

#1973—October 18, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—16

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

[Easley:] God in His great kindness reached down in a way I'll never understand from eternity past, and He chose you before the foundation of time. You don't seek Him out and decide, “Oh, I think of all the options, Jesus is the best one.”

[Gauger:] With a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded, this is the continuing series *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents, and I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to today's broadcast, featuring a message from Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute. He came here in 2005. You know, Dr. Easley brought with him a number of perspectives gathered over several decades of ministry in the pastorate. I was privileged to serve as host of his daily broadcast, *PROCLAIM!*, for about three years. In the course of that time, a number of themes began to bubble to the surface. These came about in conversations across the microphone as well as in his messages. A couple of themes would include “never let the world teach you theology.” It's amazing how we sometimes do, in fact, do that. Or, his statement “Comparison is the kiss of death of gratitude.” Yeah, you want to lose a grateful spirit? Start comparing yourself. Or, “Only God is awesome.” He would often say that when somebody would say, “Oh, that was so awesome.” No, he would correct and say, “No, only God is awesome.” Well, Dr. Easley carried quite a torch for prayer and a desire to help Moody students and the entire Moody family pray with more effectiveness. I think that's part of what set him up to write his book *Interludes* from Moody Publishers, this collection of prayers that come right out of his own devotional life. With a pen in hand as he ponders Scripture every day, Dr. Easley writes a prayer. Let me read you an excerpt from this one:

Oh, faithful Lord, You are great and faithful. You are holy and righteous. You are the hope of all who seek You. Yet we languish at the first sweat of faith. We whine at the first delay. We withdraw at the first obstacle. We tire at the first hour. Oh great and faithful Lord, by faith help us to choose to endure when we weary, resist when tempted, mature when complacent, serve when selfish, be joyful when depressed. Oh great and faithful Lord, grant to us not just a miracle but an immovable faith.

That excerpt from *Interludes*, Dr. Michael Easley's book of prayers and reflections of a servant's heart from Moody Publishers. You might want to check it out. Another great theme of Dr. Easley's was a message series titled *Why We Believe What We Believe*, sort of a mini theology condensed into a series of messages, incredibly popular with listeners and students alike. Today's message on the Hall of Presidents, *Why We Believe What We Believe* about Jesus. Walk with me now down the Hall of Presidents as we hear from Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute.

[Easley:] To follow Christ in this culture is going to be more and more challenging. What happens to all of us when persecution begins? Some people can step up to the plate, and they can be bold and courageous and talk about Christ. For those we are thankful. We call them our heroes, and we push them ahead, and we say, “Go for it.” The rest of us may be shy, or be skittish, or move to the corners.

Perhaps that's why when persecution or criticism comes, when external pressures weigh in, we sort back off the message. I think one of the issues we face in the evangelical, fundamental, believing church of Jesus Christ is that when we're pushed so hard by so many voices, we

become more concerned about tolerance than the truth of Christ. More attention becomes paid to success in ministry rather than significance and substance as a follower of Christ. We spend more energy on the media, the wrapping, the presentation than we do the message of the person of Christ. Watch it when you go into circles ... And I am all for the arts. I am all for music. I am all for efforts to bring the message in. But you watch carefully when the media overwhelms the message, when there's an interest in marketing, strategic thinking, and production rather than maturity in Jesus Christ, when there is more importance laid on the crowds than on being Christlike—all these kinds of things perhaps are the pulse, the indicators of how Jesus is doing through us.

Now, when we talk about this little series "Why We Believe What We Believe," when I sketched these out and thought about a systematic biblical theology from a very high fly-over level, the subject of Christology at first seemed so exciting until I got into it the last few weeks. I thought, *How do you talk about Jesus Christ in a few moments and do any justice to the doctrine of Christology?* So I won't, but we will begin a beginning. Why we believe what we believe about Christology is not important; it is crucial. To know the person and the work of Jesus Christ through your pores begins doctrinally, and it moves emotionally, and it becomes part of who you are as a follower of Jesus Christ.

William Gladstone wrote, "All that I think, all that I hope, all that I write, and all that I live for is based upon the divinity of Jesus Christ, the central joy of my poor and wayward life." Up until that point I thought he was glossing. "The central joy of my poor and wayward life." I hope you never recover from your sinfulness—not that you dwell there in perpetual guilt, and agony, and regret, and disappointment, and depression, but that you are in tune enough with your own sinfulness to begin to understand His grace and mercy to call you to Himself. When I am prone to discouragement, and disappointment, and guilt, and conviction of things I did decades ago, I just cling to the base of Calvary, because I have nowhere else to go. You've been forgiven much. It's a good thing to be humble. It's a good thing to be broken quickly by your sin and guilt—not to dwell, not to stay there, not to become a depressed person, not to become an Eeyore theologically ... But nobody likes Tigger. He's just totally annoying theologically, right?

How would you explain Jesus Christ? If you were asked an unassuming question from a person who didn't know Christ, where would you begin? Would you talk of your experience? Would you talk theologically? Would you speak a moment of how Jesus has changed your life? Would you talk about before, during, and after you knew Christ? Would you begin to explain some key verses? How would you begin to talk about the Christ? Would you think theologically? Would you use a little booklet, a pamphlet: "Four Spiritual Laws," "Bad News/Good News," the Roman Road verses marked up in your Bible so well? How would you begin if someone threw you a softball and said, "Tell me about this Jesus?"

We can think of His preexistence, eternity, divinity, incarnation, intercession, humanity, virgin birth, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, His substitutionary atonement for our sins, His kingdom, His return, His reign, and that doesn't begin to describe the list. Maybe we could talk about prophecy. We could begin at the beginning in Genesis, and we could look at the first few verses and Genesis 3:15, and walk through the covenants, and walk through Abraham believing God. We could see Christ, the scarlet thread through the whole Bible. Perhaps we would look at His parables, a great place to learn of Jesus. We love the narrative today. Everyone's running that direction. Let's look at the parables, look at the stories. Perhaps we would look at the I Ams. Years ago I did a series on the seven I Ams of Jesus Christ. Powerful just to look at what Jesus says about Himself as a self-identifier. You could look at it

geographically: Galilee, Bethlehem, Bethany, Samaria, Caesarea Philippi, Jerusalem. You can look at Christ's life in many ways.

How do you develop a Christology? The comprehensive Christ deserves careful study, and no matter where we are in our spiritual life, we can still study Him. We can begin today. The Moody Bible Institute's doctrinal statement, article 3 reads, "Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. He took upon Himself our nature, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died upon the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the world. He arose from the dead in the body in which He was crucified. He ascended into heaven in that body glorified, where He is now our interceding High Priest. He will come again personally and visibly to set up His kingdom and to judge the quick and the dead." Then there's a host of passages.

By the way, *the quick* is a king's word for living, the living and the dead.

There are three or four footnotes that I won't take time to look at here, but let me just draw it back. Because Christology is so far-reaching, we should be lifelong students of the person, the work, the theology of Jesus Christ. The good news is you can start now. There's no worry about what you do or don't know. You have all your life to learn about Christ, so we have lots of ways to begin thinking about Jesus Christ. I have selected—not perhaps the best way—a few names of Jesus Christ. I thought about Prophet, Priest, and King. I thought about past, present, future work, all kinds of ways. I want to suggest five names.

The first one is the Son of Man. If we look at the words that the Bible uses to explain Jesus, it seems of interest to say, "What were the titles? What were the names? What did He call Himself?" The Son of Man, as you well know, is the single most common referent that Jesus used to talk about Himself. So that piques my curiosity. Why would Jesus refer to Himself as the Son of Man? Obviously it represents His humanity. Some of our old doctrinal statements say "fully God and fully man," and the fully God part I'm fine with, but the fully man has got a little bit of hair on it. He's not fully man in the sense that He has all of man's problems. He is comprehensively man. He is man, but it is a reference to His humanity. He represents mankind. Not only is He born, just like you and I were born; not only does He grow from an infant to an adult, just as we grow from infancy to adulthood; He is a man who identifies as a son of that birth canal process, of growing in health, and stature, and wisdom, and knowledge until He begins His so-called public ministry.

As a man, He suffered. The Son of Man—this is hard for us to grapple. I think some of our sanctified imaginations put Jesus in a very unfortunate light. He suffered every feeling you've suffered, I believe. He was weary. He was hungry. He slept on a boat. We have no indication He was ever sick, but I don't see why He'd be exempt; after all, He suffered and died. He hungered. He got angry. He was troubled in His spirit, John tells us. There were times He tossed tables. There were times I think He was grieved and saddened. He wept at the death of His friend. I think He was saddened when He said, "Oh, ye of little faith." And I think He is fully man in that sense, comprehensively man. He identifies with our weaknesses.

When you see your suffering Savior, know that He must suffer to go to glory. That's the theology of the gospel of John, right? "The Son of Man must suffer many things." And who will know the agony of Gethsemane until we see glory? The suffering path to glory is talked about in Mark 8:31, 9:12 ... many times.

The *Son of Man* refers also to a unique authority that God the Father granted Him. Perhaps one of the most unusual, I would say, the unique use of the Son of Man comes from Stephen's lips

in Acts 7:56, if you want to turn over there real briefly. Acts 7:56, the great sermon that is still being written upon from Stephen's mouth. I heard a scholar one time say there was no more written on any homiletic piece in the abstract journals than on Stephen's sermon. Don't know if that's verifiable or anecdotal, but it would sort of make sense. In verse 56 Stephen says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Obviously it was the culmination of all that he said, but that's an interesting stack of terms. "The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God," the place of inheritance, the place of the sonship, the place of the ruler, the reign, the One who will take everything from the Father, at the right hand of God, and exercise judgment, compassion, mercy, rule, reign. It's all there. And He's standing there. He's not dead; He's in heaven, in proximity right beside God. No one is at the right hand of God but God. That's when they drove him out of the city and pelted him to death with stones.

[Gauger:] In case you've just joined us, we're listening to Dr. Michael J. Easley in our Hall of Presidents series, his message, one of the eighteen available in our Hall of Presidents message collection available right now at moodypresents.org. Eighteen messages on nine CDs—check it out at moodypresents.org. Now here's Dr. Michael J. Easley with part 2 of Why We Believe What We Believe about Jesus.

[Easley:] Well, the position of Son, Heir, Ruler, He is the Son of Man.

A second term, *Messiah*. We use this quite casually in our Christian-eze. We talk about Messiah, Jesus Christ. One of the interesting observations is how the Synoptics stack up talking about Jesus. In Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22 we have the exact same scenario told a tiny different way, but when the high priest presses Jesus and asks Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ...?" Are You the Christ? Are You the Messiah? Are You the One that's come to do certain things? The Synoptics record it a tiny bit differently, but Jesus basically says, "Yes, I am. I am. I am Messiah." What this would mean for the Jewish ears is far different than you and me. This is of the Davidic royal line. This is the messianic lineage. This was the One who would be King who would reinstate the fortunes of Israel, who would control the boundaries of the land, never quite inhabited, never quite taken, always marauding enemies encroaching against the land. Their sin and their inability to dispossess the land that God gave them through the Abrahamic covenant has always been in contest and in battle.

I remember years ago hearing Dr. W. A. Criswell, a remarkable pastor at the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, speak one time in chapel when I was in graduate school. He made this eloquent speech about all the "ites"—the Ninevites, the Perrizites, the Amalekites. On and on he went. He said, "Where are they today?" But there is this group called the Israelites, however you define them, and there is this little sliver of land pushed up against the Mediterranean Sea, so small and insignificant, but it hangs on by its fingernails. I don't know your view of Israel, and the land, and those are fun issues to discuss, but there is a theological precedence that the Davidic king, through the Davidic line, will come and be a royal, regal heir Messiah. And the way I understand Scripture, He will dispossess. He will be a ruler. He will be the One the Jews thought would restore fortunes, build boundaries, take care of enemies, and be the King. That was what they hoped for. This is what John the Baptist scratches his head over. "Are You the King of the Jews? Are You the One?" Jesus belongs to the Davidic family, and this proclamation would be frightening to a Jew who was not ready to accept Jesus as Messiah.

Perhaps the most telling event occurs in Caesarea Philippi. Matthew 16 ... Turn over in your Bible for a moment to Matthew 16, beginning in verse 13. When you go to Israel, you will go to Caesarea Philippi. It will be one of the highlights of your trip there. You will walk into this state

park-type configuration, and up a road you will go, and you will find yourself in a beautiful garden, picnic-type setting. You'll go up to Banias, Pnias. The Greek god Pan was worshiped in these naves. You can still see where they were hewn beautifully into the stone. It's this huge rock in the middle of lots of rocks, and the water still pumps from the springs of Caesarea Philippi, a sheet of beautiful, clear-glass water, and you will walk around there, and go up, and you will see this is the very spot Jesus has this experience. It's interesting that He takes His disciples there when He says these words. Verse 13 of Matthew 16: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'"

Let me stop for just a moment. You all know the passage too well, but who do you say Jesus is? When the softball's thrown your way, who do you say that He is? When the pressures of the culture and the context in which we live continue to push us away from clear, gentle, truthful, unapologetic explanations of Jesus Christ ...

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah is a fascinating confession, because we know Peter, right? This isn't the kind of thing Peter would typically say. "You're the Christ. You're the very Son of the Living God." You're blessed, Peter, because God told you that.

Men and women, when you came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it was not because you concluded it on your own account. It was because God, in His great kindness, reached down in a way I'll never understand from eternity past, and He chose you before the foundation of time, before the foundation of the world. He called you to Himself, and at some point in your journey on this sod you said, "Oh, Jesus is the Christ." It's no different than Simon's experience. God revealed it to us. You don't come to this conclusion. You don't seek Him out and decide, "Oh, I think of all the options, Jesus is the best one." He calls us to Himself. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Now, the aspect of the story of not telling anyone invites great intrigue on the part of careful Bible students. We at least know that Jesus was reluctant to reveal His messiahship. It was not yet the proper time. *Reluctant* is a poor word. It was not yet the proper time for Jesus to reveal His messiahship to the world until His resurrection, and then that will take off.

Well, one, He's the Son of Man. Two, He's the Messiah. Three, the Son of God. As the Son of God, Jesus is uniquely positioned to reveal the Father. If you turn over to Mark 1 for just a moment, the first verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Right out of the beginning, the oldest gospel begins making the self-identifier. This is the good news, the Euangelion, the good, redemptive news of Jesus who is also the Son of God.

Drop down to verse 11 of Mark 1. "And a voice came out of the heavens: 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'" This identification is crucial.

Son of God is used in many ways. Let me just give you a few, a sample of them. At the annunciation when Gabriel comes to Mary in Luke 1:35, "The Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Interestingly, in Matthew 4:3 the Devil refers to Jesus in an accusatory

way: “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” Of course John the Baptist in John 1:34: “I myself have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

So here’s the forerunner of the Messiah—right?—who closes the Old Testament prophecy and begins the new revelation of Jesus Christ. He’s the forerunner, the announcer, the moral, repentant baptism for the Jew. “Come back to your God. Turn away from your lifestyle because He’s coming.”

Mark 3:11: “Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, ‘You are the Son of God!’” Isn’t this rich in irony? The erudite, self-appointed scholars of the world tell us Jesus is nothing! Even the demons know He’s God. Even the spirit realm quakes when He comes by and says, “Don’t throw us out of Him. Put us into the swine.” The demons are smarter than the brilliant of the world.

The disciples in the boat stumble across it. Matthew 14:33: “Those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son who can calm the sea.’” After Saul’s conversion, Acts 9:20—an interesting passage: “Immediately [Paul, Saul] began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’” So the angels, the Devil, the demons, those who worshiped Him, the disciples, and even John the Baptist said, “This is God’s Son.”

Now, we can say a whole lot more about Him. Let me summarize the Son of God in two ways. He has an eternal relationship with the Father. When you study systematic theology, or biblical theology, you will study the difference between the preexistence of Jesus Christ and the eternality of Jesus Christ. *Preexistence* simply means that He existed before He became incarnate, in flesh. *Eternality* means He’s always existed. They do hinge together as you understand the dynamics of the Trinity and the doctrine of Christology.

[Gauger:] Speaking to the students, faculty, and staff, that’s Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute with *Why We Believe What We Believe* about Jesus, one of the messages that’s part of our eighteen-message collection from the Hall of Presidents. Complete information is at moodypresents.org. You know, this *Why We Believe What We Believe* series is one of the most popular that Dr. Easley ever preached. You’ll want to get a copy of today’s message. Again, it’s part of the Hall of Presidents series at moodypresents.org. Just look for the button there called “Hall of Presidents” when you visit moodypresents.org. Next week on *Moody Presents*, a very special conversation with Dr. Paul Nyquist, our newly installed ninth president at Moody Bible Institute—a bit of his background, his life, his family, his heart for ministry, and you’ll want to hear it all. That’s next week on *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.