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Why We Believe What We Believe – Jesus Part 1

[Easley:] When the softball is thrown your way, who do you say that He is? And 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.

[Lepine:] This is in context with Michael Easley, I'm Bob Lepine. We are in a series called "Why We Believe What We Believe" and when it gets to the subject of Jesus, you would think that this ought to be a no-brainer. We ought to all agree on who Jesus is and yet, as you've mentioned many times, every spring newsmagazines seem to uncover some new revelation about the historical Jesus. There is still debate about the reality of Christ, isn't there?

[Easley:] Well, and if we attack the person of Christ and redefine Him and make Him something that He's not, then of course it dismantles Christianity. Understanding the person and work of Christ, the divinity, the incarnation, fully God/fully man, this is critical because our salvation is completely tied up in this person, Jesus. So if you can dismantle Jesus, if you can Da Vinci code Him away, -

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] - if you can change the views; He was just a man. He wasn't completely God. He could have done this. He could have done that. You dismantle what the Scripture says about salvation.

[Lepine:] And there are still some, although it's a vast minority, who think that Jesus didn't even really exist; that He's a mythic figure -

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] - not an historical figure.

[Easley:] And I think this will grow. I think this will grow with time. There will be a continued denigration of Christ. And think of this, if you want to attack Christianity, dismantle the person and work of Christ.

[Lepine:] Well, let's listen as you teach us about the person and work of Jesus in part one of this message, in the series "Why We Believe What We Believe." Here's Michael.

[Easley:] The time was if you were a Judeo-Christian culture, you are well to the; you were embraced; you are at least sort of tolerated. In recent decades that toleration has shifted. Sure there have always been fanatical groups that have sort of lobbed criticism at Christianity, but at least our country that we call America, there has been a certain freedom, a certain ability to be a Jewish person, a Christian person with this so-called Judeo-Christian concept and you were okay.

Some of the criticism that Christianity has taken in the recent decades, some of it frankly is self-deserved, right? I mean sometimes Christians are kind of foolish in the way we represent ourselves and Christ. Sometimes I don't want to be associated with certain people that call themselves Christians. I don't know about you but you want to just sort of say, "Hey, I'm not one of them kind. I'm a different kind." And there are so many kinds

when you look at it from the world's perspective; but the vitriol from the press, from the entertainment industry, from the political realm in our country and then persecuted believer a cross the globe, I'm not a historian, there are better men and women to address that subject, but it seems to me in my small experience as a follower of Christ that the stakes are getting higher and hotter.

To follow Christ in this culture is going to be more and more challenging. Now, what happens to all of us when the persecution begins, some people can step up to the plate and they can be bold a courageous and talk about Christ. For those we are thankful and we call them our heroes and we push them ahead 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, external pressures weigh in and we sort of 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 are 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, and the presentation than we do on the message of the person of Christ. Watch it when you go into circles. I'm all for the arts, I'm all for music and I'm all for efforts to bring the message in, but you watch carefully when the media overwhelms the message; when there is an interest in marketing and strategic thinking and production rather than maturity in Jesus Christ; when is more importance laid on the crowds than on being Christlike. All these kind of things are perhaps the pulse; they are indicators of how Jesus is doing through us.

Now when we talk about this little series "Why We Believe What We Believe," when I sketch 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, 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 and 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 the symbol of 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 no where 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.

[Laughter] He's just totally annoying theologically, right? [Laughter]

How would you explain Jesus Christ if you are asked an unassuming question from a person that 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 could 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 and we could see Christ, the scarlet thread through the whole Bible.

Perhaps we would look at His parables. 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. Or perhaps we would look at the "I Ams." Years ago I did a series on the "Seven I Ams of Jesus Christ." It was powerful just look at what Jesus says about Himself as a self identifier.

You can look at it geographically; Galilee, Bethlehem, Bethany, Samaria, Caesarea Philippi, Jerusalem. You could 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 Doctrinal Statement, Article III reads:

"Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God which is to say He Himself is very 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 and the body in which He was crucified. He ascended into Heaven in that glorified body or 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."

And then there's a host of passages. By the way, the quick is a King's word for the living. The living and the dead. There are three or four footnotes that I won't take time to look at here. 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 is 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 and 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 reference that Jesus used to talk about Himself so that peaks 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." 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 and 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. I mean 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."

I mean, 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?

This 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 seven, verse fifty-six, the great sermon that is still being written upon from Stephen's mouth. I think I heard a scholar one time say there was no more written on any homolytic piece in the abstract journals than on Stephen's sermon. I don't know if that is verifiable or anecdotal but it would sort of make sense. Verse fifty-six:

"Behold, [Steven says] I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Now 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 and looking up he sees Him, right? Well, the position of Son, heir, ruler; He is the Son of Man.

A second term: Messiah. We use this quite casually in our "Christianese." We talk about Messiah, Jesus Christ. One of the interesting observations is how the Synoptics stack up talking about Jesus. In Matthew twenty-six, Mark fourteen and Luke twenty-two we have the exact same scenario told a tiny different way. 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 a messianic lineage. This is 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 hearing years ago Dr. W.A. Criswell, the remarkable pastor of the first that this church in Dallas Texas speak one time in chapel when I was in graduate school. He made his eloquent speech about all the "ites". The Ninevites, the Perizzites, the Amalekites and on and on he went. And 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 significant, 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. 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 about.

"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 sixteen. Turn over in your Bible for a moment. Matthew sixteen. Matthew sixteen beginning at verse thirteen.

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 and you will go up to Pannis; the God Pan, the Greek god Pan was worshiped in these knaves. You can still

see where they were hewn beautifully into the stone. It's this huge rock in the middle of, well, lots of rocks and the water still pumps from the springs of Caesarea Philippi; sheet of beautiful clear glass water and you will walk around there and go up and you will see that this is the very spot Jesus has this experience. It's interesting He takes His disciples there when He says these words:

Now when Jesus came [verse thirteen of Matthew sixteen] 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 is thrown your way, who do you say that He is? And 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 [verse 17], "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood not revealed 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 Son of the very living God."

"You're blessed Peter because God told you that."

You don't occur, you don't result in your long study and analysis of events, you don't put prophecy together and come to the conclusion, "Well, Jesus must indeed, based on my research, be the Christ."

Men and women, when you came to 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 will never understand from eternity past and He chose you before the foundation of time, before the foundation of the world and He called you to Himself and at some point in your journey on this sod you said, "Oh! Jesus is the Christ."

[Lepine:] Of course your reference there to Peter's confession before Jesus, "Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am?" This really is the essential question for everyone of us, isn't it?

[Easley:] To understand the person and work of Christ, to look at Him square in the eyes as we understand Him from Scripture is the beginning of a relationship with God the Father.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] And apart from Him there is no way to God.

[Lepine:] There are so many in the culture today who will affirm Jesus was a good teacher.

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] He was a great teacher and someone who we ought to study and we ought to learn from His wisdom. Well that's true.

[Easley:] He was Gandhi.

[Lepine:] But it's incomplete.

[Easley:] Yeah. Right. Right. Right. Well, if He's not God and man, He's just a man. He's not a little bit of God or a part of God. So the divinity of Christ is so critical. He could not pay for sin if He was just a human being. And the illustration is often used that if you needed a kidney and I offered to give you a kidney and perhaps I died on the operating table but you live, the best I can do is help one person.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] But Christ's death, because He is fully God, can take care of the sin of all men and women who've trusted in Him. So you need that divinity part for Jesus to accomplish what His Father intended for Him to do.

[Lepine:] When people say to me "He was a great teacher," I often ask two questions. I say, "Do you think that when He said 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me,' is that some of His great teaching?"

[Easley:] Mmm.

[Lepine:] And then the second question is, "Do you believe He's a great teacher who died and rose again?"

[Easley:] Ok.

[Lepine:] "Because there are no other great teachers who did that. Do you believe that to be true about Him?" And that puts people on the horns -

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] - of a dilemma.

[Easley:] And again, as we talked about earlier, there's this conundrum I find. We're happy to embrace those things that banal

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] - that are inane. That He is loving and merciful and kind and gentle and turn the other cheek, but we dismiss the part that talks about His Holiness, His wrath, His exclusivity, the absolute nature which He taught. So the claims of Christ, if you take

them at face value, are a very different Jesus than *Time* and other magazines will portray Him around Easter.

[Lepine:] And ultimately we want to know who the real Jesus is the place we look is at the Scriptures and we've been making available over the last couple of weeks the *Moody Handbook of Theology*, tied together with a Bible study that we designed on each of these subjects so that people can have a better understanding of what the Scriptures do teach about these very important issues. With the whole package we also include a CD that has MP3 files of each of these messages. You can go to our website, incontextradio.org, for more information or call us at 1-877-3CONTEXT.

Tomorrow we continue to look at what the Bible teaches us about who Jesus is on *inContext* with Michael Easley.