

We Believe: Begotten From The Father
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 9:6-7; Psalm 2:1-12; John 8:31-59

Our final Scripture reading today comes from John 8:31-59. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds."

It's amazing how much more you see when you clear away the debris. This week, three trees were removed from our property – two that had fallen on their own, and one that was dying and was in danger of taking down some power lines. At first, it just appeared desolate, like something was missing. But as I was writing my sermon, I noticed more deer, deer that once hid behind the large tree that came down. I notice our side yard now that the tree isn't in the way.

It's amazing how much more you see when you clear away the debris. That's really what the season of Advent is about. We have a habit of thinking that Advent is just a time to remind us to buy our presents early before the stores run out of what everyone wants. But Advent has always been a time of waiting, a time of anticipating Jesus' second coming as we remember the events of His first coming. And while it's not somehow an official part of Advent, I think this time can also be a time for clearing away the debris and seeing Jesus for who He truly is. In a seasons where we're constantly in motion, it's good for us to sit and contemplate for a little while about the nature and person of Jesus. Because when you clear away the debris of life that clutters up the landscape of our lives, you can see more clearly the God who loves us and the Savior who transforms us.

And so, for the next four weeks, as we think about the birth of Jesus and sing songs about His coming, we're also going to examine who He is through the words of the Nicene Creed. It's a creed we sometimes use as our Response of Faith, and we'll be using it as our Response of Faith throughout the month. Now that might surprise you because as you all know, the Bible is our text every week, and it still will be throughout the series. But the ancient creeds of the church, the creeds that everyone in the ancient church held in common, are incredibly important because they help us make sense of some things that are not perfectly clear in Scripture, that take some work to understand.

The Bible can be read by virtually anyone, and if you read it carefully, you can understand the basic message it has for us – the depths of sin, the need of salvation, and how God has provided exactly that through His Son, Jesus. But not everything is spelled out in simple ways because God is not simple. There are things in Scripture that were clear to its original audience that are not clear to us and we need help getting to the bottom of them.

Some things we know because they've been put into laymen's terms. Take for example H₂O – what we all know of as water. Two hydrogen atoms, one oxygen atom. But unless you're a scientist or have been taught in school what H₂O is, you simply don't know just by seeing the formula. In the same way, there are some things that we don't see named in the Bible because they're spoken about in ways we don't fully understand unless we've been trained or are looking very closely. That's the reason we don't see the word "Trinity" in the Bible, even though the concept of the Trinity is all over the place – Trinity is a word that defines what we see in the Bible. The creeds take what we see in various places throughout the Bible and make it clear in one statement.

So the first part of the Nicene's Creed's statement on Jesus is what we are going to tackle today. Here's what it says: "We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father."

What's wrapped up in this part of the creed is the ever-important understanding that Jesus is, Himself, God. The creed and Scripture are very careful in how they put this because we must be careful to acknowledge that Jesus is not God the Father. As Scripture describes God, God is One, yet in three unique persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In a very real way, God is unified in three persons in a way that nothing in creation truly is. It is a mystery, yet it is true.

For us, what we need to understand is that, when we look in the manger, when we look at this infant wrapped in swaddling clothes with Mary and Joseph, we are seeing something infinitely more amazing than the picture would even suggest. We are seeing God with us. In Jesus, God becomes human to rescue His people, yet is still fully God. Jesus is the God-Man. We celebrate Christmas not because a child was born – we could celebrate 385,000 children born around the world each day. It is that this is God’s Son, God from God, light from light, of the very same God-stuff as the Father.

Now we only believe the Nicene Creed because we believe the Bible and we believe the creed is simply summarizing what the Bible says. So what does the Bible say? Let’s take a look at some of the passages we’ve heard today, and perhaps even some others. Psalm 2 is where the language of the begotten nature of the Messiah comes from. Now again, “begotten” isn’t a word that we hear much. We need to know what it means. It is a word that means to have born children. There’s no other definition for it. It’s not creation, it’s not making something new, but having a child. In Psalm 2, God the Father is simultaneously speaking to the enemies of His people and the Messiah, warning His enemies to embrace the Messiah rather than die in their sins. To the Messiah, the Father says, “You are my son; today I have begotten you.”

What this means is that Jesus is not a created being. Jesus is not an angel that God transformed into a human or adopted as His Son. John 3:16 is clear that Jesus is God the Father’s one and only Son. We are the adopted; we are the ones God brings into the family. But Jesus has always been family. He was begotten in eternity, before time even began, so He is timeless. He has always been with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There was never a time when Jesus was not. And because Jesus is begotten, it means that He is of the very same type of God the Father, of the same essence. Human beget humans; cats beget cats; dogs beget dogs. God begets God. The key to remember is that it doesn’t make Jesus a different god like many other religions have with multiple gods. Jesus is God from God. But unlike say the Roman and Egyptian gods with their own personalities, where one god stood for war and one for harvest and one for creation and what not, the Father and the Son are unified. They are One.

Now David wrote this psalm, and some people might say, isn’t it about David? Isn’t it metaphorical language of God taking in David as His son? What’s interesting is that many Jewish scholars took this to be language about the Messiah, not about David. In fact, up into the Middle Ages, a thousand years after Jesus, many prominent rabbis were still teaching that this was about the Messiah! The only rabbis who took it to be about David himself were those who were writing against Christians saying this was about Jesus. Through most of Jewish history, there was belief that God was speaking of a truly begotten Messiah who would come.

Then there’s Isaiah 9. There’s another prophecy that a child will be born that will leave the enemies of God in utter disorder and will restore God’s people. The Messiah is given many names, but among them is Mighty God. Remember that Judaism is absolutely, positively monotheistic. The prayer that every Hebrew child learned to recite everyday is “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” The Ten Commandments absolutely forbid the worship of anyone or anything but God alone. And yet here, the Messiah has the title Mighty God. The only way to understand this is through the revelation that God is one God in three persons.

Or let's take a look at our main passage today, John 8. Jesus is instructing a group of Jewish teachers about Himself and their dangerous mistakes in the way they interpret and live out the Scriptures. He tries to teach them about Himself, but they become more and more agitated. Their real agitation is with Jesus' claim that they are slaves to sin and not the true children of Abraham. They are offended by that because of course, they are the physical descendants of Abraham. But Jesus teaches that being a physical descendant of Abraham means nothing if your words and actions go against Abraham and against God and against the Messiah.

The argument reaches its peak when Jesus claims that Abraham looked forward to the day of His coming. His opponents scoff at the idea that He could know Abraham. And Jesus replies, "Before Abraham was, I Am." This language is important. "Before Abraham was, I Am." If you go to Exodus 3, when Moses is called to be God's spokesman so that the Hebrew slaves are freed from Egypt, Moses says, "Who shall I say sent me? What is the name of the god of our forefathers?" And God replies, "I AM THAT I AM. Tell them, I AM sent you."

When Jesus' opponents pick up rocks to stone Him, they know exactly what they are doing and why. They understand just what Jesus has said. Jesus has used the same language for Himself as God did in Exodus 3. He is proclaiming Himself to be God in the flesh. And if we read elsewhere in John's gospel, John 5, we find the Jewish leadership had been trying to figure out how to kill Him because in calling God His personal Father, Jesus was making Himself equal to God. The religious leaders say it directly in John 10:33. And in the other gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' opponents confirm at His trial that they believed His claim to be the Son of God was blasphemy, that it made Him equal to God.

Other passages we don't even have time to get into today confirm it. Isaiah 7:14 confirms that a young woman, a virgin, will conceive, and bear a Son, whose name is Immanuel – God with us. Hosea 11:1, quoted by Matthew 2:14, God says, "Out of Egypt I called my son," referring to when Jesus and His family fled to Egypt after His birth to avoid the rage of King Herod. 1 Chronicles 17:13 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5, where God says of the Messiah, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." Over and over, in various ways and places, the Scriptures speak of the Messiah being the Son of God who is, in very essence, God in the Flesh.

Now...why does all that matter for Christmas? Why should we study it? Why should we spend so much time on it? While the Bible tells us so much about God's dealings with us over the ages, while it's important to spend time on the full story – which is why we're going through Genesis, for example – we really need to get this right. Because all of human history, all of human eternity, depends on who the baby in the manger really is.

If Jesus is just a man, just an ordinary baby, perhaps an extraordinary teacher and rabbi, if He is nothing more, then we shouldn't be celebrating Christmas. There's no point. If He is a created being, if as some people have believed over the years that He is some form of angel, or as the church argued in the third century, if He is similar to God but not identical, then we should turn off the Christmas station and take down the lights and the tree. Because if Jesus is not God, then we have very little idea who God is and we have displeased God by worshiping an impostor. Because worship is something that belongs to God alone. And because Jesus accepts worship in the gospels, He would not be a good teacher but a false one – if He is not God.

But if Jesus is God, if the child on our Christmas cards is not just a man but God enfleshed, the God-Man, then everything changes, because Jesus **can** change everything. Because Jesus is begotten of the Father, very God from very God, He can bridge the gap for us. As we studied this year, we know that Adam failed the test. At the lone point he could rebel against God, he did. He threw the whole human race into sin and darkness that we could not conquer. In fact, because of Adam's sin, we by nature choose the darkness; when we are counted to Adam, we are dead in sin and trespasses. Even throughout the Bible, when we see the best humanity has to offer, we see people repeatedly falling into grievous sins.

For us to be saved from the debt we owe for our crimes against God, we cannot rely on just a man. For a man is by nature flawed. We need someone else, someone more, someone unique, someone uniquely suited to the task, One who is not under the sin nature that Adam handed down to us, One who can truly be perfect in every way, following the Father's will at every point, not just avoiding sin but genuinely pleasing the Father with each choice. When we hear the Christmas story each year, it's not just the story of angels come to visit a young virgin or shepherds and wise men and an evil king. It's the story of rescue come to Earth, the story of God taking on flesh and entering into creation in a new way, the story of the first Adam being replaced with the second Adam, the perfect Adam, the one who can forgive sins and bring us into the Kingdom of the Father He loves.

If Jesus as God, as He says He is, as the Scriptures say He is, as the apostles said He was, if we really grasp it, then it also might change how we look at Christmas. Because before He is anything else – Savior, comforter, counselor, Prince of Peace, friend, Lord, deliverer, brother – He is God. When the disciples truly realized this, they bowed down in worship. They were in awe. Even when their hearts grew weary and tired and they weren't sure they had seen all they had seen, when they knew Jesus was God, worship was their first response. When Thomas sees the risen Lord after His resurrection, his first words are, "My Lord and my God!"

It means that we enter into this season as a season of worship, a time to reflect on the utter magnificence of the infant King in Bethlehem. Because it means that Jesus gave everything up to become one of us. As one of the most poignant passages in all of Scripture, Philippians 2:5-8, tells us, "Jesus, being in very nature of God, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking on the very nature, the very form, of a servant, being born in the form of a man. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

When we think of Jesus as a tiny infant, we see One who had every right to sit at the Father's side, who became nothing. He left it all behind for you and for me, and for all those who would come to Him in repentance and faith. He came and lived as a peasant so we could become rich in spirit. He lived as nothing so we could have everything. He gave up His life so we could have eternal life.

So as we contemplate the manger this season, we pray, may the debris and chaos and tragedy of the last weeks and months be wiped away and cleared from our sight. May we be blessed with the gift of spiritual insight to understand what it means that in Jesus Christ, God came to be with us. May we worship Him in this season and forevermore. Amen.