

Wonderful Counselor: The Humanity of Christ

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Hebrews

By Kristian Brackett

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Ty Blackburn: For about 15 years Kris has actually been a missionary on the mission field for 20 in Croatia. Croatia is in Europe, part of former Yugoslavia and Kris has been ministering there since 1998. He is a graduate of the Master's Seminary in '96 with his M.Div. and '98 with his Th.M and recently completed his Doctor of Ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He's married to Nina and they have three precious daughters, Gracie, Gaby, and Katie, between 19 and 13 ages. They are a great friend of our church. As I said, we've been supporting their ministry over there for a number of years. He's with the Master's Academy International, that is a ministry of Grace Community Church, Pastor John MacArthur, and basically working, he's going to give us an update but what we love about this ministry is they come alongside the churches in the countries where they go and then they help train ministers by basically providing theological training for men so they raise up indigenous leaders in these areas and Kris has been doing that for 20 years. Hard to believe that long, but we praise God for your ministry. He's a dear friend to us and we rejoice in what the Lord is doing in and through you guys over in Croatia. So come down and share God's word with us.

Kristian Brackett: Well, I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior on behalf of my family. Nina, Gracie, Gaby and Katie are all laid up with whatever is going around. They're all dealing with that in different symptoms but we are currently in the States and have been here since the beginning of the semester. We have been here this whole semester primarily for several reasons but primarily to help our oldest daughter, Gracie, to make transition to the Master's University which started the beginning of the semester near the end of August, and then we also took the opportunity as a family to be at Grace Community Church, our sending church, which we haven't really spent any significant time in about 20 years or about 12 years for an extended time of furlough and to visit with elders and to even at a church like Grace Community Church, get to know new elders, new pastors and things like that. Then also as Pastor Ty mentioned, had a graduation of my own, 2-3 weeks ago, and we are also visiting since just before Thanksgiving churches here in the Georgia area that support us.

So I grew up just south of Chattanooga in a town called Flintstone, which is a pebble's toss from Chattanooga. If you know where See Rock City is, or Rock City if you can throw a baseball really far or drive a golf ball far, you can land in Flintstone, Georgia. So

we always have tried to maintain as much as we could strong relationships with the churches in this area to minimize the travel and the stress of our time here in the States, but I also bring you greetings in the name of the Theological Biblical Academy where I have served now for 20 years, and also in the name of Baptist Church Immanuel where I've also served which hosts our training ministry.

I just want to give you, being sensitive to the time and knowing it's a busy and joyous season, I just want to give you some brief updates about what God has done in our ministry through our team over the last 20 years. We went out as a team, three Americans, to serve with another graduate of the Master's Seminary who was a national pastor, Misko Horvatek. After 20 years, we are still all working together, serving together, serving in the language with the same goal of planting churches, strengthening churches, and developing leadership, and so the primary way we do that is through a local church-based training institute called the Theological Biblical Academy. So thankful for the team that God put together 20 years ago. So thankful for Pastor Misko's patience with three young seminary graduates who had to kind of bite their tongues and just learn the culture and not comment for a year or so before he began to bring us more into the decision-making process. In these last 20 years, we've spread out to different churches. I still serve alongside Pastor Misko, who is 76 years old and still ministering full-time, and the other gentlemen have served in different church plants or established churches.

We have 22 grads from our full-time program which lasts anywhere from three to five years, and they are serving in about 35% of the Baptist churches in Croatia. We also have two graduates in Serbia who are planting churches, two graduates in Slovenia planting churches, and one graduate serving as a missionary in Bosnia. Altogether our team of faculty, fellow missionaries and graduates are involved currently in eight different church plants in former Yugoslavia. So very thankful both that we're filling existing pulpits but also establishing new churches, in fact, just after Christmas our graduates will be getting together and talking about how God is working through them and how they can encourage one another, how they can improve that whole process of planting churches and network together to support one another in planting more churches.

We've also had numerous seminars throughout the years and currently have five concurrent classes going on outside of our local campus in Krapina, Croatia, and five different churches where monthly we have a class going on to help, again train churches in any kind of systematic study. There is nothing, really, between what happens in the pulpit on a regular Sunday and maybe a prayer meeting or a Bible study throughout the week, but no systematic study that's available to the Croatian church so we're trying to fill that gap as well.

Our small church in Krapina is still the only non-Catholic church out of 99 churches in our county. We're hoping and praying that God would lead us, first of all, to transition beyond our founding pastor, Pastor Misko, who as I mentioned, is 76 years old, and also to eventually plant a new church in our county. We're also very thankful that a key aspect in that process is that this month we are paying off our building and free of debt, and so

we raised about half the money to buy the building that we're in and paid off half of it as a church. So very thankful for our church's faithfulness, sacrificial giving to do so, but that has historically been anywhere from 95% of our budget to now about 65% of our budget so that will enable us to make that transition from a missionary pastor, Pastor Misko, to a pastor that we invest in and show honor to.

We continue to slowly grow. We continue to spread the Gospel through radio ministry, through English camp, through literature distribution, and also, of course, through personal testimony, and as we have been visiting churches throughout this semester reflecting on 20 years of ministry in Croatia, I think the thing that stands out to Nina and me most of all is just how God has been faithful to us, showing us kindness, showing us generosity, showing us just good, kind, generous deeds through the local churches that support us, and so we just want to express our appreciation to you for standing with us, for holding the ropes as we serve in Croatia, and again, after the service I'll be available to talk with you and answer any questions you might have. I was certainly enthusiastic to find out about anybody who's been in that part of the world or knows someone from that part of the world. We're always looking for a way to get Croatians who have traveled away, Serbians, Slovenians, excited about the ministry and to be aware of what's going on. We have seen the prayer answered throughout the years of people, the diaspora as Pastor Misko says, who have gotten excited and even come back and served in the local churches and planted churches in Croatia.

So, again, thank you. I bring you greetings on behalf of the school, of the church, and of course, my family. As Pastor Ty mentioned, I recently have graduated from the same program that he's in and after we pray, I want to share just a brief overview, as brief as I can possibly be of the topic that I studied for that and it's very appropriate to the Christmas season, and so I would just ask you to bow your heads with me and we'll pray and then look into God's word.

Heavenly Father, we are so grateful, so grateful for how our hearts have been prepared through the music and the worship that has already taken place, worship in song, worship in prayer, worship in reading the word, and Lord, my prayer is simple this morning, that you would enable us to see the glory of Christ. As we are here two days before our celebration of the coming of Christ, may we see more clearly his glory and may we know that whatever we see this morning, we have seen yet only the edge, only the trim of the robe of glory that he wears. Change us this morning to a clearer understanding of who Jesus Christ is. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

In 2012, we had a conference in our training institute and there was a gentleman who my colleagues really were insistent that we invite and it was Dr. Doug Bookman. You've probably not heard that name but he at one time was the most popular professor at the Master's College and he was popular because he taught a very impactful class called "The Life of Christ," and he has devoted his academic life to two topics, one is the life of Christ, and the other is to the land of Israel, and of course, those two topics come together very well, and as he taught us about the life of Christ and gave us insights into the life of Christ, not only myself but everyone that was in our ministry was really overwhelmed

seeing things that we had not seen before. At the end of that week of lectures, my wife who was sitting there in the lectures with us and enjoying it as well, posed at lunchtime this very insightful question to Dr. Bookman, she asked Dr. Bookman this, "Out of all your study of the life of Christ, what one truth stands out above any other?" And Dr. Bookman immediately answered and said, "We, as believers, tend to focus on the deity of Christ at the expense of his humanity." That is to say, we do not think carefully and clearly about the humanity of Christ and it's unfortunate because it is a vital doctrine.

So I took the opportunity in my studies at Southern Seminary to focus on the practical applications of the humanity of Christ and I want to share a little bit about that with you this morning, but this is a natural tendency. It's natural because we tend to have to defend the deity of Christ. When someone knocks on our door maybe on a Saturday morning and wants to give us literature and wants to convince us that Christ is not truly Almighty God, then we need to defend the deity of Christ; we need to call upon them to repent of their disbelief and if they do not repent of their denial of Christ's deity, they will perish for eternity in their sin. We must defend the deity of Christ. We also need to defend the deity of Christ against liberals, liberal churches who would say that Christ is a man, an extraordinary man but nothing more than a man.

Brian Borgman in his book "Feelings and Faith" says this, "Sometimes in our zeal to emphasize one point of theology, we neglect another. This is why in our efforts to defend Christ's deity we have often overlooked the vital doctrine of his humanity."

Bruce Ware, a professor at Southern, has written a book about the humanity of Christ and he refers to this tendency as an evangelical intuition, almost as a default position in our thinking that we focus, again, more on Christ's deity and less on his humanity.

Another commentator, George Guthrie, suggests that this unconscious tendency to discount the humanity of Christ is a new form of an old heresy. He writes this, "If we are careless in our thinking about Jesus, we can slip into a form of neo-Apollinarianism, embracing his divinity but holding his humanity at arm's length."

So my question to you this morning: do we read the Gospels carefully and in light of what the Scriptures, specifically what the epistles teach about the humanity of Christ? I want to provoke you this morning. I want to encourage you to go back to the Gospels and to carefully read them and we're going to talk about that briefly, give you some examples, but to read the Gospels in light of what Paul and the author to the epistle to the Hebrews says about the humanity of Christ.

We all acknowledge the obvious things. Jesus was thirsty on the cross. Jesus was tired in the boat. Jesus was born. He grew. He learned things. He died on the cross. What could be more human than death? But there are other things that we rarely consider like the emotions of Christ; the daily obedience of Christ; the faith of the man, Christ Jesus. We don't talk about his disappointments and struggles so much and, frankly, we all have difficulty explaining his temptations, knowing that he was absolutely sinless and could not sin and yet he was genuinely tempted only not from within as we are.

We tend to read the Gospels, as Dr. Bookman described, as if Jesus was Clark Kent and that he would go through life and if he came to a problem, he would just turn into Superman, access all deity, all omniscience, all omnipotence. I remember when I was in high school in Bible study and my youth pastor was trying to make a point about Jesus being authentic and he said this, "Jesus would never look at a friend, a girl, and say, 'Oh, I just love your dress,' and then turn around to someone else and say, 'Where did she get that thing?'" One of my friends raised his hand and said, "But, Pastor Rick, wouldn't Jesus already know where she got the dress from?" And that's the way we think, that Jesus went through life knowing absolutely all things. We read the Gospels as if Jesus could shift into 4-wheel drive whenever he got stuck.

Now why is this important? Well, look with me at 2 Corinthians 3:18 just briefly. 2 Corinthians 3:18. I want to show you why this is so important. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is defending his ministry. It's a new covenant ministry. It's superior to the old covenant. And at the end of his defense, he gives us an insight into the process of sanctification. He says this in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." And what Paul is saying here is that as we behold the glory of the Lord, it has an impact on us. It changes us. It transforms us step by step, one degree of glory to another.

So my question to you is this: if we see the glory of Christ clearly in his deity but we do not clearly see his glory in his humanity, are we not in danger of undermining our own spiritual growth? If a key aspect of growing in Christ and in Christ-likeness is meditating, observing, considering the glory of Christ, do we not need to see that glory absolutely clearly both in his deity and his humanity? If we neglect one aspect of the nature of Christ, if we emphasize one aspect and are foggy on another, then that has the potential to undermine or cripple our sanctification.

God's goal for us is to be like Christ. We know that from Romans 8:28-29. We love Romans 8:28, it says that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose, but we forget what that good is which Paul defines for us in verse 29, that we be conformed to the image of his Son. God the Father loves the Son so much that he wants to make out of all of us, and out of every believer, a copy of his Son Jesus Christ, that we are conformed to his image. That's God's goal for our lives and a key means, not the only means but an important means to that process of transformation is gazing on the glory of Christ. We need, then, to understand the glory of Christ. We need to see Christ in his full glory and that glory is equally in his humanity as it is in his deity. Let me remind you what John says in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory," as he walked among us, we observed his glory, "glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

So the Incarnation, the four accounts of the life of Christ, give us a unique opportunity to observe the glory of Christ but we must read those Gospel accounts in light of what the epistles say so we're going to just briefly look at Hebrews 2:14-18 and I'm going to go

through these verses very quickly tracing two themes through these verses. There are other key passages like Hebrews 4 and 5, and of course, Philippians 2:5-8, that speak specifically about the Incarnation. I want to mention those so that you might go and investigate them further yourself, but we're just going to limit our study this morning of the epistles to Hebrews 2:14-18 because I want to get to the application, one example of application in the life of Christ.

So Hebrews 2:14-18,

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

So there are two themes I want to briefly follow through this passage. There are many points. I'm going to move through them quickly but I decided to put them on slides just so you can follow with me quickly. First, we're going to see descriptions of the Incarnation, and then secondly, we're going to see reasons for the Incarnation. So four descriptions of the Incarnation in these verses and then we'll go back and we'll see five reasons for the Incarnation.

First description we find in verse 14: Jesus took on the same physical nature as all mankind. Jesus took on the same physical nature as all of mankind. Look what it says in verse 14, it says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same." Now all of our translations here have "flesh and blood" and that's because that's what sounds good to us as English speakers, that's an English idiom, but the actual text says "blood and flesh" because biblically speaking, and especially in a Jewish mindset, the blood is what's most important, the blood is the essence of life from the Old Testament, but the point is we have the same nature. But notice along with that emphasis on solidarity, the same nature, how the author here makes a slight distinction. He says this, we all together have the same, we share in the same flesh and blood, we all have a common physical nature, but Jesus, what does it say? Partook of that same flesh and blood. This is exactly what Paul is saying. In the Incarnation, Jesus added humanity to his deity. He partook of the nature that we already have but it is the same physical nature. That's what's important.

So he makes both a distinction while also emphasizing a great similarity. It's the same flesh and blood, but he's also very emphatic here. Note how he says this. He uses an emphatic conjunction, an emphatic pronoun, and another adverb in order to stress the degree of solidarity. The syntactical stream here literally says, "He himself also in the

same manner." So you see how the author is going to extremes to emphasize that this is the same physical nature that humankind took on.

Secondly, we see in verse 16 that Jesus came for the purpose of identifying with mankind, not with other creatures. So it is, again, emphasis on his solidarity with the human race. In verse 16 he says he did not come to help the angels, but he came to help the offspring of Abraham and, again, this verb could literally mean he came to take on the nature of the descendants of Abraham. He contrasts the options between helping angels and helping mankind, helping any other kind of creature and helping men and women, and he emphasizes he came and helped mankind, the human race, to appropriate their nature.

We also see in verse 17 that Jesus comes in complete solidarity with mankind. Look with me at verse 17, it says, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things." He echoes what he said earlier before verse 14 where he says that he's not ashamed to call us brothers. This familial relationship again shows the solidarity, the identity that Jesus shares with us but notice what he says here, he had to be made. It was necessary. It was essential. There is an element of moral obligation in his taking on humanity. It had to be that way. It was totally necessary for him to help us.

Then finally we see in verse 18 that Jesus gives aid to those who are tempted, again using the exact same verb for the temptations that Jesus faced with the temptation that mankind faces. It's the same experience. He is able to help those who are being tempted because he suffered and he was tempted himself. He knows our frame. He knows our lot. He entered our world and became wholly like us.

So beloved, I want to encourage you this morning when it says that Jesus knows your temptations, when Jesus knows what you're going through, it's not simply because he's omniscient and knows everything, but Jesus knows what you're going through because he went through similar experiences. He knows it by experience and that's why he came, so that he could know that.

So we look again back to five reasons for the Incarnation. This is another theme that's woven throughout this passage, five descriptions, to what extent Jesus became man, but also he adds reasons as we read throughout this passage why Jesus became God Incarnate. First we go back to verse 14 and it says that Jesus came to set mankind free from the tyranny of Satan. Look back with me in verse 14 and see what it says there, the second half, that through death he became man so that he could die and "through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." How does Satan have the power of death? By bringing death into the world. Through his temptation of Adam and Eve, he brought about that promise of God, "In the day you eat of this fruit, you shall absolutely most assuredly die." Through temptation, through entrapment, Satan brought death into the world and that death faces every person, but Jesus came to annul the work of Satan, to reverse the work of Satan, to destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

He came to free us from this physical state that is subject to death but he also came to free us from a moral state, a moral state that Satan uses that fear of death to manipulate us through fear. Look at verse 15 with me, he goes on and says, "and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." The fear, the daunting prospect of death gives Satan control over us if we allow it, if we don't look to Christ and his victory. It robs us of confidence. It robs us of boldness. It causes us to consider worldly things in our decisions and not spiritual realities. But Christ, again, came to deliver all those who were subject to slavery because of their fear of death, how my life might end. Christ came to assure that we would have that confidence at his appearing that John talks about without shame, without guilt, forgiven for our sins.

A third reason we find in verse 17: Jesus came in order to be our great high priest, our merciful and faithful high priest. This is a description of Jesus that is unique to the epistle to the Hebrews and he goes on to develop it from here. But the writer here is very explicit. Verse 17, "He had," again, it was absolutely necessary that he be made like his brethren in all things so that he could become our great high priest, the perfect mediator between God and man. He is merciful, showing to men the mercy of God, and so representing a merciful God to repentant sinners, but he's also faithful, representing man to God on the basis of his own obedience. He was completely faithful and obedient to God in all things and because of that, he is our perfect mediator, our perfect high priest, the one who is uniquely qualified to stand between us and God and to bring us together, as Paul talks about in 1 Timothy 2:5, the one mediator, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Jesus represents mankind to God, represents God to mankind, and removes the barrier that stands between God and sinners, and the author here so tightly binds Jesus' priesthood with his humanity that if we undermine his humanity in any way, then it compromises his ability to be our great high priest.

We go further. Not only did he come to be our great high priest but he also came to be our sacrifice, a propitiation, a substitutionary atonement, to absorb the wrath of God as our substitute. Jesus' ability to fulfill his role as the merciful and faithful high priest stems from the fact that he, himself, becomes the sacrifice and, of course, the author of Hebrews goes on to develop this theme further, especially in chapters 9 and chapters 10. He makes propitiation, he makes sacrifice for the sins of the people through his own death, but had he not become man, he could not have become man's high priest.

Finally, a fifth reason why Jesus came we see in verse 18. We saw earlier that he's tempted in the same way we are tempted, but why would he go through that? So that he could help us. Jesus came to help sinners who are beset with sin. We're all plagued, tormented, overwhelmed with our own sin. We should be, at least from time to time aware of how truly and utterly sinful we are and how desperate we are for God's grace that comes to us through Jesus Christ. The suffering and the temptation that Jesus experienced as a man uniquely qualifies him to provide help to those who are also tempted. He frees us slowly step by step from the sin that dominates our lives, our thinking, our attitudes, until one day, again through gazing upon Christ and seeing him as he truly is, we are freed from the presence of sin. John talks about that in 1 John 3:2, our glorification. When he appears we will be like him because we will see him just as he is.

So just in summary, Jesus' act of becoming man brought him into complete solidarity, profound identity with the human condition and this is true humanity without being in any way any subtraction of deity. Again, we don't have time to talk about all that and I would love to talk to you, I'll stay here all afternoon to talk to you about that. It is genuine humanity without any subtraction of deity. The two natures of Christ function in such a way that, the word they use is interpenetrate, so that he is fully deity without being any less deity but without violating the limitations of true and genuine humanity, and it had to be that way so that he could be our Savior.

What are some implications of this? We need to be careful. When we talk about the Incarnation, we need to be careful that we do not describe that in any way to lead others to believe that Jesus became less than God; that he gave up his divinity; or that he even gave up his prerogatives. What he gave up is his position but Jesus as a man also lived in his humanity with the same resources that you and I have to live the Christian life. As a man, he depended upon the Spirit. As a man, he believed the promises of God. As a man, he trusted the Father. And we need to understand that. We need to understand that his humanity was in all ways like our humanity, except of course, the author of Hebrews make clear in chapter 4, verse 15, without sin.

Now in my thesis, I focused on three areas of application. I'm just going to briefly touch on two and then develop a third one as we think about Christmas. Jesus knows what it's like, first of all, to bear a burden. Jesus knows what it's like to bear a burden. We all know what it's like to bear a burden; to have some problem that is bigger than us, that is with us when we wake up in the morning, it's with us when we go to sleep at night, it's with us when our mind is in neutral, but I want you to know that Jesus knows what that's like and just briefly at some point as a man, as a young man, Jesus realized that when he read Isaiah 53, when he read Psalm 22, when he read those prophecies in the Old Testament, he came to an understanding, a growing understanding that he was reading about his own future, including all the details of his life where he would be the sacrifice for the people; that the Father would be pleased to crush him instead of rebels. And he bore that burden all throughout, I would say, his teenage years and all throughout his adult life all the way to the cross. Jesus knows what it's like when you face a burden. He's walked that path and he can walk that path with you.

Jesus also knows what it's like to be disappointed in people and we tend to focus maybe on Judas or Peter, but I want you to think a little bit about this. Was there anybody who Jesus experienced in his human life who could not to some degree or another, be a disappointment to him? Who let him down? Followers, the nation, his hometown, one after another abandoned him. Jesus was fully man with the same emotions, expectations, reactions, and temptations of an ordinary, sinless man and I would say to some degree he experienced social sins, personal sins, more poignantly, more deeply than we experience them because he didn't have the deadening effect of his own sin. Jesus knows what it's like to be disappointed by people and here's the thing: do not think in any way that it was easier for him because he was God. That's what we need to get away from. We tend to think, "Oh, but he was God. He was staid. He was unaffected by the things that went on

around him." No, he was man and he reacted the same way. He was God, don't misunderstand me. He was fully God but he is also fully man and experienced it as a man.

Third area of investigation, this is where I want to spend a little bit of time. Jesus knows what it's like to be disappointed in circumstances. Jesus knows what it's like to be disappointed in circumstances. He experienced this. He tasted this as well. How many of you are here this morning and the path that you know that is before you is not desirable, it's not attractive, it's not easy, and it's not comfortable? We all face situations that we just don't have the appetite to face. There are unpleasant situations that we must deal with but the Savior knows this experience.

The life of our Savior was a difficult human life. He faced financial instability. He faced difficult situations at work. Listen, again I want to provoke you to read the Gospels carefully. When we think of Jesus as a carpenter, what's the first image that pops in our mind? Jesus probably was not a carpenter working in his own workshop, maybe with his dad, as a young man making perfect chairs, "Oy, my son, what a perfect carpenter you will be!" That was probably not Jesus' life. It's far more likely that Jesus was a day-laborer working on a team of profane Jewish men for unreasonable bosses who were demanding, no matter how perfect your work was. So if you have problems with your boss, I want you to know that Jesus understands what you're going through. That is not a foreign concept to him. He probably was not just working in his own little workshop, this romantic look at him just creating great works of wood. It just probably wasn't like that.

He virtually had no privacy. Go back and read the Gospels and look at all the demands of the crowds upon the life of Jesus. He had no control over his own time. People constantly took advantage of him. He received very little cooperation. His rights were ignored, trampled all the way through the trial for his death.

And Jesus lived with shame. Again, I want to provoke you to read the Gospels more carefully, considering that you're reading about an extraordinary man, the God-man, fully God but also fully man. So when we think about Christmas, we know that the circumstances of Jesus' birth were unique, extraordinary. They had to be so that he could be our perfect sinless sacrifice. The virgin birth is true, it's necessary. He had to be born without a human sinful nature and he never caved into temptation. The virgin birth is absolutely necessary but it came at a great cost to Jesus that he faced his whole life, not only Jesus but his whole family.

Look with me at John 8:41. Again, I just want to give you a little insight here and then we're going to go back to Luke 2. In John 8, Jesus is describing what a true disciple is and he contrasts it with the Pharisees, the leaders of the Jews who constantly opposed him. He says that a true disciple abides in the word of Christ, knows the truth and is set free from sin and as Jesus interacts with the Pharisees, again they're being provoked, they're angry, they're irrational, they claim that they've never been enslaved to anyone which was a patent lie, it was not true at that moment when they said it, but Jesus appeals to their statement when they say that, "We are Abraham's descendants," and he says, "If you are a

descendant of Abraham, then do what Abraham did and believe." Then he begins to contrast his Father with their father which provoked the Jewish leaders and in chapter 8, verse 41, they throw down their trump card. Jesus says to them, "You are doing the deeds of your father." And note how they respond, "We are not born of fornication." Some translations say, "sexual immorality." The Greek word here is porneia. They insist, "We have one Father, God." Older translations of this verse would say, "We were not born of whoredom." The NIV is actually really helpful here. "We are not illegitimate children. We know who our father is." Listen, in order to accomplish what Jesus had to accomplish, the circumstances of his birth had to be unique but those unique circumstances produced a difficult, if not scandalous, situation. It was not fair but it had to be and this was a burden that Jesus bore along with his whole family.

How extensive is this? Again, we see here that the Pharisees had done their work, they had done their due diligence. They had researched. They knew about this scandalous rumor that shadowed Jesus' family. As they say in Croatian, people talk, especially in villages, small villages like Nazareth and Bethlehem. The Pharisees had done their research.

Look back with me at Luke 2:7 and I'm going to make a suggestion. We can't be completely dogmatic here but this is a translation, an interpretation that was suggested by Dr. Bookman and other commentators. You know this verse. It says Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and she wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger, because somehow Expedia had messed up their reservations. Because they were delayed in the trip because Mary was pregnant and they came in after 6 o'clock and they gave their reservation to someone else. Because all the officials that came in town for the census had filled up all the rooms. No, what does the text say? What do all of our texts say? There was no room for him in the inn. That poor poor innkeeper who turned away the holy family. If he had only known that he would be the villain in every Christmas play, he would have never done it, right?

The word here for "inn" is the Greek word "katalyma." Now there is a standard word for inn, a different word that Luke himself uses in chapter 10 of Luke when he talks about the Good Samaritan who saves the man who had been beaten up on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem, and he takes him and he puts him in an inn. That's a completely different word than the word here that is translated "inn." On the other hand, Luke uses this word, "katalyma," that he uses in Luke 2:7, he uses it in chapter 22, verse 11, and Mark uses it as well in the same description of the same event. You don't have to turn there. It will be familiar to you. I'll read verses 10 and 11, Jesus said, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room," the katalyma, "in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' The word here in Luke 2:7 is guest room, not inn. Inns, motels, were very rare and very dicey establishments and they were not found in small places like Bethlehem or a place like Nazareth. They were only found on major roads. Bethlehem was a small obscure place with no major road close by. Many commentators agree that this was certainly not an inn in Bethlehem.

So what are we talking about here? The typical Jewish home would be very simple, a rectangular building with two walls, a larger room in the center, a room to one side, the katalyma, the guest room, and then a room to the other side that was more open where animals would be able to be housed or kept from the elements. Sheep would be outside but most families might have a burro or a donkey that would be able to come into that area and be safe, protected. Cows were probably very rare in the average Jewish home. Some nicer homes might have an upper room that was a guest room and that's what Jesus was referring to in Jerusalem when he says, "Go find the owner of the house carrying the pitcher," and that guest room would be the upper room. He uses the word upper room in the next verse, but that would be a more urban, a more affluent home.

Now think with me. Think with me a little bit about what you've read in the Old Testament. One thing that stands out when we read stories from the Bible, especially the Old Testament that relate to hospitality, is that taking someone into your home was serious business. It was a great responsibility. It was a duty and some of the expectations, some of the cultural norms that we read about in the Old Testament are, frankly, shocking to us, what they would do to protect their guests, even at the expense of their own family. Guests were honored. Guests were treated with respect. They were protected in ancient Jewish culture. We also know that births were a big deal, especially the birth of a firstborn son. That's why it was so horrible anytime we read about a woman who had not had a child in the Old Testament.

So think with me. Joseph from Bethlehem proposes marriage to young Mary from Nazareth. This is a big deal and as you probably know, engagement was as binding as marriage but there was no living together for the first period. Joseph had the responsibility, had the time to prepare a house before the wedding. Small towns in Israel, everyone knows. The word goes out far and wide to the family, "There is going to be a wedding. Joseph is going to marry Mary." Sometime in this engagement period, an angel appears to Mary in Nazareth, in Galilee in the north, you read about this in Luke 1. In verse 39 it says that Mary immediately went to Judah to the south to be with her cousin Elizabeth for three months, and then she returns to Nazareth. Now what happens when Mary gets back to Nazareth after three months? She begins to show, right? She's pregnant and this is a problem. This is a dilemma. We read about this every year but we don't think about the empathy in the passages. Matthew 1 tells us that Joseph didn't want to disgrace her. He planned to put her away but the angel came to him as well and said, "Do not do that. She will have a son. You shall name him Jesus and he will save his people from their sins." This word "disgrace" that Joseph didn't want to cause for Mary, he didn't want to make a spectacle of her but his righteous act in taking Mary to himself did not wipe out all shame and guilt. It couldn't. He just didn't choose to leave her as the most vulnerable member of society, an unwed mother cast out. That was his choice, his decision and a noble one. But the shame, the guilt did not go away. We can be certain that word went again far and wide to family, "By the way, there's not going to be a wedding. Mary came back from the south pregnant." People talk. People are cruel. "They say that she's pregnant by the Holy Spirit. You would think they could come up with something better than that."

So Joseph from Bethlehem comes into town with Mary, his new pregnant wife. I don't have time to talk about the group of people in the Bible who were illegitimately born, born outside of wedlock. That is not a stellar group of people. That is a huge stigma in the Bible. I will say this, the law prohibited such people from entering into the temple. Period. So here's the picture, Mary and Joseph come dragging into town. Joseph's hometown where there are plenty of relatives, family, hospitality. These are big responsibilities and duties. In those days, of course you didn't know the gender of your child ahead of time but Mary and Joseph had that going for them. They knew they were going to have a son but this would not be the joyful birth of a firstborn son. There was no place for them in the guest room. In fact, it's possible to translate this sentence, "In the guest room, there is no place for them. Sorry, Joseph. I see you're in a bind and I hate it for you, man, but I can't put you in our guest room. The best I can do is to put you over here in this room with our animals." Now there is early early tradition that it was a cave, but again, it's with the animals. It was not the guest room and it certainly was not an inn.

There are no relatives mentioned in the story at the birth. Shepherds come forward and kings eventually come but keep in mind the night clerk at the Holiday Inn is not the bad guy here. It's probably more likely Cousin Mortimer or Aunt Ruth, Uncle Moses, and it had to be this way so that Jesus could have the same physical nature but not the same sin nature as those whom he came to save. The shame, the disgrace, the embarrassment that followed him his whole life were unavoidable and do you know what? These are common to man problems that the Savior understands because he experienced them. These were circumstances beyond Jesus' control. The shame, the disgrace, the embarrassment, the sorrow, the disappointment, the grief that Jesus experienced as a man, they weren't because of his own experience. When we experience shame and embarrassment, it's probably because of our pride, right? But it's not because of Jesus' pride. In fact, the shame and the embarrassment and the sorrow that Jesus experienced is again because of our pride. We are the bad guys here. We are the ones who desperately needed saving. It was due to our sin. It was for us to identify with us, to show solidarity with us, to help us in our temptations, to pay our debt, to suffer in our place. We are the bad guys. We are the wicked rebels, the transgressors, the self-satisfied, the self-righteous, the selfish, the prideful, the ungrateful.

Jesus came to save sinners. In order to save sinners, he had to become like us in all things and experience all things except for sin itself. You can't forget this. I hope as you consider this and as you're reminded that the center of our faith is not a religion, it's not a local church, it's not a ministry style, it's not a body of doctrine or a tradition, the center of our faith is not even the Gospel because the Gospel is a word about Christ. The center of our faith is not a cross. Many people hung on crosses. The only thing that makes a cross important is the Savior that hung on that cross. The center of our faith is Jesus Christ, the God-man, who is here to walk with us and can walk with us and be near to us because he experienced all that we experience in life. He calls us to himself, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." We don't need to fear the scepter extended to us. He sits on a throne of grace and mercy and the door is always

open so that we can come to him and receive grace and mercy in our moment of need. He identifies with us. He calls us to come to him.

Regarding the humanity of Christ, Charles Spurgeon said this, "Our temptation is to regard the Lord's humanity as something quite different from our own. We are apt to spiritualize it away and not to think of him as really bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. All this is akin to grievous error." We may think that we are honoring Christ by such conceptions, we're focusing on his deity and that's a good thing, right? Charles Spurgeon goes on to say this, "Christ is never honored by that which is not true. He was a man, a real man, a man of our race, the Son of Man."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you that you sent your Son, your eternal Son Jesus Christ to become man to die in our place, and just as our faith began by looking to him and our faith continues by looking and gazing at him and our faith will become sight by seeing him and sin passing away, I pray that every one of us would be preoccupied with the glory of the person of Jesus Christ and that in seeing him, we would walk more closely with him and be conformed to his blessed perfect image. Do this in us for your glory and for the glory of our Savior in whose name we pray. Amen.