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WHY DO WE TALK SO MUCH ABOUT JESUS? Michael B. Beough
John 1:1-5, 14; Colossians 1:15-20 March 1, 2009
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I have been having fun with the “tough questions” children ask. They have forced me to dig deeper into some of the most basic questions about our faith. Today, we come to the last question in this series, “Why do we talk so much about Jesus?”

Actually, the question came to me in a different form. Here is what I received: “Why do we focus on Jesus and not so much on God?”

I put this question last in our Tough Questions series for two reasons. One, it is a great lead-in to our worship series for Lent and Easter. UNSTUCK: THE JESUS WAY. The Lent series will be an answer to today’s question. We will see the ways in which Jesus gets us unstuck to live the life of blessing God intends.

Second, this question presents the most complex question to answer. So I left the hardest for last.

Complexity arises because today’s question raises the issue of the relationship between Jesus and God. For the first four centuries, Christians debated and argued over this question. They held many different opinions about Jesus. Was he really human? Was he really God? Was he both? If he was both, was he divine sometimes and human sometimes? Was he created by God or co-existent with God? If he was God, was he praying to himself? To answer these questions, religious leaders held great Church Councils in Constantinople and Nicaea. They wrote confessions and creeds to try to pin down the answers. By the end of the 4th Century, orthodoxy had been defined, answers decided.

Suffice it to say, we are not going to answer all these questions this morning. What I want to do is to suggest two things that can help our children begin to understand the relationship between Jesus and God.

We can help them to see that the Bible says Jesus is God. When we talk about Jesus, we are talking about God.

Colossians 1:15-20 makes this abundantly clear. Among other things, the writer of these verses calls Jesus “the image of the invisible God.” My Bible titles these verses “The Supremacy of Christ.”

Now, what I want us to see is that the first Christians did not start out thinking about Jesus in this way. Jesus didn’t come into the world with a certificate of authenticity proving he was God. The first Christians came to the conclusion about his supremacy based on observation and experience.

Here is how it came about. The first followers of Jesus observed him. They lived with him. They listened to him. They saw his miracles. They saw him die. They witnessed the resurrection and his ascension into heaven. They concluded that "He is the image of the invisible God." Unlike anything or anyone else in all of creation. Not created, but the creator of all things. "All things created through him and for him." Preeminent in all things. First in resurrection. The Head of the body, his Church. Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.

Their conclusion: Quite simply, when we talk about Jesus Christ, we are talking about God. We are talking about the one true God who is and was and will come again in glory.

For the one who wrote Colossians, there was nothing of greater importance for the Christians in Colosse to hear.

It seems that these first century Christians were being tempted to abandon Christ as supreme Lord. Some in their midst were spreading what this letter calls "philosophy and empty deceit." They were encouraging these Christians to see Jesus as a lesser deity, one among many. They were downplaying his importance. Instead of worshiping Christ, they practiced "self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions."

The writer insists that Christ is supreme Lord of all things. We need no other gods. He is God. When we talk about him, we are talking about the one true God.

Another way we can help our children: the Bible says Jesus is God with skin on.

John 1:14 says it so succinctly. "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."

Here is what the Bible teaches. If you want to see and know the one true God, then look at Jesus. God came in the flesh to reveal God to us. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen God. If you have come to know Jesus as he is made known in the Bible, then you know God. You know God's nature. You know God's purpose. You know God's plan. We cannot speak of God without also speaking of Jesus.

I really appreciate this about God, don't you? I need things spelled out for me. I relate far better to concrete, tangible, visible reality. As long as God is invisible, it is easy to think all sorts of things about God. It might even be easy to think God doesn't really exist. It is easy to make conjectures about God, to imagine all sorts of things that are far from the truth. And so it has happened throughout human history. We humans have made up lots of gods to suit our purposes. Think of the Greeks and the Romans in ancient history.

Go see their statues and shrines to all their gods. They are in museums where people go stare at them.

Not so with Jesus. When we talk about Jesus, we are reminding ourselves that here is God, but here also is man. Here is the true God, but here also is true humanity, that for which God has created us. What he did, the way he lived, the sacrifice he paid, the salvation he won for us, the glory he entered – he was God in the flesh, unique in all of creation. It is this God who calls us to follow him. To trust in him. To give our lives to him. To live like him. To exalt him above all names in heaven and on earth. For in following him, he leads us to fullness of life, what we at SBPC call the peace, purpose, and promise of God.

I am glad that a child asked the question about the relationship between Jesus and God. We live in a time not much different from Bible times. A time of many religions. A time of many “philosophies and empty deceits.” Today, questions and opinions abound about who Jesus was and who he is. More and more I see him being turned into nothing more than an example to follow or a spiritual good luck charm to hang around one’s neck. On all sides, even in the church, he gets portrayed as just one among many messiahs, saviors, religious figures of significance. It’s like if he can help you be more spiritual, whatever that means, then fine. But if you find more spirituality in, say, a fine novel or in the contemplation of a flower, then so be it.

And, so, many fine folks go about feeling spiritual or seeking a spirituality which I suspect means feeling at peace with themselves and with the world. But this kind of spirituality comes up far short of what is promised in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He didn’t come to lead a spiritual movement. He came to defeat the powers of evil and deliver us to life everlasting. He comes as God of gods and Lord of lords. He joins us in the flesh to break the chains that bind us, to unstick the windows of heaven.

More than at any other time in history, we must answer the question for ourselves. Who do you say he is? Does he demand your life and your all? Or is he just another character from the past who did good deeds and had interesting things to say? Is it ultimately better to dumb down Jesus? To choose your own god? Or is this a time in which more than ever we who call him Lord need to be clear about who he is and what he brings into the human equation? How will we answer our children when they ask why we talk so much about Jesus?

Why Jesus so much and not so much God?

All the questions surrounding Jesus: Was he human? Was he divine? How can he be both? Isn't it easier to think of him as a good person who set a good example for us? If he is God, doesn't that mean we have at least two Gods? How could he do miracles? Why didn't he fight back instead of dying on the cross? Where is he now?

Jesus was human. Came to earth. Lived a human life.
Jesus was divine. Eternal with the Father.

We might emphasize one person of the Trinity. The Father as creator, sustainer, provider; the Son as Savior; the Holy Spirit as the empowering one.

Jesus is God. We know who God is by what Jesus showed us and did for us. We are called to follow Jesus. He makes God more concrete, more visual. Jesus is God with skin on.

I want children to come to know Jesus. In knowing Jesus, they come to know God. He is the way to the Father.