a natural development and what that simply means, if I could break-up verse 41 and 52 for you - first of all it means this: that he grew physically, what does it say? 'The child grew, and waxed strong...Jesus increased in stature'.

Have you ever gone to a gallery, or to a foreign country, and you've seen some beautiful pictures - or maybe you've seen them in some Bibles - and they have this picture of the holy maiden mother and she is there, within the manger, and she holds that Child within her arms and roundabout her head, or roundabout His head, is this halo - this aura - of light. Blasphemy! To look upon, there was no ray of light, there was no holy halo. The fact is this: that if you were to go into a maternity ward today, and the Christ-child was there, you wouldn't be able to distinguish Him from all other boys, and all other girls - except for His sinlessness, He was the same.

Mothers think of this, think of this: you know what it is (I don't) to bring up a young boy (the girls are bad enough, but I don't know, you can argue about that when you get home: who's the worst). But think of this: to bring up the Christ-child. The poet said:

A Son that never did amiss,
That never shamed His mother's kiss,
Nor crossed her fondest prayer.

And no matter how good the child is that you have, or have reared before - no matter how many dreams that they have fulfilled for you - there's never been a child like this! A child that never did any wrong, a child that never brought a contradiction back to the request of a father or a mother - there's never been a child like this, who never failed to answer a prayer of a mother on her knees. She was never disappointed in the child, Jesus.

He grew physically, and it says, and it leads us to believe, that He grew to a well-built, well-formed, sturdy lad - who, I believe, delighted to climb, and would have had to climb the mountains around His home. Picture Him! Don't think of Him as something other, out of the universe, in this sense - as a boy. He was a lad, full of life, full of feeling, quick-witted, full of courage and of a warm heart. Can you see in your mind's eye: His keen-minded nature, His intelligence, His affection before His mother and His father, His sparkling eyed youth as He stood before them - all of their dreams encapsulated in a single body! He had within Him the fullness of life.

But never forget this: that the child Jesus grew at the same rate as other boys and girls. He was neither ascetic - and what I mean by this [is that] He wasn't some monk, who went away and prayed all day, He wasn't austere in His appearance, or devout, or some recluse that never played with the boys and girls. Neither was he stoic, and I mean unfeeling, cold to pleasure or pain. He enjoyed to play, He enjoyed the things of a full child's life in His youth. He was a normal boy, not some pretentious, eccentric, holy boy - He was a child. Physically, Psalm 45 verse 2 leads us to believe that He must have been an attractive child to look at, listen: 'Thou art fairer than the children of men'. The Gospels lead us to believe - as the temple guard exclaimed as he was about to arrest the Lord Jesus in John 7, 'Never a man spake like this man' - and I imagine that His child-like voice, even back then, must have been pregnant with the signs of the future richness and vibrancy that would reach the vast multitudes which later crowded around Him. And as He played the games, as He was in the playground, or in the home and He called to His friends, you could almost hear the future promise of the strength: that He would become the Prince of all preachers.

He grew physically, but it says this: that he grew mentally - look at the verse, 'Jesus advanced in wisdom', verse 40. He wasn't an 'adult infant', He wasn't born with the body of a baby, and the mind of an Einstein - but this Child was like any other child. He had to learn the power of speech, day by day He became familiar with the ordinary facets of human nature and knowledge - He even learned to read and write! It's possible to gain a little bit of knowledge about His education from the customs of the day in Jerusalem. As I said already, His first instruction would have been at the knee of His mother - think of it, think of it! The God-child learning upon the knee of a Hebrew, sinful maid! His devout mother would teach Him from the holy scriptures, teach Him to chant and to sing the Psalms, she would instruct Him in the highlights of Jewish history and the precepts of the law - the first five books of the Bible. She would show Him the Passover preparations, He would be told the whole story of the redemption of the Jews - and His education, and this is what I want you to get: it began at home! You have a duty, mother or father, and grandmother or grandfather, if your child is not saved you have a duty: tell your children and your children's children!

I wonder when Mary told Him of His birth. When she told Him of the words that the angel spoke to her on that day? I wonder when it started to dawn on Him - I don't know - but as we look at these verses together, we know this: that in His early childhood days His mother did not neglect Him, but His mother immersed herself in that Child. In the Jewish village of Nazareth, in a village the size that Nazareth was, there would have been a little school, it was called 'The House Of The Book'. And Jesus would have been sent along at the age of six, and the teachers would have been the rulers of the synagogue, and for five years - listen to

this! - the children would have memorized and learnt the Old Testament, especially the first five books of the Bible. Do you know what Josephus, the Jewish historian, said? 'The Jew knew the law better than their own name'.

Now this touches my heart - do you know what the first book they learnt was? It's the last book that we ever read, what is it? Leviticus - that's the one you always skip over, isn't it? That's the one you can't get through a chapter - these Jewish children learnt it! The first thing they learnt, at the age of six, was the book of Leviticus to study it, and to study the sacrificial rituals and laws. And I just wonder - I wonder - as the Christ of God as a child, as He looked through the book, and He saw the blood, and He saw the sacrifice, and He saw the substitution, and He saw the scapegoat - did He see Himself? [In] the words of John the Baptist, did He say to Himself, 'I am the Lamb of God, that will take away the sin of the world'? He, don't forget that He had no clouded vision of the future concerning God's divine plan, but within this Child there must have been growing convictions that He was the one with whom the five books of the law and all of the prophets would find their fulfilment in - the Messiah Child.

He would move, from the age of twelve, to another school. He would become what is called 'the son of the law' - it's the age thirteen today in the Jewish system, Bar Mitzvah. He would be robed in the garments of a man-child, and from then on He was regarded as a free moral agent - no longer a child, His parents were no longer responsible for His religious upbringing before God. Can you imagine what that would have been like? Because we are led to believe that when He went up to Jerusalem in this passage that we read, they were going to the Passover feast, and He was twelve years of age - He was going to celebrate His first Passover. He had been denied a university education - He wasn't like Paul you know, remember Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel - the Lord Jesus wasn't like that. But when He went into the presence of the doctors of the universities what did they say? 'How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?'. Think of this: what does the word say? 'He grew mentally'. Listen, there was never a day went by, not a day passed, that He did not learn, not a day that went by in school that He never paid attention to the older men that taught Him and spoke to Him. He was attentive at His lessons, whether at the synagogue or at school. He read every book that He could get His hands on that would bless His soul - but listen to this! It does not say that He was full of knowledge - for knowledge puffs up - but it says He was full of wisdom. And He had this divine ability to take what was knowledge and - as He changed the water into wine - change knowledge into wisdom. And Oh, if I could get what's in my heart to you today: Oh! That we would change our knowledge into wisdom! That we would obey the word! That we would live the word! Listen: the child Christ Jesus had got it even back there, that what He learnt was not for learning's-sake, but was for wisdom. Wisdom is to live by, not to crow about. Whatsoever things were true, whatsoever things were honest, whatsoever things were just, whatsoever things were pure, whatsoever things were lovely, of good report, He instinctively, immediately thought of those things. That was the whole wisdom both of the Christ as a child and as a youth.

The verse says this, 52: 'He grew with God and He grew with men'. Can you imagine such a child living in Belfast? And all the mothers are chattering and talking about, 'Have you seen that child, Jesus? The way He behaves, what He does, how He learns, how He is developing?'. And although He was like every other child except for sin, this character of the God-man was being manifested in Himself as the years passed by, in His purity, in His meekness, in His kindness, in His inherent goodness, and it caused Him to grow in favour with God and with men. Could you imagine this - now I know you can't imagine what God thinks - but just for a moment try and grasp this: as the Heavenly Father, for the first time in the whole of history, looks down and He sees the symmetrical, balanced development of the first ever human being. I'm sure that at that moment, His heart was filled with the words that He would later say: 'Behold My beloved Son, in Whom is all My delight'.

Think of the children - maybe there's some children here - think of this, children and young people: what age are you? I don't know what age you are, but think of it: Christ was your age! Have you ever thought about

that? Christ was a toddler! Have you ever heard a sermon on the teenage Christ? Or Christ the adolescent? Christ the student? Christ the apprentice in the carpenter's workshop? What are you going through child? Young person? Through exams, through turmoil of education, through the stress of teenage years - listen - Christ went through it all, yet without sin! That's the amazing thing about it! He was tested at all points like as we are, He went through it all, that when we go through it, He can help us. The poet put it like this:

Our God has sanctified all ages,
 He, not for twelve years, but for those long thirty-three,
 Dwelt in our world, the ever undefiled,
 Loving, obedient, gentle, stainless, mild.
 Exemplar He alike, to king and boy.

I want us, for a few moments in our closing, to look at the youth of Christ. For when He came to the age of twelve then comes in, not just the silence of Scripture, but we find the story that we read about in our passage - and we don't have time to deal with it all today, but we know this: that He was going up to the temple - and can you imagine what it would have been like? This country boy coming into the big city, and as they would have come, as a caravan, a train of people from Nazareth together, they would have sung the Psalms. And as they would have come to that hill, and seen on the temple rock that white edifice of the place where God dwelt on earth, can you imagine what would have come into His mind, and into His heart as the people sang, 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help'. Can you imagine that boy as He saw the spires glittering in the sun, as He saw the officaries of the priests within the temple court that were worshipping His Heavenly Father? Can you imagine what He felt when He saw the sacrificial lamb, when He smelt the incense ascending to Heaven - can you imagine? Can you? Oh, I believe that this must have been an epoch in the deepening consciousness that between Him and His God existed a relationship that was unique among men.

And then He gets lost, doesn't He? They've celebrated the Passover, and they can't find Him, and it says that they all went on their way home to Nazareth supposing Him to be in their company. And what used to happen was this: the boys and girls - I used to wonder about this were they not looking after Him right? - the boys and girls would have gathered together, they slept together, they played together in their own part of the caravan. Now think of this, before you point the finger at Mary and Joseph: this was a child that never caused them any anxiety at all. They had no need to worry where He was, He never wandered about, He never disobeyed them. But one moment they got to a certain point within in the journey, they realized He was not with them. And they went back, and it seems strange, it's not explained for us - but I wonder why they knew to look in the temple? And Jesus was almost as surprised that they didn't know where to find Him as they were that He wasn't in the train with them! And Mary turns to the child and what does she say? 'Why did you do this to us?'. Isn't that what you say to the child? You're worried, you're in the supermarket and you can't find it and then, when you get it, you blatter the life out of it! You thought something had happened to it, and then you make something happen to it! And she was so concerned, and Joseph himself, and it literally means this, you could turn it into the Scots translation: 'My bairn, why hast thou dealt with us?'

Now I think this is interesting: Mary came to Him and said 'Your father Joseph and I were looking for you'. And, if you look at the verse, Jesus turns round and He says 'Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' And at that moment - I don't know how much it had come to Him, but something was there within His consciousness that He was here - that He must be in His Father's house, this was a home for Him, He had to be about His Father's business. Now can I ask you this, it says within the word of God 'a child shall lead them' - and we are here this morning, and by faith we look at the Christ-child at twelve years of age, and I know He was God incarnate, but He was still a child, and He is so far exceeding our position in His spiritual understanding and wisdom and maturity - why? Because He knew that His life was to be about His Father's business. Do you? Can you say, like Christ, 'my meat, my fuel, my life's existence, everything that I am here for, is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish the work that He has given me to do'.

Oh, this is our hour of decision, for you'll not have an hour of decision in eternity for this, you'll not be able to surrender your will, or consecrate your life, or your hands, or your wealth, or your intellect, or your use, or whatever power God should choose - you can't do it in eternity, you've got to do it now! Let these words grasp you: 'Wist ye not', this was a child that did everything to please His parents, never had disobeyed a command before, think of that! But when it came to the crunch, and He would have to disobey men and obey God - He did it!

And then began - it finishes here and the curtains close - and then began eighteen years of absolute obscurity that we hear nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ:

And all that we hear is the come and go of busy feet,
With sound of hammer down the busy street.
A little two roomed house,
With scarce a breath of air, in busy crowded Nazareth.
Yes! Here for love of thee,
Through silent years oh pause and see,
If thou art wise,
The King of kings dwelt in disguise.

For these years He learned obedience, He was tested in all points like as we are, to bring Him to that point, where one day the consciousness that He would go to Calvary, that the child Jesus would mature in His knowledge of what His calling was, to die for the sins of the world, to take my place, to bleed, to take the wrath of God for all my hell. Well might the poet say:

And yet I think at Golgotha, as Jesus' eyes were closed in death,
They saw with love most passionate the village streets of Nazareth.

Let us pray: Now I have tried - I hope by the help of the Holy Spirit - to bring to our spiritual consciousness this child Jesus. What are we like, Christians, in our lives? Are we about our Father's business? Are we doing the will of God rather than the will of men? Are we growing, day by day, in the knowledge of God, seeking, drinking in all we can get of Him and His word? Oh, let us take the example of this holy child Jesus who said: 'Except ye become as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter in'.

Our Father, take us, and make us little children. We thank Thee for the example of the Lord Jesus, but more than that: we thank Thee that Thou didst not leave us with an example, for we couldn't have followed Him. But Thou didst leave the Comforter, the Strengthener of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to live the life of Christ down here on earth. Lord help us, we feel so weak, we need Thy help, help us day by day to be more like Jesus. In His blessed Name we pray. Amen.

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The Man Of The Millennium - Chapter 5

"The Baptism Of Christ"

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Now we're reading from our Bibles, from Matthew's Gospel and chapter 3, and as has been announced, we're looking at the subject of the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been going through a series concerning the character, the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Himself. And we have learnt, I hope, to appreciate Him a little bit more in His person. We're looking today, not specifically at His person, but something that happened to Him, that describes Him and that shows what was in His soul as the Son of God at this time in scripture. Now we noted last Lord's Day morning that the only cameo that we have of the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ is that time when He wandered away from His parents and went into the synagogue in Jerusalem. And we see there that there is a silence upon the childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for almost 18 years after He leaves that synagogue with His parents and submits Himself to them, there are almost 18 years of silence where He labours in the carpenter's shop. One of the Jewish historians tells us that he believes that Joseph, His earthly father, died when the Lord Jesus Christ was at this stage in His life. And perhaps for 18 years He laboured as the bread-winner within that carpenter's shop. He learned obedience, He learned it the hard way. But as we take up our reading today, we come as those years of silence -- the curtain falls down -- and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ begins. Let's read at verse one of chapter 3:

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Let's come before the Lord, and ask His help in a moment's prayer together as we turn to His word: Our Father, we have read how the heavens were opened. Lord, by the eye of faith, we know that our Saviour is there at Thy right-hand, and like one of old we say that there is power in that place. And we ask Thee to dispense a little of that power, to come by Thy Spirit in a mighty sense, to come and speak to our hearts. We have sung: 'We never can prove the delights of His love, until all on the altar we lay. For the favour He

shows, and the joy He bestows are for them who will trust and obey'. Fill with Thy Spirit now we pray, and come oh Holy Ghost of God and minister to our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.

As I've said, for the last time the door is shut on the Nazareth carpenter's shop. Never again would that man return, never again would the children come along each day from school and stand, and watch, and listen to this great carpenter as He told stories about the Old Testament Scriptures. He makes His way toward the river Jordan, and there are multitudes there flocking. They're not flocking around the Christ, but they're flocking around this rustic, gruff, strange, unorthodox preacher. And as he stands there you can almost hear him proclaiming, and then administering, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He is standing there, and no longer is he standing preaching in the wilderness, to dead plants, to dust and to sand. But he stands before all of the city it says, all of them came out to hear this man preach -- and he cried, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of God is at hand!' This is a prophet like Elijah, indeed he was prophesied to be, in one sense, Elijah - Elijah coming to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist, he looked like Elijah, he walked like Elijah, he talked like him -- he was like Elijah also in his fearlessness. Oh, we're afraid today aren't we? To preach 'Repent ye'. It's 'Come and know the Lord Jesus'. It's 'Come and know this new relationship -- no strings attached, forgiveness of sins and everything in life that you could hope for, an answer for all your problems'. But what about 'Repent ye'? 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.

Now can you see, I want you to try and picture it in your mind, this humble carpenter of Nazareth as He pushes His way through the throng, and He actually joins the queue for the candidates of baptism! Imagine the astonishment of John as he saw the face of the next person who he was going to baptise -- the righteous, holy face of Jesus Himself. One man, gruff as he was, who was previously baptising sinners, many sinners; women of ill-repute, murderers, thieves, adulterers, all kinds of sinners coming to repentance -- and here stands the sinless, spotless, Son of God wanting to be baptised! We can sympathise with his astonishment and his protests, as he turns to Him and says: 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and you're coming to me to be baptised?' Jesus answers and explains that this strange act is to be permitted for now, verse 15, "Suffer it to be so: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". And do you know what that's saying? The Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world and it was His job, as we saw last week, to be about His Father's business -- it was His job to do the will of Him who sent Him! And even if God's will for a moment was not applicable to Him, He had to fulfil it, He had to fulfil it. Isn't it amazing? That the one who would be classed as 'Christ our righteousness' fulfilled all righteousness when He was here on the earth. Can you imagine what John would have felt? Martin Luther, who was a bit like John the Baptist, he has a book entitled "Table Talks" -- various writings about various parts of the Scriptures and elements of our daily walk as Christians. And he says within this, I don't know whether he's right or wrong, but I understand what he's saying, he says that our New Testament really begins here at the baptism of Jordan. Now he's not saying that everything else before doesn't matter, but what he is saying is, this is the moment where the Lord Jesus Christ comes to fulfil and to begin His ministry.

Many have wondered how well John the Baptist knew the Lord Jesus, whether he recognised Him physically as He came to be baptised. Where they companions in their childhood? We know from Luke chapter 1 and [verse] 36 that they were related, we know that John's mother, Elizabeth, was informed about the strange virgin birth of the Lord Jesus through Mary. So much so that we read of Elizabeth referring to the foetus in the womb of Mary as 'My Lord'. I wonder had Elizabeth conveyed to John the Baptist her knowledge about who this child was, I don't know, it's all supposition. We know that Nazareth, where Jesus was brought up, and Hebron where John the Baptist was brought up, were quite far from one another -- but they could have come together year by year as they, as we thought about last week, all went to Jerusalem for the Passover to celebrate that feast. I don't know how John knew Him, but I know this: that God had revealed to John, don't ask me how, but God revealed to him that the Messiah, the Christ would be identified, because upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost -- John 1:33.

Some, even this week, have gone out from our own hall and have been witnessing around the streets and have come in contact with Mormons. And they say the Lord Jesus Christ had to be baptised because you need to be baptised to be saved. They infer that He was a sinner like you and me. God help them on the day of judgement, unless they repent for such a blasphemous thing. But what did it mean? I mean, it does confuse us doesn't it? Why the Lord, and remember that this isn't the baptism specifically that we practice, this was John's baptism -- a baptism of repentance, people were coming, repenting of their sins and what it meant here was: they were confessing first of all, and forsaking their old ways of sinful lives. How could the Lord Jesus Christ do that? That's the first thing it represented. The second thing it represented for all those in Judea, Jerusalem and the whole part of Palestine was that John the Baptist was here preparing the ground for the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Messiah to come. Neither of those two things apply to the Lord Jesus. So what was it? Here's the first thing that the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ means to us, now listen to this: He identified with your sin. Let that sink in. He identified with your sin and my sin, by the act of being baptised into the baptism of repentance, He allied Himself with the whole race that He had come to redeem and to save! He was showing that one day He would be the substitute for sinners!

Do you know that, my friend? I'm very conscious that there are people out here this morning, and they're not saved. Maybe you don't come on a Sunday evening, but you're here today -- and maybe it's safe to be here in the morning because you don't get the Gospel. Oh, you do, and this is the Gospel: Christ died for the ungodly, He died for you! He suffered for you, and by the very act of being baptised long before His death, He was symbolising: I have come, I have dedicated my existence down here on earth to go through the sins of the world for you, to come up again, to rise again and to administer my forgiveness to all who come onto me! The word of God says that the Lord Jesus Christ had to be made like unto his brethren, and one of the ways He had to be made like unto us is this: He had to be numbered with the transgressors. We often say Christ had no sin, and I know what that means, but my friend He did have sin: your sin and mine. Not inherent in His person or character, but He had to bear it, He had to take it, He had to sink under it! All my sin, all my iniquities, all my transgressions, all my indiscretions, all my secret sins, all my open sins were laid upon Him at Calvary. We read, within Exodus 29, that the old priest, in the Old Testament before he went and made the sacrifice, before he engaged in his holy ministry, he had to wash in that laver - that holy basin - in water. And when our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ who one day would consummate His ministry in entering into heaven with His own blood, He started it by washing Himself in the waters of baptism to declare: I have come to identify with your sin. I have come to take your place my friend, in physical death, physical burial, to take your sins away as far as the east is from the west and, though sinless Himself, He is able to come and do it, Hallelujah!

Our Lord didn't come to His baptism, blasphemers may say it, to confess His own sins -- not a bit of it! He had no sin! He was holy, separate from sinners, undefiled -- but He came to make Himself one with them who had sin. Let me speak to you believers for a moment. You've seen it before, the saintliest women and sometimes men, who take the Mary Magdalenes off the streets of Northern Ireland and Belfast, out of the red-light districts and they bring them into churches, and they set them down, and they sit beside them to show the love of Christ to them, and they tell them that Christ loves them, and Christ died for them, and they need to have faith in Christ. You've seen it! And you've maybe envied it -- the poor outcast that everybody looks at when they wander into the church building. And every one of them would never have come to Christ if it wasn't for that saintly man or woman. You know what that is? It is the spirit of Christ in them. The spirit of Christ that came and made no difference -- came to the poor, the wine-bibbers, the publicans, the adulterers, the fornicators -- He came to them to bring them into the kingdom of God. Alexander White says, speaking of General Booth - the founder of the Salvation Army, 'The General sits down on the same form himself beside the off-scarrings of the city and thus it is that he gets his penitent form so well filled and his Salvation Army so well recruited. It was something not very unlike that when He who knew no sin came to the Jordan waters along with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish publicans who were there confessing and forsaking their sin'.

You know this, this parable of the Lord Jesus has been burning on my soul, and I mean it! Where he told them to go out and invite all the 'hoity-toity'* people and the rich to come to his marriage feast, and they wouldn't come! What did he do? Persevere? You know my friends, I believe that there are hundreds of people, hundreds of people around this hall, hundreds of people in our city, in our country and they would love to spend an hour in a warm place with a cup of tea. But the problem is, many of them aren't the type of people that we want to do with. Isn't that right? Is that not the fact? Well let me tell you this, they were the people Christ came to save. They were the people that He died for! They were the people that He reached down His holy arms -- rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them from pity, from sin and the grave, weep o'er the erring ones, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus the mighty to save. Do you know what Jude tells us to do? 'Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire'. Some of us have mighty long arms to even reach them, never mind pull them out of the fire. Do you know what Jude infers? He infers that we might even get singed in doing it. Do you know my friend, do you appreciate that Jesus came to identify with your sin?

*'posh'

But secondly, His baptism tells us this: His introduction into the Messianic office. If you go into the Old Testament, you'll find that for 30 years the Levites prepared their priests, and at the age of 30 they were allowed to do the work within the tabernacle. The Lord Jesus Christ here is approximately 30 years of age. And in His baptism here in Jordan, it is His inauguration into His Messianic role, and within it there is the terrible symbolism of the fore-shadowing of the death and resurrection at the cross and at the tomb -- for He Himself said, Luke 12 verse 50, 'Do you want to know what my baptism means? I have a baptism to be baptised with and how I am straightened until it be accomplished'. What did He talk about? Baptism simply means to be overwhelmed, to be immersed. And there at Jordan when He was plunged beneath the waters by John the Baptist, He was saying, 'There is a day coming that I will be plunged under the waters of my Father's wrath for you'. Oh, make me understand it, help me to take it in, what it meant for Thee, the Holy One, to bear away my sin. And here, we have the whole Trinity: the Father speaks from heaven, the Son is in the waters and the Holy Spirit descends. The Trinity who said in the beginning, 'Let us make man in our image', and He speaks again -- the only other time He speaks in the whole of history from heaven -- and He says not 'Let us make man', but 'Let us save man!'

Can I ask you, Christian and unsaved person, or person who professes faith and is wayward, have you surrendered everything to Jesus Christ? For this is what the Lord was doing with His Father here. I'm not suggesting that He had things that He held back. What I am suggesting is this: He was acknowledging in a public way that He was going to do the will of His Father. Are you baptised? Are you? How could God use you, or how could you expect God to use you if you can't even be baptised? Christians, and it baffles me, running around for 40 years after their conversion and they've never seen it, or at least they won't admit it, that they need to be baptised! Maybe it's this: that baptism is a symbol that you've surrendered everything to God, maybe that's why. Maybe we find it hard to do that, and let me commend you if that's the reason why you're not being baptised, because there's a lot of hypocrites that get baptised, and they haven't done that. You know Polycarp, he was the Bishop of Smyrna, and he was a friend and a pupil of John the apostle himself; and it tells us in the history books that when he was in his old age he was urged by the Roman Proconsul to reproach, to blaspheme the name of Christ, and to be set free from prison. Do you know what he said? Listen, 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me an injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?'

'He never did me an injury' -- You've clothes on your back, don't you? You've a breakfast in your belly, you've maybe an income coming in every week from a job, you've children, you've parents, you've a home, a roof over your head and some of you forget that it's from God! Every bit of it, every wit of it, every good and perfect gift comes down from God. And you live your life as if you attained it yourself, and you've give God back nothing, nothing. Oh, it grieves me. Do you know what Polycarp did? He turned round to the Roman

Proconsul, and the Roman said to him: 'Just say "I denounce these atheists"' -- and when he was talking about atheists he was talking not [about] the people who don't believe in our God, but people who didn't believe in their god, the Roman gods, and he [Polycarp] didn't -- so he was classed as an atheist. Do you know what he did? He turned round to the Roman crowd and he pointed at them, and he said: 'Away with these atheists!' And he went to his death. Can I ask you, now this is serious stuff, you can't get much more serious than this in the Christian life, I believe. Have you pledged your head to the Gospel? Are you like John the Baptist: that you hope at least if it came to the moment that you had to die, that you had to sacrifice all for Christ, have you given it over already? "All to Jesus..." -- oh, we sing a lot of lies, don't we? -- "...I surrender, all to Him I freely give. Fill me with Thy love and power, let Thy blessing fall on me".

But thirdly, His baptism spoke of His Father's approval of the silent years. Now who can understand this? I can't! But for the first time in thousands of years the heavens were torn open, what that must have meant to the Son of God, to hear for the first time, perhaps since He left the splendours of heaven, the audible sound of His Father. It's a fulfilment of Psalm 2:7, 'I will declare the decree: the Lord has said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'. Now I want you to note that this was no subjective experience that no one else saw or heard or experienced. Everybody standing around there was able to view it -- and the heavens opened! It was the same for Ezekiel, he says in chapter 1 and verse 1 of his prophecy, 'Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God'. Did Stephen not see that? And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right-hand God'. Did John not see it when he was on the isle of Patmos, 'After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking to me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter'.

Don't underestimate the significance of this miracle: no voice had ever been heard from heaven from the giving of the law at Sinai. The law that killed men, the law that pushed them into the dust and showed them that holiness belongs to God and you can't have it, you can't strive your way, you can't live your way to God -- that was the first time God's voice was heard. But now the second time: He declares that Jesus is the Saviour, Jesus has come to save His people. What must that have been, as God's pronouncement upon the silent years of Jesus? Can I say this: God never did this for any pope, He never did it for any priest or any minister that pronounces absolution, because there is one mediator between God and men, there is one man, one person, one being that can forgive sins, none can forgive sins but God! And God, here at this river, publishes to the world that He is satisfied with Him as the propitiation, the substitute, the ransom-payer for the lost family of Adam, the just and yet the justifier of the ungodly. What does He say about those eighteen years behind the carpenter's door? What does He say? "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased".

Now listen, what would God's word of approval be on your silent years? Your years from 13, maybe you haven't reached 30 like the Lord here, but what about up to now? What would God say? Would it be, 'Oh, they made a profession in Sunday School and then they got into their teenage years and went wayward, and now they're nowhere now. And they come, and they go, and they come, and they go but they're not really there'. Would God say that one minute you're standing up giving a word or praying in the prayer meeting and the next your eyes are feasting on the filth of the world! That's not total surrender, that's total hypocrisy. Maybe you're here, and you need to do what I needed to do -- you [need to] realise that past is gone, you can't change it but one thing you can do is commit your life to Christ afresh, re-dedicate yourself to Him -- say the old is gone and I must now look forward and press toward the mark. Maybe you're not sure that you ever were saved, you've never taken Christ as your sin-bearer, as your Saviour and trusted Him -- well do it now! My friend, do it now! In ourselves we have nothing, nothing that can please God, nothing that can bring a smile -- we can only be accepted in the Well-Beloved, that means being in Christ and that righteousness that He came to perform, His death at Calvary trusting in it, trusting in the blood, trusting in His righteousness -- what are you trusting in?!?

John the Baptist said to these Pharisees, 'God can bring up from these stones the [children] of Abraham'. And maybe you're trusting in your Christian home, or the fact that you've been brought up in the Iron Hall -- I don't know what is, but listen, for God's sake listen! You need to come to Him yourself. Someone said to me recently, 'You know I don't know what keeps me back'. This was a dying woman, and I asked her, you know, dying, 'What have you got to lose?' She hadn't alcohol to give up, she hadn't the fags* to give up. But then I said, 'Well maybe it's this: relying on yourself'. It's a hard thing to give your whole life up to somebody else, isn't it? But you know what it is? And I'm speaking to both Christians and non-Christians right now, it's this: it is letting the executioner take your arms, clasp them together and lead you up the hill of Golgotha, and take an old hammer and rusty nails and bang them into your hands, and let you hang on a cross -- it means to die to yourself! For Christian friend, unless you die to yourself you'll never know the blessing of God, never. You might know a smattering of it.

*cigarettes

Let me say this, I've much more to say to you but I'm not going to go on and on, but let's look at this: the third evangelist, Luke, tells us that when this incident happened it says that Jesus as He was looking to heaven and praying, the heavens opened. I think that's lovely, I'm glad he recorded that: that Jesus was praying. I believe that He was praying that He might receive the Holy Ghost in the way that He needed to for the ministry that was ahead of Him, because His prayer was answered as soon as He came up out of the water -- and every prayer of Jesus was answered. But while he was yet speaking, the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost came down. Do you pray for the Holy Ghost? Do you? Now I know that you were given the Holy Ghost when you were saved -- don't worry, I haven't lost my way you know. But I know this: that some of us are stuck between Calvary and Pentecost. And some of us, God forgive us, think that the rapture has already taken place and the Holy Spirit's gone away -- and perhaps He has from some of us. But He is here, as He was at Pentecost! He has come! Do you pray for Him? Do you pray that you might be filled with Him? I'm talking about the fullness of the Holy Spirit, not some charismatic thing, I'm talking about the biblical fullness of God in your life, for serving Him, for living for Him. For Jesus said, 'If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Ghost to them that ask Him'. Well, do you? Do you ask Him?

Oh, will nothing teach us to pray, all the examples in the world, all the promises that are ours within the word of God, all our needs, all our cares, all our distresses -- they can't teach us to pray. And in our hopeless depravity, there is such a dearth in our hearts that we can't be brought to God, we can't come to Him in prayer. That's why the prayer meeting is the lowest attended meeting in this fellowship -- it's general, it's all over -- that's why. Because it's the 'Cinderella' of the church, Leonard Ravenhill says this, 'Because it's not dripping with the pearls of intellectualism, nor the glamorous silks of philosophy, neither is she enchanting with the tiara of psychology. She wears the home-spuns of sincerity and humility, and so is not afraid to kneel'. You'll not get your ears tickled at the prayer meeting, that's for sure. You'll not get anything for your reputation by being seen at the prayer meeting. But you'll get God, you'll get God. Who is it that said, and I've quoted this before, 'Come on a Sunday morning and you'll see the popularity of the church. Come on Sunday evening and you'll see the popularity of the preacher, that they'll come back and listen again. Come on a Friday night* and you'll see the popularity of God'.

**to the prayer meeting*

My friends, I hope you don't perceive me as beating you with a big stick. But if you want to get somewhere with God in this fellowship, get out to the prayer meeting, get on your knees at home and you know what will happen? If you pray, and you pray for the blessing of God and you pray for the Holy Ghost to come in fire and power upon the Iron Hall and upon your life, it will happen! And the Dove will come, and He will rest upon you. E.M. Bounds -- and I finish with this quote -- 'No erudition, no purity of diction, no wealth of mental outlook, no flowers of elegance, no grace of person can atone for lack of fire. Prayer ascends by fire,

flame gives prayer access as well as wings, acceptance as well as energy. There is no incense without fire, no prayer without flame'.

Let's sing our final hymn, 581, and let's not sing it lightly my friends -- for One greater than our brothers and sisters around us can see our hearts. And He knows whether we are singing lies to Him or not. 'All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. All to Jesus I surrender, Lord I give myself to Thee. Fill me with Thy love and power, let Thy blessing fall on me'. Let's sing the first, the fourth and the last verse of 581, standing: [Hymn]

Let us bow our heads, and let me say this: that every meeting where the word of God is preached, there is potential for someone to be saved. And you're maybe here, and God has spoken to you about those years, silent they may be. And God has said, 'Thou fool', and you want to trust Him now, or you want to rededicate your wasted youth to Him again, or Christian -- you want to wise up and you want to quit pushing the plough and looking back, and back, and back; but going all out for Christ. For there's nothing else that will see the blessing of God in your life. And many of you know, like I know -- I'm not speaking like I say, as Paul said 'Not that I have attained' -- but many of you know a dissatisfaction with your Christian life. Well ask God to come in and to fill you, surrender all to Him. Our Father we thank Thee for this time and for the word of God that is so powerful to the dividing of very bone and marrow. And it's cutting us Lord, now, but Lord help us not to resist the sacrificial knife. But help us to lie down and present our bodies a living sacrifice. Lord help anyone who is striving with Thee at this moment in salvation, and bring them to Thee. Part us now with Thy blessing, in Jesus name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - May 2000

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*Appendix A:****"Liar, Lunatic Or Lord?"***

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I would like you to open your Bibles at the reading that was given first in Matthew chapter 25 - or sorry Matthew 22 even - better preach from the right passage! Matthew chapter 22 and verse 42 and we read these verses again. Now there's a wee note here for me, a wee envelope and it says that there has been a ring found up in the balcony and the ring is in here, so if any of you 'fellas' have any ideas - you can come and get it later and get on [your] knees, but there we are...Matthew 22 and verse 41: "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

Let's bow our heads, just for a moment, in a word of prayer: Our Father in heaven we come before Thee this evening and we thank Thee for what has gone before: for the beautiful songs of praise, and worship, and adoration. But our Father we thank Thee more for the Person that we have been singing them to - the Lord Jesus Christ. And our Father we pray this evening that as Thy word is preached that He would be seen, and that as He is seen men and women, boys and girls, teenagers may be drawn unto Him. Lord we need Thy help this evening, we pray for Thy Spirit in power, that He would be here to do the work that only He can do, for we ask all these things in Jesus name, Amen.

I want to ask you the question that is posed in this passage before us this evening, and it's found in verse 42. It's a question that the Lord Jesus asked of the people who He was speaking to in this passage. But we would be foolish to think that He only asked it of these people He was speaking to. Because we today have the word of God, we have the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and it's not just applicable to the people who it was originally written to, but we believe - as is true - it's also applicable to us tonight in 1998. This question therefore that the Lord Jesus asked these disciples, He did not simply ask them the question, but He is asking you this question tonight, and He is asking every person across the face of this green and blue earth this one question. It's almost as if no other question mattered, it's almost as if out of every question that the Lord Jesus Christ wanted to pose to planet earth, that this was the question that was foremost, this was the question that meant everything to Him. So in verse 42 He says these words: "What think ye of Christ?". What do you think about Jesus Christ? That's the question I want to ask you, whether you're young, middle aged, or old - no matter what age you are - that question is so relevant to you, what do you think about Jesus Christ? Not just what do you think about Him, but why do you think it?

Some people believe He was a prophet, some people believe He was a good man, Paul Daniels thinks He was a magician, some people see Him as a guru, the Muslims think of Him as a great teacher and preacher and prophet, some people think He was an imposter - the Jews thought He was an imposter, someone who was wanting to take worship and glory [for] Himself and worship and glory away from God. But what do you think? Not what have you been taught, not what do you hear at school, not what you have read in books, but what, after evaluating this whole person Jesus Christ, [after] thinking about Him, what He did, who He said He was, after all of that: who do you think He was?

You know there's a lot of people in the world today and they think a lot of things and they believe a lot of things, but they couldn't tell you a reason why they believe it. Sad to say tonight that Christians are often guilty of this, they believe things because they've been taught them, because their mother or father have believed them, but they don't really deep-down know a reason why for the hope or the belief that is within them. That's my question to you tonight, what do you personally think about Jesus Christ? I'm going to give you the answer tonight because there are only three possibilities about who that person was - you see, He could only have been one of three possibilities. There is no sitting on the fence tonight, there's no way of getting out of these three categories, He either had to be one of them or He was non-existent. We know that He wasn't non-existent because there's more proof that the Lord Jesus Christ lived than there is that Julius Caesar lived - and we don't dispute his life, do we? We're sure - as sure as we can be about anybody in history - that Jesus Christ was a man, that Jesus Christ lived and that Jesus Christ died - and I am sure tonight, and we're all sure who are saved - that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

But I don't expect you to right off believe that right away. What are those three categories that I'm talking about tonight? Well they're these: first of all, Jesus was either a liar, He was a lunatic or He was Lord. Have you got those three? He was either a liar, in other words everything He taught, everything He was, everything He did, it was all a pack of lies. He was either a liar, or He was a lunatic, He believed everything He was saying, He believed it about Himself but He was mad, He was away in the head. And the only other alternative is this: that He was who He said He was.

Now you might think that this is a very contemporary issue or this is the real issue today about who Christ was - if you go down to NPO* or Easons* you'll see shelves of books about who Christ was. Some say that He had children and His grave can be found in France, some say that He was a prophet and a teacher but He had a family and He lived and died like any other man. There are so many stories about this man Jesus - who do we believe? Well don't think that this is a contemporary issue, don't think that this has just come out today, because the early Church, the first Christians that ever lived - right just after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ - they were faced with the same issue, in fact they came across this argument so much that they coined a phrase in Latin that went like this, it went "Out deios out homos mallos"(sp?). Now I don't know whether any of you do Latin, I did Latin but I can't remember any of it - but that means this: "Jesus was either God, or He was a bad man". Have you got that? Quite simple: Jesus was either God or He was a bad man, and they reasoned in their minds like this, and they said this: 'Jesus was either God - if He didn't lie of course - and if He did lie well, that makes Him what? It makes Him a bad man'. But they looked at Jesus' life, they looked at His words and His teaching and they thought to themselves, well Jesus obviously doesn't get on like a bad man, so that must mean that He is God. *bookstores

You might say to me tonight, 'Well David, hold on a minute, that's quite simplistic reasoning there, you don't expect me to accept that?' - well you're right, I don't. But I want you to bear with me for just a few moments tonight, and to listen - don't just put a barrier up to what I'm saying, consider what I'm saying, listen and see if these things are so. I'm sure there are few people here tonight who would say that the Lord Jesus Christ was not a good man, I'm sure there is no-one perhaps, maybe there is one, but most of us would believe that Jesus did good things, He said good things, He taught good things, He lived a good life - in fact many say that He lived a perfect life as a man. And that is true, you read in the Gospels, but you read it in other historical records, that the Lord Jesus Christ went about doing good, He healed the sick, He preached freedom to the captives. Some see Him as a revolutionary, some see Him as a person who helped the poor, who healed the sick. But I want to make something very clear this evening, and it's this: that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not claim to be a good man. Now take that in this evening, Jesus never ever claimed to be a good man, but in the Scriptures, in the New Testament we find another claim - we find that this man, Jesus, Jesus Himself claimed to be God. Have you got that? He didn't say He was a good man, He didn't say He was just a prophet, He didn't say He was a guru, He never claimed to be a magician or a rabbi - Jesus Christ claimed to be God.

You remember on one occasion they came to Him and they called Him good, and He said to them: 'Listen, there is none good but God'. And when they looked at the Lord Jesus Christ of course they could see that He was good, so what was He saying? He was saying 'I am God, there's no man alone that is good, but I am the God-man, I am God incarnate'. Sure even the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, they came to Him on one occasion and they accused Him of blasphemy. What did they say? They said: 'We will stone you!' and they bent over, as it were, to pick up stones and throw them at Him - and their reason for doing it was this, they said: "For thou being a man makest thyself God".

I hope you're not going to tell me tonight that the Bible doesn't try to tell the story of this man Jesus being God - because it clearly does. But I want you to think for just a moment here, because if Jesus claimed to be God - now listen - if He claimed to be God and He was not God, He could never be described as a good man. Do you believe that Jesus was a good man? You can't! If you don't [believe He was] God, you cannot believe that He was a good man, because it only makes Him a liar if He was not who He said He was. It makes that possibility eradicated - He could not be a good man if He was a man who lived a total lie from His birth to His death. You could never describe a liar as a good man.

Of course it's fashionable today to say that Jesus was only a good man. You go to our universities, many of them, you read academic books, sometimes theological books and those books tell us that Jesus was a good man. Do you know why they say that? Well, they don't want to offend Christians. Yet they don't say that Jesus was God, because if they claim that Jesus was God well, that would offend everyone who wasn't a Christian. So what they do is they say neither and they think that that offends no-one. But do you know what the truth is tonight? And we are only interested in truth - the truth is that by doing that and by claiming nothing about Christ, they offend not Christians, or non-Christians but they offend pure common sense and logic! Now I have more faith in you tonight than the academics do, and I want you this evening young person, older person to think about these issues in your own mind. Jesus could not be described as a good man if He said He was something that He was not.

You might say, 'Well I don't think He is a liar now, David. You can't push me that far to say that He was a liar. He maybe wasn't a bad man, perhaps...perhaps He actually believed what He was saying about Himself, perhaps He really - deep-down in His heart, in His mind - He really believed that He was God?' Well you're right in a way, well that wouldn't make Him morally bad. It wouldn't make Him morally bad, because it would mean He didn't really know what He was doing, He didn't know that He was lying. But listen, if it doesn't make Him morally bad, do you know what it does? It makes Him mentally bad, why? Because He would have deceived Himself, He would have conned Himself into thinking that He was God on earth, that He was something that He was not. Not only would He have conned Himself, but He would have conned thousands of people to follow a madman - to follow a lunatic.

Was He a liar? Well you can't trust a liar, sure you can't? I'm sure you can conjure up in your mind a few liars that you know, you couldn't trust them could you? Well let me ask you: could you trust a lunatic anymore than a liar? You couldn't, you can't trust a liar, you can't trust a lunatic. Now listen: you can only have one of these three, there's no outside of it, and you can't sit in between, you can't sit here tonight, it's too big an issue to just sit here tonight and say, 'Well I'm not sure David. Well I don't know, I haven't made my mind up and I've a bit of my life to live and when I get older and I'm wiser and I've looked into these things a little bit more - well then I'll decide about this issue', you can't do that! Because there are serious life and death issues at stake, because if Jesus said He was who He was: you must listen to His claim. And if He was a liar you can throw it all out, if He was a lunatic you can forget about it because He was mad.

Well I want to say to you this evening, on the authority of the Word of God - and upon plain logic and common sense - that Jesus Christ was not a liar, and Jesus Christ was not a lunatic. 'David how can you be so sure? How can you be so sure that He wasn't lying - were you there? How can you be so sure that He wasn't a lunatic and that He was who He said He was?'

Most people, as they read the Scriptures, as they look into the history books and the accounts of the life of Christ, will admit that Jesus Christ had two characteristics. And I want to build everything that I'm saying tonight upon one thing and it's this: the character of Jesus Christ. There are two things that we see in His character - and most people will admit it - first of all: He was wise. He was wise, He was a wise man, He was wiser even than Solomon who was one of the wisest men that ever lived - everyone admits that He was wise. But secondly, we also look and we see His life, we see everything He said and we see that this man was, indeed, good. Well listen, if He was wise and He was good - a lunatic is not wise, and a liar is not good.

You know tonight, in the mental hospitals about our land and in mental hospitals all over our world today, there is a condition - and this is the truth - and this condition is called 'Divinity Complex'. And believe it or not - I know it seems astounding - there are people in our land today, at this very moment, and they actually believe that they're God - and I mean literally. They actually believe that where they are on the earth, in this hospital ward, they believe that they are God. Now there are certain symptoms to this condition, doctors tell us that they show egotism - it's all 'I, my, me', it's all selfishness - they're self-centred people, everything has to revolve and centre around them. The doctors tell us that they show self-love, they show inflexibility, they are people who are dull to look at and dull to be with, they are people who are absolutely predictable - they're like the soaps on the TV, you can tell what's going to come next, everything they do, you know exactly what's going to come - they're inevitable, they are understandable, but they show within themselves a complete lack of ability to understand others and to love others, and they have a lack of creativity.

Now let me ask you, and be honest about this tonight, does that describe Jesus Christ to you? Listen: egotism, self-love, inflexibility, dullness, predictability, an inability to understand and love others, a lack of creativity? Young person answer me, does that describe Jesus Christ to you? No! Of course it doesn't! Surely as you read the word of God, surely as you read the historical records about this man, surely you can see that Jesus Christ was the exact opposite of this. You read about Him and Christ fulfilled perfectly all of these things: He was a man who was filled with love, He was a man who was filled with compassion, He had an immense creativity. What other man is there in the world who could touch blind eyes and make them see? What other man is there in the world who could touch lame legs and make them walk? Who could make food for thousands out of five loaves and two small fish? What other man in this world could be so creative [as] to walk upon water? What other man could do these things? What other teacher, what other wise man, and guru in the world has exceeded the wisdom and the knowledge of the teaching of Jesus Christ, there is no one!

But further than that, this man had not an inability to understand or appreciate other people. But more, far more than this, this man was able to look right through people! He was able to look through the masks that we put up, the personality shields that we have, so that we can cover our pain, so that we can cover our darkest secrets and our anguish. And Jesus could come in contact with a man, and even without coming in contact with them, He knew their thoughts, He knew their problems, He knew their desires - He knew their thoughts! And listen tonight, wherever you sit, here and now, Jesus Christ can see right into your heart of hearts. He can see every problem that you have, He can sympathise in it, He can see your sin and it pains Him - all your pretense, in the sight of Jesus Christ, all of it goes down the drain, He can see everything! This wasn't a man who was predictable, because this was a man who made the impossible possible. This was a man who was totally unpredictable, the scribes and the Pharisees who knew their Bibles inside out couldn't tell what He was going to come out with next. In fact the word of God says that everyone who came into contact with this man, it says, they wondered - they marvelled at Him. But this man, far from being selfish, this man was full of love, do you know why He was full of love? Because, He laid His life down for His followers. I don't mean in death now, I mean in His life. He said the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head! He didn't have a home, He hardly had any clothes, He didn't have money - the Creator of the universe, as He claimed He was, gave up everything for the ones that He loved - He wasn't selfish and He wasn't loveless.

Someone has said - listen, 'Lunatics are not wonderful people, but Jesus was the most wonderful person in history. And if that were lunacy, lunacy would be more desirable to sanity!' Have you got that? It would be better to be a lunatic tonight and follow Christ, if that were so, but listen this evening, Christ is not a liar and Christ is not a lunatic. If He was a liar do you know what that makes Him this evening? It makes Him one of the most cunning, deceptive, cruel, wicked, evil, devilish men that ever walked upon the face of the earth. Because He would have conned all of the men and women through the centuries who gave up their lives for Him, who followed Him - He conned them and led them into a lost eternity, or simply to lose their lives and not enjoy themselves - it would have been all for nothing! Christianity, one of the greatest faiths in the world, would have been the biggest deception of all time. But the truth tonight is this: that the enemies of Christ when they came to take Him - and believe me they wanted to take Him, and they wanted to put Him to death - when they came to that place of getting hold of Him and taking Him to kill Him, do you know what the Bible says? It says that they couldn't find a fault in Him - and they were the ones, if they wanted to, if there was any fault in Him they would have found it, believe you me, and they would have crucified Him for it! But even they, even Pilate said, 'I find no fault in this man'.

But not only that if He was a liar - listen, He would have died for His lie. Do you know a liar tonight? Do you know any? I know a few, and I can tell you one thing, they're cowards, and they wouldn't die for their lie. But Christ went all the way, if it was a lie, He went all the way to die for His lie and to suffer for His lie - it brought Him nothing! He wasn't a liar, because He had the wrong psychological makeup, His teachings don't point towards lies it was all about truth, what the truth was and exposing hypocrisy and exposing error. There's no understandable motive for this man to have been lying all of His life, why? Because it didn't bring Him riches, it didn't bring Him success in the eyes of the world, what did it bring Him? It brought Him nothing but death!

He couldn't have been a lunatic, because a lunatic lacks the very things that Jesus Christ had. I don't know whether you've ever come in contact with a lunatic, you might think you are tonight. But when you come in contact with someone who is mentally retarded, often - and it's our fault - often we feel uncomfortable, and the reason why we feel uncomfortable, psychologists tell us, it's because that we feel superior to them. We feel superior to them. Now if Christ was a lunatic - He could not have been a lunatic, because everybody who came into contact with Him felt the exact opposite. They knew that He was far superior than they were, why? Because He knew their inner feelings and thoughts, He knew everything about them.

What do you think about Jesus? That was my question, I ask you it again now and answer it honestly: what do you think about Jesus Christ? Well listen, I'll tell you tonight what is the truth from the Word of God, and from plain common sense, and it's this: that He was not a liar, He was not a lunatic, listen, He is Lord and He is God! That is the truth this evening, there is nothing else, there's no in between you can only have one of these and tonight the truth is this, He is who He said He was!

Do you know what that means for you this evening? Do you know what it means? It means when Jesus Christ was on the earth and He said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me' - that's not very popular today - but what He meant was this, the only way you'll get to heaven is through Christ and Christ alone. And it means that when He said that, that was the truth. It means that there is no way to heaven, not through your church, not through a lodge, not through an organisation, not through a system, not through a philosophy, not through good living - there is no other way, but through Christ! It means that He was right, it means that when He said that everyone in the world was a sinner and had a problem within themselves called sin, it means that - whether you like it or not, tonight - you do have that problem within, you have a problem of sin, it means that that is true! It means that when Jesus said that if we did not trust in Him, if we do not trust in His sacrifice and His death, and follow His way, we would end up in a place called hell - a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place where there is no hope! It means that

when He said that, it was true. It means that there is a place tonight that we cannot see with the naked eye, that we cannot hear with our ears, where there are millions of people screaming and crying in punishment for sin! It means that it's all true - but listen, it means that when He said He went to the cross, and when He said He would shed His blood for our sins, and when the word of God says that He took our sins in His own body on the tree, that we wouldn't have to be punished for it, and that we could go to a place called heaven - do you know what it means? It means that He was right! And when He said that if you trust Him tonight, you give your whole life to Him, you put it all into His hands, and you come to Him by faith and trust in His death - it means that if you do that, you will be guaranteed of life here and now, and life in eternity. It means that when Jesus said that the world doesn't know what living is all about - and remember that young people, they think they know it, but they know nothing - when they say that, the truth is what Jesus said, when He said 'I will give you life to the full, and give you life in more abundance'.

That's what it means to you this evening - this fact about who Christ is, listen friend, it changes your life tonight whether you like it or not, it changes it one way or the other. Philippians 2 that was our second reading this evening, says that there is a day coming, there is a day coming - now that doesn't mean we think there's a day coming, it doesn't mean there's a story that says there's a day coming, it means there is a day coming! - when every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now you mightn't do that in this life, but this word in the Word of God says that one day, when Christ returns, you will bow the knee - whether you want to or not. In fact the meaning of that verse is this: that everyone willingly bows the knee. Do you know what the tragedy is tonight? Possibly - and I hope to God that I am wrong - but possibly there are some in our building tonight and you will bow the knee on that day - but listen, you will have bowed it too late! And suddenly on that day the awesome and awful realisation: that what Christ said about Himself was true, that He was God, that He was Lord, that He was who He said He was - it'll all come home and the penny will drop, and it'll all be too late! You'll not be able to get out of it! And how tragic that will be, when people at last bow the knee, to be sent to a lost eternity.

C.S. Lewis, that great writer, said these words - and listen: 'In a civilisation like ours', he said, 'I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Christ upon his life or else' - listen - 'he is guilty of inattention or pervading the question'. Do you know what he means? If you don't come to terms with the claims of Christ upon your life this evening, you're avoiding the question! You're burying your head in the sand, and how often Christians are accused of that - but listen - if you don't come to terms with these things tonight and walk out as if you don't care, you're avoiding the question of life! Don't ignore Christ - you may ignore Him tonight, but God His Father will not allow you to ignore Him forever.

Will you not yield to Him this evening? Will you not come and bow to the claims of Christ upon your life? One day the Lord came and asked another question of one of His disciples, Peter. He said to him, listen, 'Who do men say that I am?' Peter thought for a moment and he said: 'Well, some people say that you're one of the prophets back from the dead, Elijah. Some people think you're John the Baptist, risen from the dead'. Jesus looked at him right in the eye and said to him, 'But Peter that's not what I'm asking you, I'm asking you, who do you think that I am?' And Peter - Peter said these words - he didn't say what other people were saying, and don't tonight think or say what other people are saying, think about this for yourself this evening, he said, 'Thou art the Christ! The Son of the living God!' And you tonight young person, older person, backslider, unsaved person, you must bow the knee this evening and say those same words: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God and take my life into Thy hands'. Will you do it tonight? Think about the reality of God and Christ...

 Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2000

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Appendix B:

"The Barren Womb And The Virgin Birth"

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by Pastor David Legge

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Matthew chapter 1, and we're taking a break from our current series on Lord's Day mornings in the Sermon on the Mount. The fact that it is Christmas, and also the fact that I believe I have a message from the Lord for you all, I want to share with you today.

We're beginning our reading in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS".

Let's bow our heads and pray together as we come to God's word: Our Father, we thank Thee for the name that is above all other names, the name of Jesus. We thank Thee, our Father, that He was called and is called Emmanuel, God with us. Our Father, if the truth be told, all of us - no matter who we are or where we find ourselves today, whether we are among the converted or the unregenerate - all of us need God with us. We pray that through Thine eternal Word that Thou wouldst minister Christ through the Spirit to us. Oh, send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me, that He may touch our eyes and make us see. Show us the truth concealed within Thy Word, and in Thy book revealed. Let us see Thee, Lord. Amen.

The title of my message today is: 'The Barren Womb and the Virgin Birth', the barren womb and the virgin birth. It has always fascinated me, the great deliverers that God brought forth from barren wombs - both in the Old Testament and in the New. At a casual glance you will learn that there was Abraham and there Sarah. Abraham was 100 years of age, and Sarah not far behind at 90 years of age. In Genesis 11 verse 30 we read that Sarah was barren, yet of course the plan of God and the story of God's word is that it was that barren womb of Sarah's that brought forth a deliverer in Isaac. Read further through the book of Genesis and we find Isaac, Abraham's son, married Rebekah. In Genesis 25 verse 21 we find there too that Rebekah's womb was barren. Yet, as we read through, we find another miracle taking place, and Jacob - who later became Israel, the father of the nation - he was born to Rebekah's barren womb.

Then Jacob, he married, he married Rachel. In Genesis 29:31 we find that her womb also was barren, yet it was from her womb that Joseph was born - another deliverer to the people of Israel. We go into the book of Judges to chapter 13 and verse 2, and we read of a man called Manoah, his wife is unnamed. We find in that time when there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in their own eyes, and they needed a deliverer, that Samson was born from Manoah's wife's barren womb. In 1 Samuel chapter 1 we read of a man called Elkanah, a woman by the name of Hannah - she too possessed a barren womb. Again a time

of great sin and depravity in the nation, again a void of a deliverer - they needed a man to lead them - and we find that from that barren womb of Hannah, Samuel was born.

We read on, we find another barren, widowed womb. It was owned by Ruth. Ruth found mercy in the eyes of the Lord, and we read also that she bore Obed, who begat Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. Great deliverers born from barren wombs. We go into the New Testament, and we find exactly the same thing - not to the same extent, but we find in the beginning chapters of the Gospels a man by the name of Zacharias and a woman by the name of Elisabeth, also past the age of childbearing with a barren womb. We find that the greatest prophet ever born of woman, John the Baptist, was born of her womb.

It has always fascinated me, but as I have been meditating for messages to bring to you over this Christmas period, whilst I was meditating on this - not specifically, but as I was pondering what I should preach to you today I sensed, I can't tell you how, but just in my mind that the Holy Spirit was causing me in some way to compare these births from barren wombs to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ from the virgin's womb. Essentially, in doing this, it has brought me to two questions - really one question: what are the similarities between the births from the barren wombs and the birth of our Lord Jesus, and what are the fundamental differences that we must lay down today?

Bear with me today, we must understand what barrenness meant in the Old Testament. When you read through the Old Testament it's not long before you gather that barrenness was considered to be a curse, it was seen by women in Israel to be an affliction, and they believed that it was an affliction sent by God. You remember the story of Abraham and Sarah, remember Abraham lied to King Abimelech about Sarah, he didn't tell him that she was his wife, but he said: 'She is my sister'. Because of that, to save the nation from sin and to save Sarah, it says: "The LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife". It was the Lord did it, and therefore people in Israel assumed that it was the Lord who took away this ability to procreate. Because God had given this gift of procreation it was considered to be both a commandment and a blessing of God, if it was taken away it was seen to be a curse and an affliction of God. It was commanded to procreate in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth". We find that when Noah landed the ark there on Mount Ararat, that he too and his family was told the same thing: "Go forth, and multiply, and replenish the earth".

Right through the Old Testament, in Psalm 127 especially verses 3 and 4, we can see how it was considered a blessing. He says: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth". So in Israel fertility was one of God's blessings on His ancient people, on His ancient nation. So how else could these people interpret barrenness? Only as a curse and an affliction from God.

In the light of that let me make a short digression, because this is extremely important - and I get more and more distressed with the confusion that is made between the Old Testament and the New Testament today in Christendom. A great deal of doctrinal confusion, and more than that, a great deal of personal pain is caused because people - whether they be preachers or the ordinary people in the pew - wrongly apply the Old Testament principles to New Testament believers today. We are not Israel, we are the church. We are not a physical people, but a spiritual people. You must realise in your mind that in the Old Testament Israel's blessings are concerning a physical land, the promised land, that physical land would bear for them physical blessings - but we are not Israel. We are a spiritual people of God, we are the church with spiritual blessings.

What I mean is this: yes, children to us, even as God's people today, are still blessing from the Lord to any Christian - but it should not be interpreted to be the opposite, that without children it is because of disobedience and God's displeasure toward us. Get that out of your head! We are God's spiritual people

today, it was the blessing of being in the land that meant fruitful wombs in Israel, but we do not live for physical blessing of the grapes in clusters falling down, for the riches of the promised land, we live for a heavenly home. Paul says: 'We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. He says in Philippians: 'Our conversation', a better translation, 'Our citizenship is in heaven; from there also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. We are a heavenly people.

Even though that is the case, childlessness is still an awful burden for anybody. You can see that from the case of Hannah. She is one of the most poignant characters in the whole of the word of God. It says that she was greatly distressed because of her predicament, she was in bitterness of soul, she wept and would not eat, and she cried continually out to God because she couldn't have children. For her it was a cause of embarrassment, it caused feelings of failure within her soul, like it does for 10 to 15% of marriages affected by the same predicament today. It can breed feelings of inadequacy and guilt, it can even turn to anger, and even anger against God. It can become a fear of the future, growing into old age without children and grandchildren - the fear of loneliness and frustration. Now let me say this, and this is a delicate subject but I feel I have to say it: please do not jest with young couples about when you will be hearing little feet pattering. It amazes me the insincerity of some believers today! Recently I have witnessed young Christian girls breaking their heart because of the insensitivities of Christian jokers. If we need anything as Christians today it's greater love for one another, it's a greater concern for each other, a greater sensitivity that there are others hurting around us that we don't know about, and we might never know about.

But as we find from scripture, there is little that anyone can say to help a woman who cannot bear a child. Elkanah found that out to his detriment, for he turned to his wife Hannah in verse 8 of chapter 1 of 1 Samuel: 'Hannah, why weepest thou? What's wrong with you, why are you not eating? Why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?'. The answer was: 'No'. Undoubtedly Jacob too proved his love by working for Rachel - you know the story, 14 years - Rachel could never have doubted that he loved her. Perhaps, probably as it was the custom in those days, he loaded her with jewels. She was beautiful, the word of God says, to look upon. But none of those things: the love of Jacob, the jewels, her own beauty upon her face and body - none of it was a compensation for the lack of a son. The terrible truth of it all was that Leah had four laughing lads about her skirts, but an unfruitful Rachel was mocked by men, and women shut out the lip against her.

Nothing you can say or do can meet that need. I can imagine Rachel, her eyes red from weeping, and her hair dishevelled, and the voice hoarse with groaning, coming before Jacob with the piercing cry that we find in Genesis 30 verse 1: 'Give me children or I die!'. Nothing we can say or do can meet that need, but if I can just say this: if there's someone here today thinking 'I must have done something terrible, God must be cursing me'. Maybe you're looking to your past and recalling something you've done in your youth, and you think subconsciously that it's for that reason that you don't have any children today - banish the thought! Banish the thought! Be liberated from it today, it is the lie of the devil! I cannot tell you why this is your lot, but don't for one moment believe it is God's curse on you, because it is not!

Can you imagine today what an extra burden it was for an Old Testament woman to bear the burden of God's displeasure? Feeling that it was God displeased with her, and also the fact that Israel as a nation needed a deliverer, and she would have longed to be that one who would have brought Israel's deliverer into fruition - but she couldn't even bear a child! Can you imagine the pain? The extra burden that would be?

The surprising thing to me as I studied this this week was: although the general thinking of the Old Testament was that God had shown displeasure with you, that you had been disobedient if you had no children, there are several instances in the Old Testament where barrenness is not attributed to disobedience. If you look at Sarah, there's no occasion of disobedience whereby her womb was shut up - the same with Rebekah, the same with Rachel, the same with Manoah's wife, the same with Hannah, the same with

Elisabeth in the New Testament. In fact, as I have been studying, I've found it difficult to find one woman in the Old Testament whose name has been cursed of God by childlessness. The only example I can find that is even near it is Michal - remember, she laughed and mocked David for dancing naked in front of the Ark? It says that from that point on she bore no children - but that mightn't even have been a curse from God, that might have been estrangement that had come into the marriage from that point on.

So, how are we to understand these women's barrenness? Why does it happen? If it's not a disobedience to God, even though it may be perceived to be so in the Old Testament, why has God delivered Israel, and brought deliverers, out of barren wombs? Well, if we could see the first three cases in the word of God: you have Sarah, you have Rebekah, and you have Rachel. If you think about it for a moment you will remember that these three women were ancestresses of Israel, they were wives to Israel's patriarchs. The first, Sarah, was the wife of Abraham, and God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea shore - God had promised Abraham. God had blessed Isaac in Abraham, God had blessed Jacob in Isaac, and so on - and right throughout the twelve tribes and over the whole nation the promise of God was given to them, yet all of these men brought forth their children from barren wombs.

What was the reason? Do you know what I believe the reason is? God was asking these couples in pain and anguish: 'Is your sterility an insurmountable barrier to me accomplishing my plan and my promise? Is your barrenness a threat to all that God has said? Is it impossible to me?'. God would come into their home, into their life, and He would overcome by His power and by His promise an obstacle that seemed to be insurmountable for the testimony of His glory and His name. Now listen, God has not given us that promise, God has not promised to us that we should have children - but, my friend, He gave the promise to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob. God was saying: 'Even though you have a barren womb, nothing will be an obstacle to my plan and my purpose'.

Isn't that good to know today? Isn't it? God was proving that nothing would stand in His way, and that's what the Psalmist means when he says: 'He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children'. Praise ye the Lord, for nothing is impossible with Him! I don't know about you but I, as an accomplished sinner, can sympathise with these women's failure when it came to believing God. As you go through the record we find that Sarah laughed, we find that Sarah and Rachel - both of them - encouraged their husbands to take surrogate wives, Hagar for Abraham, Bilhah for Isaac, to raise up children by the flesh rather than by the promise of God - to do it their own way. You can see what's happening here, here is an insurmountable problem, here is the promise of God - and the promise of God seems not to be fulfilled in their sight and in their understanding, so they try to fulfil the promise of God themselves.

Insurmountable is the problem of sin today in humanity, and it always has been. My friend, if you're here today and you're not saved, I want you to know from the word of God that your sin cannot be overcome by the flesh - your fleshly actions or any flesh of any man - it cannot be done. It must be God's way and God's way alone. Certainly this barrenness that was in these women's wombs was not a consequence of the individual's sin, but certainly typically it can speak to us of the barrenness of the nation of Israel, of the need for a deliverer, and ultimately the need for a Saviour. It would seem insurmountable, wouldn't it seem impossible to you that God could save men and women that are on their way to hell when He's a holy God, He's a righteous God, when He can't look upon iniquity? But isn't it wonderful, isn't it wonderful today that God not only promised Abraham that his children would be like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the sea shore, but He promised Adam in the very Garden of Eden that there would be a Saviour.

He may have said to Abraham: 'Thou shalt surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in thee'. But how would all the nations of the earth be blessed in Abraham? I'll tell you: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy

head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. Whether it's the barren womb, or whether it's the virgin womb, there is one thing in common right throughout the whole scripture and it's this: God would have His way, God would bring that Man forth, God would do it in His own time and in His own mechanism - and, praise God, we're the other side of it today and we can read in the Scriptures: 'When the fullness of time was come, God brought forth His Son made of a woman'. Hallelujah! Made of a woman!

Do you know that His birth was the dream of every Jewess? In Daniel 11:37 we read these words concerning antichrist: "He shall not regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all". Many expositors and preachers have interpreted that 'he will not desire the desire of women' as meaning that he is a homosexual, a sodomite, as meaning he is a member of the Roman Catholic faith and is chaste and does not marry. I don't believe that's what it means - the desire of women right throughout all of the Old Testament was to give birth to Messiah, and antichrist will not regard the desire of women, Messiah.

The desire of all women in Palestine was to be the vessel to bring Messiah to Israel. You can all see it coming together when you come into that nativity scene in Luke chapter 1 verse 28, the angel came unto Mary and said: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women". She was a virgin: 'I know not a man, how can this be?'. The obstacle in Mary was not a barren womb, but was a virgin womb - but it wasn't an obstacle, it wasn't a barrier, the word of God would teach us that it was an absolute necessity that she was a virgin! Even the virgin womb was no obstacle in presenting us today with a Saviour. Women who were barren in the Scriptures brought forth the noblest of children - we've looked at it, remind yourself: Sarah, barren until 90 years of age, begat Isaac. Rachel's piercing cry, 'Give me children or I die!', was answered and she bore Joseph who delivered the nation. Manoah's wife bore Samson, another deliverer of the nation. Hannah, a smitten soul, after sobbing in the sanctuary and vowing vows and continuing in prayer, ignored Eli's scorn poured on her soul and received her answer in Samuel, giving a prophet to Israel. The barren and widowed Ruth found mercy and bore Obed who begat Jesse, the father of David, of whose line came John the Baptist, of who Jesus said: 'There is no greater prophet born of women'.

But, my friend, look at the difference today: the Lord Jesus Christ would not be born of a barren womb, but rather He would be born of a fruitful womb! That womb would be fertilised not by man, but by the Holy Spirit of the Living God! What a difference! Barrenness wouldn't do, only a virgin womb could give sanctuary to the Son of God. There's no parallel with this conception, there's nothing to compare. This wasn't a miraculous conception like the rest, this was a virgin conception! In fact, this was beyond the natural, there was no natural process at all within the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, His birth was normal, but His conception was of the Holy Ghost. Yes, He would be a Deliverer; yes, He would come to a barren nation; yes, there would be no insurmountable objects that would prevent God bringing Him to the people. But, my friend, His Father was God Almighty! That took a virgin birth.

He was the sinless, spotless One. That took a virgin birth. He was the first ever of His kind, He was a divine Deliverer to be born among men, and only a divine Deliverer could come forth from a virgin womb. 'A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us', why did it have to be a virgin womb? I'll tell you why: because God was not supernaturally creating something out of nothing, the Lord Jesus was the pre-existent Christ. He is the Ancient of Days, without beginning and without ending. He was not created like the universe - 'bara', created out of nothingness - but He has always existed and will always exist. That womb of Mary's was only used as a medium and a mechanism to bring the Eternal One into time. Do you see the difference?

These other births were miraculous, but this is something else. Listen to Hebrews, this is wonderful, this has thrilled my heart this week: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world he said, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared for me". This is above the rest, this is beyond them, this is

eternally transcendent of anything we find in the Old Testament or in the New - Almighty God here, look at it, is using a virgin's womb as a vehicle for Himself to come among men! A teenager's womb to transport a prepared sinless, separate, sanctified body, a body divinely engineered by God for the task that Christ would undertake, a body that was kept uncontaminated while in Mary's womb - Mary who was a sinner! Even though she was a sinner I do not hesitate one iota to say that that was a blessed womb to host the holy Son of God.

Oh, this difference is supreme. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the Incarnate Deity. Can I leave you with this in closing in the last couple of minutes? Romans chapter 8 verses 22 and 23 reads like this: "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to know, the redemption of our body". This earth cries out like a woman in birth pains for its redemption. Like Rachel crying for a child, the human race has cried out through all time for a Saviour. The problems that would seem insurmountable, the many sacrifices, the many sins, the law of God that they couldn't climb up or climb over, all of it seemed impossible - but what a message! For He has come, and all our sin is gone; and a barren womb or a virgin womb could not hinder God in His holy plan - in fact, God made the virgin womb a necessity. Why? Because our God, in the midst of us, is mighty and He will save!

Think of this for a moment: He gave up the warmth of the eternal light of heaven to be folded in a cosy, dim female womb. The Word of God from all eternity, who spoke and the worlds were, was sentenced to nine months dumbness in Mary's belly. Infinity walled in a womb. The Saviour's first earthly taste was the country barn's bare floor. His first earthly smell might have been the dung of the cattle shed as He was crushed from the womb of that virgin. Why was it all so graphic? Why did it have to be this way? I'll tell you why: because eternity was being squeezed into time! The wonder of it all, and the blessedness of it all today, that from His imprisonment I am made free! Because He took a body, one day I will transcend the body! Because He took terrestrial, one day I will take and put on celestial! From the sweet silence of that babe in the womb, I now can sing a new song from my heart even praise unto our God. Because He was forsaken at Calvary in human flesh, my hand is now clasped by the hand of God, and in His death I have glorious life! Isn't that wonderful? Isn't the lengths that God went to wonderful to save you and me?

Can I ask you today: have you lost the wonder of it all? Have you lost the wonder of it all?

'A child He was, yet had not learned to speak,
Who with His words the world before did make.
His mother's arms Him bear, He was so weak
Who with His hands the vault of heaven could shake.

See how small room my infant Lord doth take,
Whom all the world is not enough to hold.
Who of His years, as of His age, hath told,
Never such age so young, never a child so old'.

Oh come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Our Father, we thank Thee with all our heart that Thou didst send the Lord Jesus Christ from His throne in heaven to that lowly cattle shed. We thank Thee that He came as a Man to save men, but our Father we bless Thee that He came as God to do the eternal work. Father, we worship Him today. We worship Thee: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the plan of salvation. We thank You, Lord, for saving us - and we ask Thee that the wonder of the incarnation, that led to the redemption, and one day to glorification will never cease to thrill us

through this pilgrimage until we get to glory. Lord, we would just pray that if there's anybody here today that's never been saved by this wonderful Saviour, that today they would know the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Bless us now we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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*Appendix C:**"The Friend Of Sinners"*

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Luke chapter 15 - and again this is the message that I believe the Lord would have me bring this evening, and that has been confirmed in almost all the prayers that were prayed in the prayer meeting. They mightn't have known it, but they prayed and each quoted something out of this passage of Scripture. The first hymn that we sang talked about it, and the last hymn that the choir has sung talked about the saving ability of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke chapter 15 and verse 1: "Then drew near unto him", unto Jesus, "all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance".

Let's come before the Lord in a word of prayer: Our Father, we thank Thee for the glorious gospel, the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - that He came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. We thank Thee, our Father, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Lord, to this end, we see even in our gathering that there are those who are lost, and they need to be saved. Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst come by Thy Holy Spirit and save them tonight - to the glory of the Lord Jesus. We pray that You'll fill me with the Holy Spirit, O God, and that Thou wilt descend upon this gathering in a freshness, and Lord that Thou wilt come and speak to men and women's hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

You've heard the nursery rhyme: 'Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?'. We read this parable together that the Lord Jesus spoke of in Luke chapter 15, and we see Him talking about every human being that has ever lived. He talks about a subject that you don't often hear preached today, something that's offensive. It's something that people don't like hearing and some ministers even, today - a bit like the Pharisees that we've been reading about - are afraid to preach about. You see, Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The Bible says that Jesus Christ was the friend of sinners.

Do you know what He said? 'I didn't come into this world to save righteous people. I didn't come into this world to try and save religious people, because they don't know that they even need to be saved - they think they're alright, they think they're getting to heaven'. That's why, every chance He was given, He castigated, He reprimanded the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day - because they thought that they were good enough to get into heaven.

Of course, they didn't like that. The old Pharisees don't like it today either - and there are plenty of them! They fill the pulpits of our churches, and they stand there and they talk a load of waffle about how, if you're good to your neighbour, and you come to your church, and you have Communion, and you're baptised, and

you do this and that, that you'll get to glory. They are taking the place of the devil himself because they are liars! Make no mistake about it, my friend, if you know a minister or a so-called 'man of the cloth', and he contradicts this book - listen to me, listen to the word of God: Paul says, 'If an angel from heaven, or a devil from hell, comes and preaches another gospel to you than you find within the word of God - let him be damned!'

That's what Paul said, so you can understand why - when the Lord Jesus Christ started going to the prostitutes and drunkards, and going to the lepers and the untouchables of society, and the publicans and the tax collectors - why in verse 1 and 2 the Pharisees and the scribes, it says, began to murmur. They were talking and they said: 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. It's not even bad enough that He talks to them, but these unclean, unreligious people - this man is hobnobbing with them!'

The religious establishment would crucify Christ if He was here today - you better believe it. They would do the same to Him if He came today, because the message of Christ is this: 'I am the way - not a church, not a religion, not a religious order - I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me - whether they be Pope or Protestant!'. Unless they have Christ, they have nothing. Boy, they didn't like it then, and they don't like it now - but it's the only message that can save them!

I wonder have you ever been lost? You know what it's like, you're driving down the road, and maybe you get lost here. I would get lost here, up around the mountains. You don't know where you are, and you've no map. Or maybe you can cast your mind back to an experience as a child, or a toddler, in the supermarket - something, a toy perhaps or a bright light or something colourful, catches your eye. All of a sudden the wee child is away, and they're lost! They're wandering along, they don't know they're lost, they don't know that they've left their Mummy or Daddy - and all of a sudden it dawns on them, the reality that they turn around and they can't find them! They realise their lostness! You've seen it, haven't you? Wandering around, as happy as can be, looking at everything around them - then all of a sudden they stop! Then there's the wail, isn't that right? They realise.

My friend, what the Lord Jesus was talking about here was something a bit like that. You know when you're lost, and that feeling of dependence goes - you have a feeling of insecurity, a feeling of need, a feeling of fear and emptiness, a feeling that you reach out and you're groping for something to hold on to. Maybe this is the way that you feel in your life: there is no security, no stability, no sure foundation. That's why Jesus went to the publicans and sinners. He went to people who knew that they'd made a mess of their life. He went to the people who were realists about their physical and their spiritual state, they knew they needed help. They didn't know where to get the help, they certainly didn't think the help was found in Jesus Christ - but they knew that they were far from perfect, they knew there was something missing in their lives and they needed much more. Jesus went to them.

Did He not say: 'They that are well, they that think they're well, don't need a physician - but they that are sick. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'. You know what I'm talking about. If you don't know you're sick, if you have no symptoms - you haven't a cough, you haven't a pain, you haven't a lump - you don't go to the hospital, you don't go to the doctor. But as soon as you realise there is something wrong, and everything is just not right the way it should be, you get down to the doctor for help! Jesus told this parable, and He was trying to show these Pharisees, and show these sinners, that they were lost.

He told a story about a shepherd. He knew every one of his sheep, and he loved every one of his sheep, and he named every one of his sheep. He could tell the difference in them, each one was characteristic, each one was special and unique. Day by day that shepherd lived for his sheep, and he cared for his sheep. He brought them home, day by day, from the pastures. He brought them down the rocky roads, and the slopes, and the valleys, and the mountains. He brought them into the fold at night, and there he lay with them and kept them

safe. But one night he brought them all home, and he counted them one by one, by name, as they entered into that fold - but one was missing! One was lost! The story is told that he went out and he left the ninety and nine there - and they were in danger when he left them - but he left them because one that he loved was in danger. It says that he went out into the mountains, he risked his life and he risked the life of the other sheep to go and to find the little one that was lost. It says when he found it, he lifted it and he put it on his shoulders, and he carried it safely home. Boy, when he got home, what a party he had! He got all his friends and his neighbours together, and he said: 'Rejoice with me, for the sheep that was lost I have found!'

Do you know, my friend, that you are loved? You are loved, the Bible says, with an everlasting love. You are loved with a love that is deeper than the sea, that is higher than the heavens, that is further than east from west, north from south. You are loved with a love that is of greater volume than the whole of the universe - and it is bigger than we can ever know, or fathom, or measure. God says: 'Listen, my child', God's message to you is this, 'I love you!' Do you know that? I'm not asking you do you know it all up here [in your head], sure we all know it. Our heads, in Ulster, are filled with all this knowledge - but it hasn't travelled the 15 inches down to our hearts. I'm asking you: do you know what it means to feel in your heart, and to realise, and to let it dawn upon you, that no matter if all your kith and kin, and friends and relatives and work colleagues, hated the guts of you - that there's One who loves you?

Oh, you know that there's people in your family who love you, and maybe even people who would die for you - but, my friend, I say this to you: there is none that loves you like the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is that Shepherd, He is willing to leave the ninety and the nine and - for you, just you, one person - He loves you so much that He is willing to come tonight, to bring you to a meeting, to speak specifically to you, to woo you, to win you, and to save you - that's the love that He has for you! You see, it's an individual love - that's why He was willing to leave 99 and go for 1. He wasn't in it for the price of the sheep, He wasn't in it for the numbers game - He was in it because He loved each one individually.

You know what I'm talking about, maybe you've a family of four or five, and they're all special. There was the first one, and when they were born that was really special - but when the last one was born, it was as special, wasn't it? They all have different characteristics, don't they? One's quiet, and one's loud. One's affectionate, one's distant. You know what I'm talking about - but you don't love any of them more than the other, do you? You love them individually, don't you? You love them for who they are, the person that they are. You love them uniquely - and God loves you, my friend. Yes, He loves the world, but He loves you specifically and individually.

The Bible says, Jesus says, that 'Every hair of your head is numbered'. Some of you haven't too many to number, but nevertheless they're numbered! Think of that! Scientists tell us that a black-haired woman has 110,000 hairs, and a blonde woman has 140,000 hairs. The average woman loses 100 hairs a day. A man between 20 and 65, it says, removes approximately 23 feet of hair by shaving. The Bible says this, now listen, that God knows every one of them! There are some of you here, and you think that your life is too small for God. 'Sure, why would He be worried about me? I'm insignificant, sure my life is nothing special. My wee kitchen house, and my wee family, and my wee job - I'm no earth-shaker, I'm no big-wig'. But, my friend, God is saying: 'Look, if I care for you so much that the very hairs of your head are numbered, there's nothing insignificant about you! I love you! I love you so much that I'm willing to leave the ninety and nine - and they're special to me, but you're as special, and I want you!'

Oh, He said: 'If the lilies of the field are so clothed' - and look how He clothes them in colour and beauty - 'how much more shall He care about you'. Even the little sparrow that falls, He knows about that sparrow. My friend, He knows about all the problems, all the perplexities, the tribulations and the trials that you go through day by day - what you have to put up with, He knows about it, and never you get it into your head that He doesn't care about you! He loves you greater than you could ever know.

The sheep was lost. Can you imagine the sheep in the storm? The little mountain, the little peak and precipice there, hanging over the ocean perhaps. There it is, and all you can see is the four silhouettes of the spindly legs of that little ball of wool as it stands there in the wind, and as the rain belts down upon it. There it is, out in the wind, bare, alone, lost! What it is to be lost! Can you imagine what that dumb sheep is thinking? No hope! No hope, standing over a precipice, waiting just for that last gust of wind to blow it over like a cloud! My friend, do you feel like that at times? Do you feel at the end of your tether? Just one more straw to break the camel's back - are you ready to give up? Are you ready to just lie back and let life go by you, there's no purpose, there's no meaning for you?

Do you feel like that in your soul? Maybe you've been coming to these meetings, and you've heard about God and how angry God is with you about your sin - and you better believe He is! You've heard about hell, you've heard about conviction of sin, you've been shaken about death and about hell that will follow it. You've heard about the cross, and you've thought: 'That was my sin upon Jesus there!'. You've felt your lostness. Sometimes I use a phrase, and it's unbiblical - and some of us use it: 'unsaved' - you'll not find that in the Bible. It's 'lost!' Lost! Eternally lost! Never to be found again! Never to be touched!

There was once a newspaper in a district, and they had two photographs in it. One was of the town Council, and the other was of a prize-winning farmer's flock of sheep. They put them into the paper, and they had got the captions below mixed up. It said under the Council: 'From left to right: Naive and vulnerable, they huddle for security against the uncertainties of the outside world'. Is that not what we're like? Oh, we're confident when we're with our friends. Oh, we group together alright - when we all have the same views, everything is OK. We're confident in our family, and once you're in the prime of your youth and you've your children to live for, and bring them up, and educate them, and everything. But what do you now, friend, when they're all married off and they're all gone away - and you're there on your own in your retirement, and you don't know what to do? What life is there for you? You just don't know, no more work, no more family - it's different then, isn't it?

The word of God tells you that. Do you know the word of God is full of truth? They're all sitting in their fine halls and universities trying to work out the meaning of life, and it's in the word of God if they would only open it and look at it! 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one of us to his own way'. My friend, you are lost. You're lost in your sin if you haven't got Christ. You're lost in your sin if you've never trusted Him, if you've never looked to the cross, if you've never repented of your sin and forsook it and turned to Christ for saving power in His blood. My friend, listen: you're lost! You're out there in the wild winds of life and of sin - and one day, if you don't turn to Him before you die or before Christ comes again, you'll be lost in hell!

Charles IX, in the Bartholomew massacre, was usurped. He was stabbed several times in the chest, and he lay in his own palace in a pool of blood. Do you know what historical records record about him? He was heard to cry: 'I'm lost! I'm lost!'. Will the aeons of eternity hear your voice crying the same forever? My friend, you are loved, God loved you, Christ loved you. But listen: you're lost! You need to realise that you're lost, you need to realise the danger that you're in! Listen, the beauty of the Gospel is this: that this parable tells us, tells you, that you're looked for. You're loved, and you're lost, but you're looked for!

It says in verse 4 that that shepherd left the ninety and nine, and he went out after the one until he found it! Do you know that you're looked for? Do you know who's looking for you? The Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd - the Lord is my Shepherd, and my Shepherd is looking for you! He's out there, He has gone out, and He is following you. He's stalking you down, and the 23rd Psalm says that even through the valley of the shadow of death, He is going. You know, He loves you so much, my friend, that He tells you: 'I am the Good Shepherd', listen, 'the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep'. He loves you so

much, that He is willing to go out into the mountains wild and bare, He is willing to climb the mountains, He is willing to go down the valleys, He is willing to brave the storm and the snow and the sleet - He's willing to do it all until He finds you!

You know that in the east the Shepherd would do anything to protect the sheep. I heard the story once about a little boy who was leading the sheep up a mountain road, and there was a precipice at one side and a hill on the other. He knew that the sheep are so dumb that they would run over the side, and he stood there - stood at the side of the precipice to make sure that the sheep wouldn't go over. Just one gust of wind, or one little nudge by one of the foolish beasts, would cast him over - but he loved them so much that he was willing to do it.

You see, Jesus Christ loves His own. As He was bleeding and dying, my friend - now listen to this - He was going through death on the cross for you. He was taking your place, He was bearing your punishment for your wrong, for your lostness, because He loved you so much. He took your place, He suffered all the hell that you could ever have. He took it all, because He loved you, because He was looking for you, and because He wants to find you.

People often ask the question: 'Why did Jesus say on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?'. Do you know why God forsook Him? Because He loves you - He loves you.

You know, sheep are thankless creatures - and any farmer will tell you that. Some of you have been coming to this mission, and you don't care about what Christ did for you. It doesn't make a rap of difference to you that He died on the cross! It doesn't matter that He went through death to look for you, it doesn't matter that we put these meetings on and a mission on - some of you have run out the door, almost, every night to get away from the fact that you're loved and you're lost, and that God and Christ and the Holy Ghost is hunting you down night by night, looking for you, trying to bring you to Himself. You're running away!

Are you running away? Well, He's catching up with you tonight. My advice to you is this: give up, give up to Him, because He says He'll go after you until He finds you. I don't know what He's going to have to put you through, and I would advise you to give up to Him now, surrender to Christ and be given a life that you couldn't imagine.

I remember hearing about a farmer, and this sheep gave birth to these wee lambs. She needed help in the delivery of them, and he came over and helped - but because his scent was left on the wee lamb, the mother sheep wouldn't touch it. He had to look after it, he had to feed it, walk about and nurse it. She wouldn't look at it. He would bring it over and put its scent upon things, put it under her nose and bring the wee lamb and try to bring her round to the child - but it wouldn't have it. One day that old farmer was walking across with the little lamb in his arms, and it gave out a little bleat. That mother turned its head in a flash, and went like lightning straight for the little lamb.

Listen: Jesus said: 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out'. He says that if He hears the voice of His sheep, He will listen! His sheep hear His voice and follow Him! My friend, if you're hearing His voice, you've got to follow Him - and if you follow Him, He'll never cast you out. For what earthly reason would Jesus die, but for the fact that He loves you?

That wee sheep wasn't just loved, and lost, and looked for - but listen, as we close: he was lifted. I love that! He was lifted, it says in verse 5 that: 'he layeth it on his shoulders'. David put it like this: 'I waited patiently on the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and he heard my cry. He lifted me up out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. He has put a new song in my heart, even praise unto my God, many shall see it and fear, and many shall trust in the Lord'.

I here this: 'Ach, I couldn't keep it. If I got saved tonight, I couldn't keep out of the pub, and my mates would drive me mad running after me. I couldn't keep off the fags, I couldn't keep this salvation'. Listen to me: if you come to Christ - you may be lost, but He loves you so much that He is willing and able to save you to the uttermost. That means that when He takes you, He'll put you on His shoulders, and He'll carry you through. Don't you think He's leaving it up to you. Listen: if He didn't leave it up to you to be saved, He's hardly going to leave it up to you for the rest of the way, is He? No. He is the Shepherd that will put you on His arms, and you will become the apple of His eye - and he that touches you, will touch God's anointed. You're special, and you will be special - you're so special that He loved you, and even though you were lost He risked everything. He gave His life, and He shed His blood, and He took your hell to go after and look for you - and He wants to lift you, to put you on His shoulders!

A tourist once went to Syria, and he couldn't understand it - because the fold of the sheep was just some stones that were put round in a rectangle, and there was a hole left at the front. There was no gate or anything. He saw a shepherd, one night, bringing all the sheep down from the hillside - and he put them in the door, and the tourist went over to him and he said: 'Sir, I couldn't help thinking, you see there's no gate there. All those sheep, once you get them in, do they not all come out?'. He says: 'Oh no, you see what I do is: when I get them all in late at night, I lie down in front of the hole, and I'm the door'.

Jesus says to you this evening: 'I am the door'. If you get into that fold tonight, you'll never be out, for He says: 'No man will pluck you out of my hand'. But perhaps, like the Israelites who were there, and the angel of death was coming from house-to-house, and they were told by God to slay a little lamb, to put the blood on the lintel and the posts. It says in the word of God - and in the Hebrew it seems to indicate that they also put the blood on the doorstep - that if they wanted to be saved they stayed in the house, but if they wanted to stay lost, they would have to tread over the blood of the lamb on the way out.

Some of you, night after night - I'm surprised when you've got home and taken your shoes off that they haven't been covered in red blood, for you've walked over the death of Christ night after night after night. But yet the miracle of God's grace is this: He still loves you, and He wants to find you tonight, and He wants to lift you.

Let us pray. My friend, it's time for you to come home. If you're a backslider it's time to come home, if you're a sheep that has wandered since your birth in sin without Christ - it's time to come home. Come home now, don't let the distractions of the wind and the storm, even the wild beasts around you that would distract you away from the shepherd - don't let them do it. He waits with open arms for you this evening, it's time now to come home.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the Great Shepherd of the sheep who gave His life in their place, that he might buy for Himself a peculiar people unto good works. We thank Thee for His blood that is able to save tonight, as it has always been. We pray that one of Thy lost sheep would hear the voice of the Shepherd, and would come into the fold. Lord, do a work tonight - let no-one walk out of this place without Christ as their Shepherd. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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*Appendix D:****"Treasures In The Family Tree Of Christ"***

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I wanted to bring something before you along the Christmas theme, and this is, I believe, the leading of the Lord that I bring before you what I've called 'Treasures in the Family Tree Of Christ'. We begin our reading at verse 1 of Matthew chapter 1. Now there's a lot of strange names in this first chapter of Matthew, so bear with me because I believe that out of the depths of all this difficulty we'll dig out some treasures this morning.

Verse 1: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas", or that could be translated 'Judah', "and his brethren; And Judah begat Phares and Zara of Tamar", drop the 'h' there, 'Tamar', "and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab", or that could be better translated 'Rahab', drop the 'c' and it looks more familiar, 'Rahab', "and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasseh", better translated, "begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS".

I want you also to turn with me, we're not reading from this at the moment, but Luke chapter 3 - and I want you to put your Bible bookmark or your little ribbon in your Bible in Luke chapter 3, and keep your Bible open at Matthew chapter 1 as we look at these treasures in the family tree of Christ.

The tendency as we read through the word of God, whether it be the Old Testament or the New Testament, is to skip out the difficult passages. It would have been very easy for me in the public reading of the word of

God this morning to skip out all those difficult names and not make the mistakes, perhaps, that I did in reading them - because it seems tedious, and there seems to be little profit in reading such genealogies. The tendency usually is, when you're doing your daily Bible reading - I hope you do do that - is to skip over such verses of Scripture, but what we must always remind ourselves, and hopefully we'll see the proof of this today, as 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 tells us: all Scripture, all scripture, is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. It's profitable for many things, Paul says to Timothy that it's profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness - but we must conclude that no matter how difficult the passage or the reading might be, or on a little glance on the surface no matter how little spiritual truth we may think there to be in a passage, all scripture which is inspired by God is profitable.

So we have to ask the question: why are these genealogies and names given at the very beginning of Matthew's gospel. In fact they're given in Matthew as a sort of preface, as an introduction, almost like a book in itself at the beginning of this gospel of Matthew. Many of you will know that people at times, even in our own generation, take up the hobby of tracing ancestors because they're curious about where they've come from. One genealogist by the name of Mr Stewart said: 'It's a matter of personalising history'. When we look back at our genealogies, our family trees, we begin to personalise history and we can set ourselves into our family tree maybe hundreds or thousands of years back as to where we came from.

Now if you're wondering the importance of a family tree such as this at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, all you need to do is read letter that was called 'Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho'. Justin Martyr was an early Christian, and he wrote a letter to a Jew trying to convince him of the legitimacy of the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to the title of Messiah or Christ - that Jew was called 'Trypho'. A great deal of this letter was expounding Matthew's gospel chapter 1 to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was in the line of David, and He was who He said He was: Messiah. That tells us alone the importance that such a genealogy was to the early Christians right there at the beginning of Christianity, because as Justin Martyr proved to Trypho the Jew, these verses of Scripture from verse 1 to 17 of chapter 1 of Matthew trace the ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ right back to David the King, and they connect our Lord Jesus with all of the messianic prophecies that are given in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Now if you're not sure about the importance of such verses, I want you to turn with me very quickly to chapter 22, chapter 22 of Matthew and verse 41. The Lord Jesus posed this question to the Jews: 'While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?'. So the Lord was asking them to say who is Christ to be the son of in lineage, in genealogy. And of course they reply: 'They say unto him, The son of David'. Now, therefore, when we trace the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ back to David what is it other than proof that the Lord Jesus is and was who He said He was? You can imagine as Justin Martyr, this early Christian, wrote this letter to this Jew who was unbelieving, the importance of the lineage of our Lord that was tracing His ancestry right back to King David and was proving that He was qualified to be the Messiah, and that all the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures could be legitimately linked with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let's delve a little deeper into the significance of this lineage in chapter 1. If you remember that Matthew's gospel is primarily the gospel to the Jew, the gospel of the King of the Jews to the kingdom, you will see how important it is that in chapter 1 and verse 1 the Lord Jesus' lineage is taken from Abraham. Matthew starts with Abraham. When you go to Mark's gospel there is no genealogy of the Lord Jesus because Mark is more concerned with the servanthood of our Lord Jesus, and as he goes quickly through his gospel you see that little word over and over again: 'immediately, immediately, immediately' - he hasn't really the time to put a genealogy in, it doesn't serve his purpose in his gospel. But as we turn to Luke's gospel which has traditionally been understood as the gospel of the man Christ Jesus, homing in on the humanity of the Lord Jesus, and you look at chapter 3 of Luke's gospel and verse 38 you see that he begins his genealogy not with Abraham, but because he's speaking of Jesus the man he starts his genealogy with Adam, the first man.

Of course, Luke's gospel is primarily written to Gentiles, so Luke goes beyond even Abraham, the first Jew that was ever called, he goes right back to the father of all humanity - Adam himself. Of course, as you go into John's gospel there's no genealogies per se, but because John is dealing primarily with the divine Christ from all eternity, the Word that was with God and was God, John gives Christ His beginning before the worlds began, and His lineage - as far as John is concerned - is from all eternity past. So we see the different emphasis in these gospels. As Matthew writes this genealogy, he's writing to Jews and he starts the genealogy at Abraham. Incidentally, if you look at chapter 3 of Luke's gospel you see that it's in a different order - he seems to go backwards to the way that Matthew does in chapter 1 of his gospel. The reason why that is is that the genealogy of a man that you find in Luke chapter 3 always goes from the son to the father, so it starts with Jesus and he works back to the fathers. But in Matthew's gospel we have the lineage and the genealogy of a King, and whenever the genealogy of a King was given it was always from the fathers down to that king, whoever the son was. That's why we start with Abraham, so if you get that into your mind first of all: that Matthew is speaking to the Jew, and he is speaking about the King of the Jews that came down from Abraham.

If you keep that in your mind, right away we have a treasure of genealogy - that's the first treasure I want to bring out of this passage: the treasure of genealogy. You see, the reason why Matthew brings us the genealogy of a King is that he is trying to prove the legal right of the Lord Jesus Christ to be Messiah, to be the heir to David's throne, and he does this through Joseph. We have in Matthew chapter 1 the genealogy of Jesus Christ to David through the person of Joseph, His father, His earthly father that is of course. When you go to Luke's genealogy it's the genealogy of Mary tracing back to David - people often ask: 'What's the difference between the genealogy in chapter 1 of Matthew and Luke chapter 3?'. The difference is that chapter 1 of Matthew is Joseph's genealogy to David, and chapter 3 of Luke is Mary's genealogy to David.

Now I know if you look at verse 31 of chapter 3 of Luke you will see that it talks about Heli, or it could be translated 'Eli', as the father of Joseph - but that really is the father-in-law of Joseph. Eli was a relative of Mary, an in-law, a father-in-law of Joseph. So you have here in Matthew Joseph's lineage right back to David, and you have in Luke Mary's lineage right back to David. Now what's that saying? That both Mary and Joseph were in the line to the throne of David - both of them! The two writers are proving, in Matthew the Lord Jesus' legal right to the throne of David through Joseph His father, and Luke is proving the natural right by flesh of Jesus being related to David so that He could be Messiah.

Now you may be a little confused, but let me try and iron it all out for you. Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14 is quoted in this passage, and you'll hear it read probably tonight: 'Behold the virgin shall be with child'. It wasn't only necessary that the Lord Jesus be born of a virgin, but He had to be born of a virgin of David's line. He had to be physically related to King David - but here's where the problem comes in: a woman could never ever be an heir to the throne. It didn't matter that in Luke's gospel we have Mary related to David all the way back, she could never be an heir to the throne - so not only should the Messiah have to be born of a virgin, and born of a virgin that was related by flesh and blood to David the King, but that virgin that was in the Davidic line had to also be married to a man who was equally related to David in the Davidic line.

This is truly a treasure of genealogy, and it has thrilled my heart this week as I have studied it, because Matthew proves that our Lord Jesus - through Joseph as His legal father in the eyes of the nation - was legally the heir to the throne of David and could be qualified as Messiah. He was born of Mary, so he was naturally of the line of David and was naturally able to be the Messiah. Do you see the perfection of the great plan of God? Even though Mary couldn't be qualified to be an heir to the throne, God married to Mary, Joseph, so that He could be legally Messiah. My friends, this is wonderful because the prophets demanded that there should be a virgin birth, and we right away would say: 'Well, then He could never be related naturally to the line of David, He could never be related legally'. The law demanded that there was a fleshly

lineage to the Davidic throne, and this is something that man could never have conceived in his human mind - to bring forth Messiah from the virgin's womb, but that that virgin should be related to David naturally and she should marry a man, Joseph, related to David legally and royally.

There you have it, and let me say categorically today: it is absolutely fundamental and essential that He was born of the virgin, no matter what the BBC will say tonight - and I'm not urging you to watch it. It is essential for who He was and who He is! But does it not warm your heart that all this is brought together in the supernatural providence of God, and I'll tell you better than this: God has left no room for any other man to claim to be Messiah, no room. Apart from the fact that it's proved here in this genealogy, when the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus what happened? In AD70 the Romans were allowed to come and absolutely destroy the whole city, destroy the temple, destroy the nation and disperse them - and with that their genealogical records were all destroyed as well! If a man in Judaism was to stand up today and say: 'I am Messiah, I go right back to the line of David', it could never be proved - but it's proved here!

No wonder the Lord said: 'Many shall rise and call themselves Christ, but it will all be unfounded'. What a treasure of genealogy we have here, does it thrill your heart to see it in the word of God? Perfection! Man would say: 'It's an impossibility', but God brings all these impossibilities together and sets His Son in the midst of it. Now the careful eye will look down this passage and see that there are three omissions of names that should be there. The name Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah are in the Old Testament, but they're not found here. Don't get confused or disconcerted about it, because just because this says 'begat' does not mean it was a direct relationship of father and son, they can skip a couple of generations in these type of genealogies that you have in the Scriptures. But why are these three men left out? I could go into many reasons why they are left out, but I'll give you the reason which I think is primary in Matthew's mind that he left them out: they were three descendants of the daughter of the wicked King Ahab, whose name was Athaliah. Without going into undue detail, let me just tell you this: Athaliah desired to annihilate the kingly seed of the house of Judah. In other words, because Christ would come from the tribe of Judah, Athaliah decided that she would wipe them all out. We could call it anti-messianity, just like anti-Christianity, and anti-Christ today, they were trying to destroy the line of Messiah - just as Cain tried to do, the devil did through Cain when he slew Abel; just as we come into the Nativity story and Herod tries to slay all those man children to try to stop the bringing to fruition of the fulfilment of prophetic scripture in the Lord Jesus.

God doesn't have them here, isn't that amazing? Because, as Galatians 4:4 says: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law'. As we heard this morning around the table, the darkness couldn't prevent it no matter how much it tried. Oh, isn't it wonderful? But I have three more treasures to bring to you in the time that's left. The second is a treasure of numerology. Genealogy is the study of generations, numerology is the study of numbers. If you look at verse 17 there are three fourteens mentioned. All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen; from David until the carrying away of Babylon are fourteen; from the carrying away of Babylon to Christ are fourteen. Now I think that one of the reasons why Matthew breaks it into three fourteens is for memorisation, because these early Christians had to memorise this to debate with Jews about the lineage of our Lord Jesus. I think that that's one of the reasons why he does this.

If you can't get fourteen, the reason is that David ends the first list and starts the second list, and Jechonias ends the second list and starts the third - but that's by the way. If you add these three fourteens together the number that you get is the number 42. You have to be very careful in the study of numbers in scripture that you don't go overboard, but let me just say this: 42 in the scripture represents the experience of sufferings. Now I know that the number 40 represents trial - the Israelites were 40 years in the wilderness, the trial that they had; the Lord Jesus was fasting 40 days and 40 nights and then His temptation came. But those trials don't always have to have necessary deep sufferings, it could just be a trial - but 42 speaks specifically of great sufferings. As you go into the book of Revelation it talks about 42 months, which is the three and a half

years of the second half of the tribulation period - Jacob's trouble. No other period of suffering has ever been seen on the earth - and the idea is not just that it's a period of suffering, but that the 43rd period - after 42, after the suffering - the 43rd period is the period of rest.

Now, my friends, as you get this in this genealogy you have 42 generations from Abraham right down to Christ, but the 43rd is rest! Isn't it wonderful? Rest in Christ! We could go on: two times seven is fourteen, you have three fourteens here - and I hope I'm not pushing this but I don't believe I am, most of the conservative evangelical scholars see this in these numbers. Seven is the perfect number in Judaism, perfection, completeness. There is no disorder with the Spirit of God, God is not the author of confusion, and as you look at the Bible you see much of Israel's history is broken into sevens. There were 70 years of captivity in Babylon, there are 70 prophetic weeks in Daniel, the last week of that 70 prophetic weeks is broken into seven years. Here you have in these fourteens, two times seven three times over. If seven is perfection, two times seven three times over - what must that mean? Absolute and complete fulfilment in Christ!

My friend, Christ has fulfilled it all - and if that's not enough for you: David, the name David is mentioned, the all-important name - and I didn't say that now! - but to Judaism the all-important kingly name is mentioned five times in this genealogy. You may not know this, but in personal names letters in Hebrew represent numbers. The letter 'd' represents 4 - they never take vowels by the way, so drop the 'a' - the letter 'v' represents 6, drop the 'i', the letter 'd' represents 4 again - you add it all up, what number you get? Fourteen! Fourteen, and I wonder is that the reason why Matthew puts this right throughout his genealogy, that all of this points to the fulfilment of Christ as in the line of David as Messiah, and isn't it amazing that not just the names fulfil scripture, but the very numbers in it fulfil it!

Let me give you another treasure, a treasure of typology. Genealogy is the study of generations, numerology the study of numbers, typology is the study of types - and a type in the Bible is just a figure, a symbol of something that is future, pointing towards something that is distant. If you look at verse 1 it says: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ'. If you turn with me to Genesis chapter 5 and verse 1, you read here: 'This is the book of the generations of Adam'. Now if you read down this generation of Adam it has the word 'begat', but it often has 'and he died...and he died...and he died'. This is a generation of death that came upon all men via sin, through Adam our forefather; but as you turn to Matthew this is a new generation, the generation of Jesus Christ. That word 'generation', which is the literal word 'genesis', is only found twice in the whole Bible - once in the Old Testament, Genesis 5 and 1; and once in the New Testament, Matthew 1 and 1. What Adam had wrought on humanity by his original sin, now the last Adam is coming in through the Nativity of Christ, born in Bethlehem, to undo and reverse everything in contrast to the first Adam.

What typology there is in this! I haven't got time to dwell on that because there's something further I want you to see. 'The generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, and the son of Abraham'. Now you think of David and think of Abraham for a moment, and you will remember from your knowledge of the Old Testament that both of them were promised sons - isn't that right? Both of them were promised sons. Abraham was promised a son in Isaac, and Abraham's son in Isaac was a promise of what? A racial line of Jewish people that would number greater than the sand of the shore and the stars of the sky. Abraham speaks of the racial line of the Jew, that there was this nation that would spring up and be a blessing to all nations. But go further into the typology of Isaac for a moment, remember Abraham took Isaac in Genesis 22 and offered him upon the altar to God - the father was offering the son. He had faith, we read in Hebrews 11, to believe that God could raise that child up from the dead again if he was caused to slay it. So there's not only death and offering and sacrifice, but there's resurrection.

Isaac married a woman called Rebekah, and Rebekah was not a Hebrew. Rebekah in these days was a Gentile, Isaac's name means 'laughter' - and I believe the significance of that was forever to be a witness to

Abraham of the utter impossibility of this birth to a barren womb like Sarah's. As far as Abraham was concerned the name 'Isaac' meant this, listen: the merging of human and the divine. The Scriptures say that Sarah received power to conceive seed when she was past age. Can you see the typology in all of this?

Let me go on: what about David's son? Well this is the royal line, King David. His son was promised and came, and his name was Solomon, and his name means 'peaceful'. Solomon's greatest endowment was wisdom, and his specific life's work was building the temple. His reign was characteristic of peace and prosperity on the nation. Do you see the typology? Do you see the significance? But let me stop you here and warn you for a moment, because what was in Abraham's heart and David's heart failed! Have you got it? The promise of their sons didn't come to fruition in the son, because you see in the Old Testament the weakness of Isaac's character, the appalling failure of his sons right throughout the whole ages of Judaism - and he failed to really grasp the promises that God had given to his father Abraham. Look at Solomon, and in spite of all his wisdom and gifts from God his life is an unutterable and appalling failure! The temple that he built to glorify God became a centre which was a form of godliness without the power because of his sin, and his sin ultimately caused the fall of the Davidic dynasty.

My friend, if you see in this genealogy the treasure of typology pointing towards another who would perfectly fulfil all the promises that were given to Abraham's sons and David's sons - and who is He? Let me remind you of His words: 'Before Abraham was I am', 'A greater than Solomon is here'. He realised and fulfilled all the purposes that were failed in Isaac, Solomon, and all after him. In His sacrifice, in His glorious resurrection, marrying a Gentile bride, building a spiritual temple and sending forth His Holy Spirit into it to give it the power that was necessary. What I want you to see today is that all the aspirations and incompetence of men has been overcome, and even Abraham the founder of the religion, and David the king of the religion, look to Christ, and have to look to Christ for the full fulfilment of all of God's purposes and promises. Abraham, the father of faith, fades out of sight when he sees his faith vindicated in Jesus Christ. The government of David, which perpetually failed, waits for Christ administration on the earth. The captivity was wrought in the time of Babylon, through which the people of God sighed and sobbed in agony, waits for emancipation - and it is all fulfilled in Christ!

You have through these time periods the judges, the kings, the priests, theocracy, monarchy, hierarchy, and what Matthew is simply saying is that all these things have been pointing toward the Lord Jesus, and now they are all fulfilled in Him - and then he starts his gospel to tell you all about it! No wonder the hymnwriter said:

'Hail to the Lord's anointed,
Great David's greater Son.
Hail in the time appointed
His reign on earth begun.

He comes to break oppression,
To set the captives free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity'.

Here's the last treasure - a treasure of genealogy, a treasure of numerology, a treasure of typology - and here's the last, but not least, and I want to give you it: the treasure of soteriology. Soteriology is the study of salvation. If you realise that in the ancient near east, in Palestine in Jesus' day, a woman was not a person, she was a thing. She was seen as a possession of her father or her husband, and they could do with her as they pleased. Certainly a woman was never ever to be included within Jewish pedigree, and you would never find a woman in the genealogies of a Jew. In fact, one of the morning prayers of a Jewish man was: 'Lord, I thank You that You haven't made me a Gentile, You haven't made me a slave, and You haven't made me a

woman'. Well, if there was to be a woman in the genealogy of Christ, you would have thought perhaps that it would have been a noble and devoted woman that you would find in the Old Testament - maybe Sarah or Rebekah, or Deborah, or as Hebrews 11 says: 'women that received their dead raised to life again, and others who were tortured not accepting deliverance'. In the genealogy of the one who would be the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head and would be Messiah, you would think you would find some great woman of esteem - but can I tell you today, look carefully: there are four women, and three of them at least are not marked by holiness, but they are marked by shame - and the fourth belongs to a race that was cursed by the law of God.

In the closing moments let me give you those four women. Look at verse 3: 'Judah begat Phares and Zara of Tamar' - there's the woman, Tamar. If you go into the Old Testament Scriptures, Genesis 38 - don't turn to it now - you will read a story there. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah, and she was married to a man who died. He displeased the Lord, so the Lord slew him. In those days if your husband died your brother-in-law had to marry you and raise up seed to your husband. So her brother-in-law came to her, Obed, but he did not raise up seed for her. The Lord was displeased, and the Lord struck him down, and then Judah promised: 'See when that little boy, the other brother that's left, when he goes up I'll give you to him as your wife' - but when he grew up Judah didn't do it, and she was displeased. The Bible says she went out, knew where Judah was travelling one day, disguised herself as a prostitute, slept with him and bore up seed to her father-in-law - incest, adultery, fornication, seduction, you name it, it's in the book. She is in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus. You say: 'What could possibly qualify her to be in the genealogy of the Lord?' - do you want to hear it? The only thing that qualifies her to be there is her shame, her shame.

Let me give you the second one, verse 5: 'Rahab' - Joshua chapter 2. You read about the spies who went to spy in Jericho when they went into the home of this harlot at Rahab, and they were given a place to stay and she hid them from the people in Jericho and from the king. Because of that they had grace upon her, and they said that they wouldn't slay her house and her family if she put a red ribbon or red rope in the window of her home - but the Bible tells us that it was by faith that the harlot Rahab perished not like them who believed not, when she received the spies with peace. She was a harlot, full of abominations, so why is she in the genealogy of Christ? Here's why: faith! That's all, faith.

Look at the third one, verse 5b: 'Ruth' - now there's no stain of character on Ruth, but her problem is she is a Moabitess, and the law of Moses was against the Moabites and cursed them. In fact Deuteronomy 23 verse 3 says: 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever'. But faith brought Ruth into the Lord's people along with her children, and the third generation after her - her great grandson - is King David himself! What the law had cursed, grace set aside and brought her in. Oh, this is tremendous!

The fourth in verse 6, it just says 'her of Uriah' - and of course you know the wife of Uriah the Hittite was Bathsheba, that David committed adultery with. I believe that David is in view here and not Bathsheba, it doesn't even mention her name - and I believe what's being talked about here is the sin of a believing man. Here you have the believing King David whose lineage we have before us, but even he can fall into the depths of sin and shame, yet he's here! His backsliding that he committed, it didn't disqualify him from grace! I'll tell you, if Matthew has anything to tell us from his genealogy it's this: the treasures of salvation. I believe that he deliberately picked out the dregs of humanity to show that it is faith that lays hold of salvation, deliverance from the law is through faith, and even in the case of a believer that falls, the assurance of salvation is through faith. Grace shines through it all, nothing but grace we can see in this genealogy - four women who are sinners, four women who are Gentiles - and we could almost sing with Hannah today: 'He lifteth up the needy from a dunghill to make them sit with princes and inherit the throne of glory'. Matthew's purpose in this genealogy is not to cover-up the outrageous sin of some of the ancestors of Jesus, but to emphasise them; that on the human side of Jesus' ancestry was part of the world.

Later as we read, verse 18 on, he emphasises that He was apart from sin and He came to redeem us. But let me ask you in the closing two minutes of our meeting: this Christmas time, does this bring any commentary or deepen your understanding of a verse like this concerning the incarnation of Christ: 'He came in the likeness of sinful flesh'. John 1, what about this one? 'He came unto His own'. You have it in the His lineage, but let me say this - and I am on holy ground, and I be careful, but I tell you this - on the authority of this passage I can say it: He was not only the friend of publicans and sinners, but He was related to them. He was related to them! Apart from sin, in His lineage He associates with the sinner - what an illustration and symbol of the gospel that the division between Jew and Gentile is broken down, male and female, clean and unclean - for He is not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Is it any wonder then, in verse 21, God gives Him the name JESUS - Jehovah is salvation.

Now listen: if you can't come and adore Him after that, I don't know what's wrong with you.

Lord Jesus, we fall at Thy feet this day and worship Thee for who Thou art - from eternity past the Eternal Son of God, the Word of God who has neither beginning or end; but yet in time the one who is the rightful heir of the throne of David, the one who came in the likeness of our sinful flesh to redeem those that are under the law. Oh Lord we thank Thee, thank Thee for dying for us, thank Thee for rising again, we thank Thee for everything that Thou art and all that Thou hast fulfilled. We pray that this Christmas time that Thy Spirit will give us a deeper appreciation of the treasures of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Amen.

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