

The Deity of Jesus

John 1:1-18

For years I heard people say that for better or worse we often project our relationship with our earthly fathers onto our relationship with God, our Heavenly Father. The thought was that if you had a good, healthy relationship with your dad, quite likely you relate to God in a healthy way; you understand intuitively that God is generous and inviting and that when He disciplines us it's for our own good. If your earthly father was harsh and demanding, chances are that you project that upon God; you are convinced that He's always displeased with you and that you never measure up.

I wasn't too sure about this whole notion . . . until I became a pastor and saw this phenomenon up close in the lives of many people. . . and until I realized that I tend to project my relationship with my dad upon my relationship with my heavenly Father. My dad was the opposite of demanding, controlling. He told me one time that by the time a kid is 15 years old, he needs to figure things out on his own. So there was little or no direction, and little or no time when we hung out and talked. My dad died at the age of 59 (after being a pastor for 25 years).

One of his friends gave the eulogy at his funeral. Forrest went on and on about how much my dad helped so many people when they were in trouble or in need. When he made the comment, "Craig was always there for us," I thought, "So that's where he was - **there** for **them**. . ." I have very few personal, relational memories of my dad. Consequently I don't have a very intuitive grasp of what it means for God to be my heavenly Father. I understand the concept, but it's hard for me to imagine that God would actually want a relationship with me. As was the case with my dad, I know I can track God down and ask Him for help; but the idea of hanging out and spending time together doesn't make much sense.

Perhaps you too have difficulty knowing how God wants to relate to you; perhaps you have misconceptions about God. This where an understanding of the incarnation can be so very helpful to us. This morning we are going to talk about one aspect of the incarnation: Jesus' deity. As Russ explained last week, when Jesus walked this earth, He was not only fully human; He was also fully God. He wasn't 50% human and 50% God; He was fully human AND fully God. The truth that Jesus was fully God is sometimes referred to as "Jesus' deity."

The gospel of John emphasizes that since Jesus was fully God, He perfectly represents the Father. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If you want to know how God feels, notice how Jesus felt. If you want to know what God the Father thinks about you, notice what Jesus thought of different people. The deity of Jesus Christ will help us relate to God the Father as He really is; the deity of Christ will help us stop projecting onto the Father our own limited experiences with our earthly fathers and all sorts of other distortions about God.

Our primary passage this morning is John 1:1-18. There we see that ***Jesus clears up our misconceptions about the Father. (John 1:1-18)***

In the first message in this series we considered John 1:1-4 in which John said of Jesus:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In the very first verse of his gospel, John boldly declares that Jesus was not only **with** God. He declares that Jesus **was** God in His pre-existence. You'll remember that by calling Jesus "the Word" John was saying that Jesus was the perfect expression of God's mind and God's will. That was true of Jesus before the incarnation. But what about after Jesus took on flesh and blood and became "one of us"? Was He still God? Or was His deity covered up or clouded by His humanity?

Skip down to verse 14 for John's statement about the incarnation.

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It's striking the way John phrases it: *the Word became flesh*. The pre-existent One who was "with God" and who "was God" became a human. As F.F. Bruce says, when "the Word became flesh, God became man" (cited in Carson, p. 127).

The term "**dwelt** among us" is literally "**pitched his tent** among us." Jews who read this in the first century would have been reminded of the tabernacle (the portable temple used before the temple was built in Jerusalem). The tabernacle was the place where people met with God; there He manifested His presence, His glory. John employs this rich imagery when he writes that when the Word became flesh, He "pitched His tent among us". . . or "He tabernacled among us." In other words, when people met with Jesus they were meeting with God.

Consequently, when people saw Jesus' glory, they saw "glory as of the only begotten from the Father." That's what happened when you entered the tabernacle: you experienced the radiance/glory of God. And that's what happened when people experienced Jesus. In calling Him "**the only begotten** from the Father" the emphasis is upon Jesus' uniqueness. That's why the NIV translates this phrase "the glory of the one and only Son."

The specific aspect of God's glory that they saw in Jesus was that Jesus was *full of grace and truth*. His glory wasn't merely a balance of grace and truth or a blend of grace and truth. He was full of grace and full of truth. As you read through the gospel of John, you see this everywhere. Without compromising truth, Jesus extended grace to everyone who would receive it.

If we keep reading in John 1, we read this in verse 18:

18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

John's first comment echoes a theme that's found in the Old Testament: Nobody has ever laid eyes on God. Occasionally people "saw" God, but it was always qualified. For example, Exodus 33 describes the time when Moses cried out to God, "Show me your glory!" God's response was, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live." The implication is that a sinful person cannot withstand the unfiltered glory of God. [God accommodated Moses in Exodus 33 by placing him in "the cleft of the rock" and covering him with His hand while He passed by; then God would remove His hand so that Moses would see His back as He walked away. Of course God didn't have a human body but was speaking in (anthropomorphic) language that would communicate spiritual realities in a way that Moses could understand.]

In light of this "given" that nobody "has seen God at any time," John makes the amazing statement that "the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." In light of what we already know about Jesus from John 1, this is an appropriate way to describe Jesus. The NIV reads, "the one and only Son, who is Himself God" who is "in closest relationship with the Father." Whereas no person had seen or could see God, Jesus had from eternity past been in the closest possible relationship with God the Father.

And since Jesus took on flesh and blood, "He has explained Him." John uses an interesting Greek word. Elsewhere in the New Testament, this term means "to narrate" or "tell a narrative." By what He said and did, Jesus narrated God the Father. If you want to know what God the Father is like, notice what Jesus is like. If you want to know how God the Father thinks, notice how Jesus thought about people and situations.

H. Richard Niebuhr likens Jesus explaining the Father to the Rosetta Stone. Before the Rosetta Stone was rediscovered in 1799 Egypt scholars could only guess the meaning of many hieroglyphics. The Rosetta stone contained the same text 1) in hieroglyphics, 2) Egyptian, and 3) ancient Greek. Since Egyptian and Greek were known, scholars could now figure out the meaning of the ancient hieroglyphics; they could see into a world that they barely understood before. In the same way, Niebuhr says, when we look at Jesus we can now understand God the Father (cited in Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, p. 139).

This reality, this fact, can be so very helpful to us in getting rid of our misconceptions about God the Father - whether those misconceptions come from our earthly fathers or from our experiences or wherever. Because Jesus was **with** God and because Jesus **was** God, when Jesus became flesh He perfectly narrates the Father.

Nobody likes to be stereotyped, right? I went to a small lecture and discussion sponsored by K-State about a year ago. I forget the exact context, but one of the participants made a series of stereotypical statements about "evangelicals" - about what **they** believe. I had to mention, "I'm an evangelical and I don't believe those things. . ."

In the same way, I'd have to assume that God doesn't like being stereotyped. Sometimes people think that Jesus and God play "good cop"/"bad cop" in the two testaments - that Jesus is a gentler, kinder version of the God of the Old Testament. For example, some people will read an account in the OT (such as 1 Samuel 15) where God commands Israel to wipe out every living thing in a certain city and say, "The God of the Old Testament is angry, vengeful, and capricious. He may bless you or He may wipe you off the face of the earth. . . it just depends on how He's feeling that day." When the Word became flesh, that stereotype was blown out of the water. However we understand the difficult passages in the Old Testament (and there are quite a few), we look at Jesus and conclude that God is infinitely more compassionate than we are.

If you've been here very long, you've probably heard me say this. . . Because of what God has done in my heart, I have compassion for many different people in many different circumstances. Even though I really love people, I would never give my one and only son on their behalf; I just wouldn't do it; it wouldn't be worth it for me. But God. . . He sent His one and only Son to die on our behalf that we might have eternal life. Jesus reveals/explains/narrates just how deep and wide the love of God really is. ***Jesus clears up our misconceptions about God the Father.***

In our time remaining let's consider some specific examples of how Jesus explains or narrates God's heart toward us. If we don't "fix our eyes on Jesus" we'll miss most or all of this; we'll continue in our misconceptions and stereotypes about the Father. But as we encounter Jesus in the gospels, this is some of what we see (these are just examples, certainly not a comprehensive list of what Jesus teaches about the Father):

Jesus explains/narrates God's heart towards us when we are . . .

. . . guilty and inconsistent (John 8:1-11, Luke 22:31-34)

When we're feeling guilty because of our sin or because of some inconsistency, our image of God the Father is important, isn't it? If we think God is just waiting until we "mess up" and then blast us, John 8 is instructive. There we read how the "scribes and Pharisees" brought to Jesus a woman "caught" in adultery. After Jesus forced them to consider the fact that none of them were sinless (and after they went away) Jesus said to the woman, "I do not condemn you. . . go and sin no more." That's a perfect example of grace (no condemnation) and truth (sin no more).

That's exactly what God the Father says to each of us who believe in Jesus when we have sinned. As Jesus' words reflect, God doesn't condemn us when we sin. John 3:17 (the verse right after the famous John 3:16) says that "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved." God could have condemned/judged the world from a distance; in Christ God became one of us so that we might have life.

At the same time, since God is a good Father He doesn't excuse our sin; that wouldn't be a loving thing to do because our sin enslaves us and keeps us from experiencing life. Like any good dad, God disciplines us that we might "share His holiness" (Hebrews

12:10). Jesus demonstrated that God is a good Father, committed to our best. If you tend to think that God is leaning back against the wall with His arms folded, just waiting for you to mess up, allow Jesus to clear up this misconception about God.

. . . self-righteous and judgmental (Matthew 7:1-5, Matthew 23)

Each of us has an issue or two (or three) that we're so passionate about that if we're not careful we'll become self-righteous and judgmental toward others who have a different view. It might be an area of doctrine or an area of practice (politics or policy or lifestyle). It's the mindset, "How can you be a Christian and not agree with me on this?!?" Well, this is where we need to let the word of Christ dwell deeply within us; we need to hear and receive what Jesus reveals to us about the Father.

Jesus said in Matthew 7 (and therefore God says) "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. . . first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." The Father wants us to deal with our own blind spots and THEN we will be helpful to others.

Or we could soak in what Jesus said about the Pharisees in Matthew 23. That's where Jesus told His disciples, "Do what they say (their doctrine is correct) but not as they do. They put heavy demands on others but they won't lift a finger." When/if we find pockets of self-righteousness within ourselves we need to understand that God has the same attitude toward **our** self-righteousness that He had toward the **Pharisees'** self-righteousness. We can hear this from God without experiencing condemnation because He is a good Father who disciplines us for our good.

. . . brokenhearted and weary (John 11:35, Matthew 11:28-30)

John 11:35 records the very short verse: *Jesus wept*. The context confirms that Jesus (and therefore God the Father) was deeply moved by the grief of Mary and Martha over the death of their brother. Here's what happened:

32 Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"

Since Jesus perfectly reveals the heart and mind of God, we can know that our heavenly Father notices our grief and weeps along with us.

Philip Yancey (*Reaching for the Invisible God*) tells how this insight had a rather profound impact in the life of one person. Roberta Bondi was a professor of church history (Emory University, Atlanta). She had a very difficult time even calling God "Father" because her earthly father was such "a harsh, distant figure"; he "tolerated no imperfections or weakness, no disobedience from his children or his wife, no

questioning or asking why.” When she was 12 years old her dad left home, and afterwards every time she heard someone say “God the Father,” her anger toward her father rose within her.

When Bondi was an adult, working on a PhD in history at Oxford, she was still barely able to use the word “Father” in prayer until she came across Jesus’ comment to Philip in John 14.

8 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

This is how Yancey describes her reaction to Jesus’ statement:

It struck Bondi, the church historian and theologian, as a startling new concept. If Jesus shows special concern for the poor, widows, and social rejects, then so does the Father. If Jesus has women friends and values them, so does the Father. Bondi had wrongly projected her own fractured image of fatherhood onto God; instead, she realized, God’s ideal should offer a strong corrective to human fathers who fall short. Through the lens of Jesus, God made visible, she saw God anew.

One of the passages that struck her with new force was John 11 where Jesus “melted with sympathy” for Mary and Martha at the death of their brother. Because Jesus (and therefore the Father) was moved to compassion for them, then surely God the Father is moved to compassion when we are brokenhearted. And that makes all the difference in the world, doesn’t it. Jesus - by His words and actions - narrates God’s compassion for us.

... _____.

You probably noticed that I left a space for you to “fill in the blank.” The examples I’ve given may not be exactly what you need to understand about the Father. Maybe you need to understand what God thinks (and feels) about your sickness, about your loneliness, about being betrayed by a friend, about your lack of faith. The second person of the Trinity became one of us so that He might know what God the Father thinks about all of these things.

My encouragement to you this Christmas is to go to the gospels and fix your eyes on Jesus. Don’t turn your eyes from Him because you’re afraid of what you might see; don’t turn your eyes from Him because you’re afraid you’ll be bored by what you find; don’t turn your eyes away from Him because you think you already know what you’ll find. Fix your eyes on Jesus and you will gain a fresh understanding of the Father. And knowing the heart and mind of your heavenly Father will be healing and nourishing for your soul.