

Believing in Jesus
“A New Creation” – Unit I: Session 2
April 15, 2018

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”²³ But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Matthew 16:13-28 (NIV)

I mentioned last week as we began this new series, *A New Creation*, with the unit on “Believing” that most Christians believe that God is not only one but that he is actually three in one: God the Father, God the Son (in Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. Last week we focused mostly on God the Father, this morning we are focusing on God the Son in the person of Jesus Christ.

The most well known Bible verse of all is John 3:16 -

“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whosoever shall believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

If “believing in Jesus” is that which leads to eternal life, that which saves us, then it is critically important that we have an understanding of what it means to “believe in Jesus.”

So who exactly was and is Jesus? Well, Jesus was a human person who lived here on earth some 2,000 years ago. He must have been pretty special because the world’s calendar is reflective of his birth – divided by before his birth, B.C. – before Christ, and that after, since his birth. I know some of you think your birthday is pretty special, but none of you can claim anything like that.

Jesus' life here on earth is recorded not just in the New Testament, especially the four gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but he is also recorded in many other historical documents from that time. There is really little dispute that Jesus of Nazareth was a human person who lived during a specific period in history. Jesus' human nature has not really been a question throughout the 2,000 years since he lived here on earth. It's Jesus' divine nature that has divided humanity and he said that would happen:

"Whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. . .'" Matthew 10:33-35 (NIV)

It is the secular writings from that time period that speak of Jesus' human nature. It is the Bible that speaks of Jesus' divine nature. In the Book of Acts, the story of the early church, it reads:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. Acts 2:22b-24 (NRSV)

Ultimately it was Jesus' resurrection which revealed His divine nature. Jesus was seen by those who experienced Him during his three year period of ministry as a great teacher (one who taught with authority), a prophet (in the line of human prophets like Elijah and John the Baptist), a miracle worker and healer of many illnesses. But all those things can be attributed to the work of God through a human person. But Jesus' resurrection, that's another matter.

Five important aspects of Jesus' Divine Nature:

1. Jesus is Savior

It is Jesus' death on the cross which provides the opportunity for our salvation. His death on the cross provided for the atonement of the sins of all who have believed and put their faith in God throughout all of history.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

The name Jesus means God saves! But Jesus doesn't just save us from our death here on earth so we can live eternally with Him, and others who have died with faith in God, in the life to come. It is Jesus' resurrection which gives us the opportunity for new life here and now. He saves us from things like:

- The dominion of sin in our lives today.
- He saves us from broken relationships with God, family and others.
- Jesus saves us from lack of purpose and direction in life.
- He saves us from being self-serving rather than other serving.
- Jesus saves us from loneliness, bitterness and low self-esteem.

- He saves us from harmful habits like alcohol and drug abuse.
- Jesus still saves us today from certain illnesses and diseases.
- Jesus saves us so we can be obedient and follow God's will for our lives today.

Those are just a few of the things that Jesus saves us from.

2. **Jesus is Lord**

But Jesus is not only our Savior, He is our Lord. That is something that has been lost for much of Christianity throughout the centuries. To the earliest Christians, the phrase "Jesus is my Lord" was another way of saying, Jesus is my king and ultimate authority. In the Roman Empire, Caesar was to be worshiped as Lord, king and ultimate authority, and to not give him that honor, either in words or actions, came at the real threat of death. The vast majority of earliest Christians would not have thought of pledging their allegiance to Rome, or its king (the emperor), or of serving in the Roman military, because that all went against what their real Lord, Jesus Christ had taught them through His words and His life. The vast majority of the earliest Anabaptists and Mennonites in the 1500's were the same. And many during both time periods gave their lives.

The apostle Paul wrote that, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

When we say, "Jesus is Lord," and really mean it, than we trust Jesus with our entire lives. We trust that the entire story about Jesus is true – that He came to earth in the form of a baby, was conceived by the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life here on earth, was crucified on the cross for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him, died, and on the third day he rose again. When we say, "Jesus is Lord," we are saying much the same as Peter said, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

I mentioned last week or the week before about a very good book that I am reading by an Anabaptist pastor by the name of Bruxy Cavey entitled *(re)union: the good news of Jesus for Seekers, Saints, and Sinners*. In it he writes that Jesus needs to be our Lord before he can become our Savior. He writes:

"Notice that Paul doesn't call us to embrace the reality that 'Jesus is Savior.' He tells us that when we embrace Jesus as Lord, we get him as Savior as part of the package. Jesus is not just a means to an end, a ticket to get into heaven, or a way to 'get saved.' Rather, Jesus is our Leader, our Lover, our Lord here and now. And that is life changing while we live, not just life prolonging when we die....

"What's more, when we say 'Jesus is Lord,' we say a lot by what we are not saying at all. If Jesus is Lord, than Caesar is not, politics are not, power is not, economics are not, religion is not, fame is not, fashion is not, food is not, fitness is not, friends are not, and family is not. That is hard to admit. But when we put everything else infinitely second and come to Jesus as our everything, he sends us back into the world as better versions of ourselves. The best gift we can give this world is to abandon it for Jesus, so he can send us back into the world to love it like Jesus. Bruxy Cavey, *(re)union: the good news of Jesus for Seekers, Saints, and Sinners*

I'm really not sure which comes first, Jesus as Savior or Jesus as Lord, but Jesus doesn't fully become our Savior until he becomes our Lord. The two go hand in hand.

Jesus is Savior, Jesus is Lord, . . .

3. Jesus is God with us (Immanuel)

It says that Jesus is Lord. Because of Jesus' resurrection, the same Jesus of history who lived and died in the first century is still alive and leading us and loving us in the 21st century.

Early on in the Gospel of Matthew, the account of the birth of Jesus Christ, it says:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel," - which means, "God with us."
Matthew 1:22-23 (NIV)

The Gospel writer John tells us:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."
John 1:14, 18 (NIV)

The writer of the Book of Hebrews put it like this:

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."
Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)

Bruxy Cavey says, "To say 'Jesus is Lord' is to say, among other things, that no one shows us what God is like better than Jesus does. . . every other version of God is only partial, incomplete, and too easily misunderstood."

"In Jesus, we get our most clear picture of the heart of God. Because Jesus is Lord, everything about his life shows God to us. And what do we see when we look at Jesus? A God who has infinite compassion on sinners and outcasts. A God who calls us friends, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. A God who enters this world not riding on a celestial chariot or amid a shower of thunderbolts, but humbly born to simple parents of little means in a small town and without a place to call their own. A God whose warhorse is a donkey and who bends down to wash his disciples' feet. A God who is humble." Bruxy Cavey

The Gospel is the Good News that God became one of us in the form of a human person, His own Son, Jesus. The beloved disciple John wrote in his first letter: *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God* (1 John 4:15 ESV).

For believers, because of Jesus' resurrection, He lives in us!

Jesus is our Savior, Jesus is our Lord, Jesus is God among us, and . . .

4. Jesus is Love!

The Bible tells us that “God is love!” (1 John 4:8, 16). If Jesus is God, who came among us, and God is love, then Jesus gives us the clearest picture of what God’s love looks like. In Jesus we come to know what God and love look like.

First and foremost it is sacrificial:

The Victoria Cross is Canada’s highest military honor, similar to the Medal of Honor in the United States. Both medals are awarded for personal acts of valor that are above and beyond the normal heroic acts of soldiers in time of war. Of the thousands awarded to date, more have been bestowed on personnel falling on grenades to save fellow soldiers than any other single act.

The first Victoria Cross of WWII was awarded to Sergeant-Major John Robert Osborn. The Sergeant-Major and his men had been cut off from their battalion and were under heavy attack. When the enemy came close enough the unit was subjected to a concentrated barrage of grenades. Several times Sergeant-Major Osborn picked up live grenades and threw them back, but eventually one fell in just the wrong position to pick up in time. It fell right in front of his men. With only a split second to decide, Osborn shouted a warning and threw himself on top of the grenade. It exploded, killing him instantly. The rest of his company survived that battle and were able to return home because of Sergeant-Major Osborn’s selfless sacrifice.

What a courageous act of heroism. But no matter how courageous that heroic act may have been, along with all the other Canadian Victoria Cross and U.S. Medal of Honor recipients over the years, through Jesus we see an even greater love at the heart of God. You see, soldiers who fall on grenades do so out of love for their friends (those who are on their side), while they are on the battlefield trying to kill their enemies. Jesus died for his friends, and his enemies, and for everyone in between.

Jesus is God’s ultimate gift of love to the world. A gift, to be truly a gift, can be accepted or rejected. Love requires freedom and the grace to stand back and allow another to accept it or reject it. That’s really what the story of the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son is about, allowing the wayward son to go wander off, not really knowing if he would ever come back and accept the Father’s free gift of love – which includes mercy, grace and forgiveness. Of course, the older son, who never left home, wandered off too. And he’s the one who by the end of the story we don’t really know if he has accepted the Father’s free gift of love, or not.

At the same time that I am reading Bruxy Cavey’s book *(re)union, the Good News of Jesus for Seekers, Saints and Sinners*, I am reading a book entitled, *Soul Making* by a man by the name of Alan Jones. In it he writes that “love is a gift or it is nothing,” “love requires freedom,” and “it always involves choice.” Unfortunately we live in a society and culture today which doesn’t want to take responsibility for the choices that we make. Many sociologists would say that today we find ourselves in a victimized culture which wants to blame others for the many problems which exist. Love, as love is defined by God, is not so much a feeling as it is a choice.

Way back in the Old Testament, God spoke to His people, the Israelites, just before they were about to enter the Promised Land:

“See, I set before you today [a choice], life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commands; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.”
Deuteronomy 30 (NIV)

Thousands of years later the resurrected Jesus is about to leave and enter the Promised Land and these are the words which He leaves for his disciples:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

Jesus is Our Savior . . . Jesus is our Lord . . . Jesus is God among us (Immanuel) . . . Jesus is Love . . .

5. Jesus is our Example

Jesus' first command to his disciples was not “believe in me,” or “make me Lord of your life.” Jesus' first command to his disciples was “Follow Me!” “Come follow me and I will show you what your life should look like.”

Alan Jones writes in his book *Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality* –

“There is no way round the issue of the need to surrender to a ‘model’ or example if we are to move towards spiritual maturity. . . For those who profess and call themselves Christians, the lens through everything else is interpreted in a person: Jesus Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection.”

As much as we like to claim our individuality and independence, especially in America and most of western culture, we all choose models to follow. It might be a parent, grandparent, someone in your field of study or work. For teenagers and young adults it is usually a group of peers. Or maybe it's a sports hero.

Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*
John 14:6 (NIV)

Jesus didn't say I am one of many ways to the Father, he said I am the way! In some ways Jesus was very inclusive, in other ways he was very exclusive.

Once again we are faced with a choice. The question remains, which model, which example, which Kingdom, whose Kingdom? The word “Kingdom” demands a King. Who is King, Lord of your life? The choice will make all the difference in the world for your life, both for today and forever more.

After the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, these are the words of God speaking through Joshua:

Choose this day whom you will serve. Therefore fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Put away all your other gods. As for me and my house we will serve the LORD.
Joshua 24:14-15 (NIV)

There is only one LORD, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, at his knee every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.