

**God's Exact Imprint**

Hebrews 1:1-4

Our grandson Samuel is three and his new favorite word is, "Why?" We went to Boone yesterday to visit and every time you said anything to Samuel, his response was, "Why?" While it can be a little tiresome after a while, it is better than his previous favorite word: "No!" After a while, though, the best answer is sometimes, "Why not?" Put the question back on him and let him think about it.

For all the questions we have as Christians, God sometimes puts it back on us – and asks us, "What do you believe is the truth?" "What do you think is most important?" And, the central question you and I have to answer is, "Who is Jesus?"

It is the central question of the gospels. We've begun studying the gospel of Mark on Wednesday nights and already we've seen Mark's way of revealing the answer to that question. Jesus teaches with an authority unlike any other teacher; he calls people to be disciples and they drop their nets and leave their families without so much as a second thought; he encounters people possessed by demons and the demons know him immediately, as though they had encountered him before on a spiritual plane, and people start saying, "Who is this man?"

Jesus touches a leper, something completely forbidden in his culture, and he cures him of leprosy. What kind of man is both so filled with compassion for someone who is hungry to be touched, and yet, also has the power to remove the disease from him? Then he forgives the sins of a crippled man and that gets people talking. "Who does this man think he is?" they begin asking. "Only God has the power to forgive sins."

The purpose of each of the four gospels is to tell us who Jesus is. John's gospel even says so at the end of chapter 20: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.* <sup>31</sup> *But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*"

That is the central belief of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we may have life in his name. But each one of us has to decide whether we believe that to be true for ourselves. You have to decide who you believe Jesus is.

And you're not going to get a unanimous answer from the people around you because a lot of people haven't made up their minds, and a lot of people have made up their minds but their answers don't match up with what 2,000 years of Christianity has believed about Jesus. We know that Jesus is an actual historical figure. Independent historical evidence exists to verify what we read in the Bible that there was a man named Jesus who lived and died in Israel 2000 years ago.

We know he was a rabbi, a teacher; he seems clearly to have been a healer and a miracle worker because a lot of people seemed to have been drawn to him because of those powers. He clearly attracted a fair amount of attention; threatened the powers that be, and was nailed to a Roman torture device consisting of two pieces of wood made into a cross on which enemies of the state were slowly suffocated to death. According to the entire body of writings we call the New Testament, this Jesus did not remain dead, but on the third day after his death, he was seen alive by numerous of his followers, and over the next 50 days, many others saw him once more alive.

Part of what you've got to decide is whether you believe these things are true: his healings, his miracles, and his resurrection. Some people will stop at saying he was a great teacher, but that's all. Some will accept his resurrection, but here's the crunch, the crux of the Christian faith: do you believe Jesus was who these first verses of Hebrews says he was: *He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being.* In other words, when we look at Jesus, we see God. Not just a family resemblance, but the exact imprint, a carbon copy. As John Calvin said, "The Father, however infinite, becomes finite in the Son... He shows himself only in the Son – as though he says, 'Here I am. Contemplate me.'"

For 2,000 years we have struggled with that idea – how the infinite Father could become the finite Son. Seventeen hundred years ago we as a church affirmed that Jesus must have been fully human or else he did not really suffer death on the cross for our sins. And we also affirmed that Jesus is fully God or else his death on the cross could not have atoned for our sins. One human cannot remove the sins of another human, much less the human race, by his or her death, regardless of how brutal. Only God can do that, so Jesus must have been fully human and fully God.

“But how?” we ask. “How can one be fully human and fully God? How can the Creator become a creature within his own creation? How can one be both infinite and finite at the same time?”

While there is no answer that completely explains how because this is a mystery beyond our complete understanding, just as God is ultimately a mystery beyond our complete understanding, there is an illustration, a metaphor, that I learned in high school that has been the most helpful for me to have some grasp of the idea, to get my mind at least a little bit around this mystery.

[Pour grape juice into the chalice]

The grape juice in this chalice is the exact same grape juice as in this flagon. A moment ago it was all in the same place, but even as it has been divided into two places, it is still the same grape juice. Just because it has been poured into this chalice does not change it. The grape juice in here and the grape juice in here are the same substance, it is just that this chalice will not hold all of the grape juice that is in this flagon. There is more that we do not see, but we can trust that when we taste the grape juice in this chalice, we have tasted the grape juice in this flagon, as well. It is just that this chalice only holds this much juice.

In the same way, Jesus is as much of God as will fit into a human form, a human chalice, if you will. There is more of God that we do not see, but we can trust that when we see Jesus we have seen the Father, as well, for they are the same substance. There is no difference between Jesus and God, they are one and the same.

“If you know me, you will know my Father also,” says Jesus in John 14. “From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

“He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being,” says Hebrews.

The one most central question of your life is this: do you believe it?

Amen.

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