

I. Intro:

A. We are early in a series that focuses on the forty biggest, most important and most foundational ideas advanced by the Christian faith. And we are calling it *Planted* because, the focus is not on persuading you to believe – it assumes you do. It is on helping you put roots down into Christ, the Bible and the Gospel. There is a sense in which we are saying, if you have signed up, this is what you have signed up for.

B. We live in a moment that celebrates freedom. It is one in which we are told we are free to believe whatever we want. OK, in one sense that is true. As a country we have the legal right to believe whatever we choose. That is a wonderful thing. We are blessed.

C. But we need to understand that, just because we believe something doesn't mean it is true. Every person has value, but not every idea does. Some are bad. And, we are not so important as to be able to change ultimate reality. God exists or He doesn't independent of our belief on the matter. Indeed, one of the points I stressed last week was that God is who God is, and not who we try to make him to be.

D. What we are exploring in this series is what the Christian faith has affirmed over the last 2,000 years. Last week we looked at nine aspects or qualities about God the Father. Today we look at Jesus. And my hope for you is that your view of him grows. Because, he is bigger and more beautiful and more wonderful than we can know – and some of you need big, beautiful and wonderful to hold onto right now.

II. If you have been around you've heard my riff on Jesus. I make three points:

A. One: He is the most significant person who ever lived. I note that of the more than 60 billion people who walked on this planet, Jesus has made the biggest impact.¹ He has shaped more lives and been a greater force for good than anyone else. It's a huge claim but it's not that hard to substantiate. I note that:

1. It's not just that tens of thousands of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages and homeless shelters have been founded in his honor – and end up with names like Red Cross, Saint James or Salvation Army, it's that the idea for the idea for hospitals, orphanages and homeless shelters came from people who state that their motivation was the life, teaching and example of Jesus.

2. I note that His followers' credit him with their efforts to abolish slavery, end poverty and advance Human Rights.

3. I've observed that He gave us the greatest ethical system and that He leveraged the modest skills of some un-schooled also-rans to launch the church, which is now the largest, oldest, most significant, most ethnically diverse and most geographically disbursed institution in the world.

4. I note that His followers currently number close to two billion, that millions of people have laid down their lives for him, and that millions more stand ready to do so.

5. And that: more books have been written about him,² and more art and music has been inspired by him than by anyone else. I note that His life divides history between AD and BC³ and His birthday is the largest annual celebration in the world and other things.

6. If you have been here you've heard that rant. And then I say, by the way:

B. Two: Jesus also claims to be God.

1. The one who has made the biggest impact, claims to be god himself. Which is something no other great moral leader claims.⁴

C. Finally, I suggest that you should give this a grownup look. My third point is actually: In spite of the fact that the most significant person who ever lived claims to be God – and claims he came to give us eternal life, who claims he came to rescue us - most people are too busy binge-watching Netflix and keeping up with the Royals and the Kardashians and Sports radio to reflect on whether they are in or out.

D. Often when I speak about Jesus – this is the angle I take.

III. Today we are going in a different direction.

A. I lay out those three points because I am trying to get fence sitters to commit. This series assumes you are in. What I am trying to provide is an overview of the big ideas around which your life needs to be shaped. So today, I want to give you the big picture of Jesus.

B. I have ten points. As you can imagine – there are more than ten. Indeed, eternity will not be long enough for us to fully grasp who He is. We will always be amazed and awed. But there are some things we need to know.

IV. Twelve Transformational Claims About Jesus

A. Jesus is God.

1. Jesus is fully God, with all the attributes of God. Our lives began at conception, not His. There was never a moment before He existed. Indeed, He existed before there was anything else. And as God, He created everything else. In Genesis 1 we are told that God created the Heavens and the earth. In John 1 we get more information about that. It reads: In the beginning was the Word (Jesus) and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And then, verse 3: Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

2. Jesus is fully God. He is not almost God. Not god with a small “g.” Not the Vice President of Heaven. But fully God, equal to the Father (and Spirit). The Bible teaches that Jesus is God. And Jesus claims to be God. Indeed, it was his claims to be God that got him killed.

3. By the way, the first creed was the Apostle’s Creed, which was written as a high-level summary of the faith for those who wanted to get baptized and join the church. The other creeds were mostly designed to defend against those who tried to distort the faith. The second creed – which was drafted around 300 AD in Nicaea – was written to stop those who tried to say that in some small way Jesus was a bit less than God the Father.⁵

4. Number one: Jesus is God.

B. Number Two: Jesus is One of Us. He was (and is) a Man:

1. The claim is not just that Jesus is God, the claim is that at the incarnation⁶ - which is what Christmas celebrates – Jesus added humanity to deity. In other words, in a move beyond our ability to fully grasp, while remaining fully God, He became fully man as well.

2. He is not half God and half man; not God some of the time and man some of the time; not God on the inside but man on the outside. Instead, he is fully God and fully man.

3. I mentioned the Council of Nicaea – where the early church fought against those who said Jesus was something slightly less than God. Shortly after that issue was settled, they gathered to add the Chalcedonian Definition to it – which was drafted to fight against those who suggested that Jesus was not fully human.

4. This is not our issue today. People today claim that Jesus was a person, just not God. Back then, because Plato and other Greeks had persuaded people that the physical world is not as good as the spiritual world, many thought it was impossible for Jesus to be an actual person. He was – and he is. The claim is that in Heaven – which is a real place – Jesus remains God and Man.

C. Number Three: Jesus is the Missing Piece of the Puzzle.

1. Jesus is the thread that unites and explains the Bible.

2. He is the true and better Adam. The first Adam failed – and through him we inherited a sin nature. The Second Adam (Jesus) passed the test in the garden and his righteousness is imputed to us.⁷

3. Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call to leave the land of his father and go out into the void to create a new people of God.

4. Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who was not just offered up by his father on the mountain, but who was truly sacrificed for us.
5. Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, though betrayed, rose to the right hand of power, who forgave those who betrayed him and who used his new power to save them.
6. Jesus is the true and better David whose victory over Goliath becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.
7. Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm, spent three days in the belly of the beast before rising again.
8. Jesus is the new and better temple – the intersection of heaven and earth where you go to get your sins forgiven.
9. The Bible is about Jesus. He ties it together. In fact, just as you cannot fully grasp the New Testament until you study the Old, you cannot understand the Old Testament until you read and study the New. What you need to see is that much of what you were reading about in the Old was already about Jesus.
10. And by the way, it's not just that He is the missing piece to a lot of stories. He is the Fulfillment of all of the Messianic Prophecies.
 - a) The Jews were waiting for a rescuer. Their term is Messiah. (In the Greek, that translates the Christ.⁸ He is the one all of the Messianic prophecies point to.
 - b) The first promise concerning his arrival is found in Genesis 3:15 – which is back on page 2 of my Bible. God said he will send “the seed of woman” to defeat evil and rescue humanity.
 - c) A couple hundred additional promises follow. Many things get mentioned - his birthplace, his lineage, his manner of death, etc. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the promises God made throughout the Old Testament.

D. Number Four: Jesus is the Smartest Person to Ever Live.

1. Jesus is not only good and kind – a point most are willingly to acknowledge. And he is not only wise. He knows what a good life looks like. He is smart. Indeed, He is the smartest person to ever live. He not only gave us the greatest ethical system we have. He knows everything. Not just every spiritual thing. Jesus knows more about banking than Jamie Dimon, more about football than Bill Belichick, more about electric cars than Elon Musk,⁹ and more about you than you.¹⁰

E. Number Five: Jesus is the Master of Humility

1. In spite of the things I have listed so far – and those yet to come. In spite of the fact that Jesus is greater than anyone, he lived simply, and He served others.
2. Now, when we discuss humility, it's important to note that there was nothing modest about Jesus's claims. It's his lifestyle and his service changed how we view the good life and it elevated the view of humility from a sign of weakness to a sign of strength.
3. Jesus has a resume unlike any other. Indeed, we could quickly list twenty things that are true about Jesus, any of which is ten million times more impressive than any other thing anyone else has done.
 - a) You could say: "I did an undergraduate degree at an Ivy League school, studied medicine at the University of Chicago and did my residency at Stanford." And Jesus could counter, "I created life and I defeated death."
 - b) You say, "I graduated first in my class from Harvard Law." He says, "I helped establish the Ten Commandments – which are the foundation of all law. They are actually based on my character."
 - c) You say, "I won a Pulitzer Prize in chemistry." He says, "I created all the elements. And there are some you still haven't discovered yet."
 - d) You say, "I won the Heisman trophy?" He says, "I can walk on water."
4. No one can compare with Jesus – but He stoops. What the Bible teaches is that no one starts higher or deserves to be more exalted than Jesus, and yet, He went lower. For us.
5. This is part of one of the most powerful passages in the New Testament: Phil. 2:5-11. There we are told that Jesus descended from heaven down to earth – the Creator humiliated himself and entered the creation. But not just that, in Philippians 2, Paul notes he not only became a person, he became a slave. And not just a slave, but a slave who went to his death. And not just a slave who went to his death, but a slave who went to his death on the cross.

F. Number Six: Jesus is our Example.

1. This is actually what the Philippians passage is about. Phil. 2:4 tells us that we should follow Christ's example. Now this point needs qualification.
 - a) On the hand, some who say that Jesus is a great example do so in order to say he is nothing else. That is not what I am saying.

b) On the other hand, some who argue that Jesus is not our example note that He did things we do not have to do – such as die on the cross. I am not suggesting we have to do everything He did.

2. But Jesus is our example. He is the perfect person. His way of living – full of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God and in service to others – is what we are called to.

G. Seven: Jesus is a friend to the poor, ostracized and oppressed.

1. In spite of who He is – in spite of having all power - Jesus hangs out with the have-nots. Think about this:

a) Jesus is the only one who could pick his parents – and he chooses a poor, simple couple. In particular, Mary, a young woman whose insights and courage are stunning, but who has no wealth or power.

b) He gets to pick his closest followers, and he chooses a collection of misfits others passed over.

c) And then as a rabbi he hangs out with those others avoided: Samaritans, tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes – the fringe. The overlooked and outcast. He loved these people, cared for them, partied with them.

2. The people he didn't like were the self-important ones. Those who thought they were better than others – especially the religious conservatives. His harshest comments are almost all directed at people who thought they were dialed in with God.

H. Number Eight: Jesus is our Future Judge

1. One of the ways Jesus sent the religious elite into a tizzy was by using the title Son of Man. It seems like it is the humble cousin to the title "Son of God." But it was not. The title comes from Daniel 7, which reads:

a) In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

2. One of the things Jesus claims is that He is the judge of our lives, and the one who determines our eternal destiny.

3. I am not sure anyone has ever liked the idea of God's judgment. But it is especially unpopular today. But it is clearly part of what Jesus claims.

4. Thankfully, while being our judge, Jesus is also our defense attorney. He represents us – which makes this sound like a Chicago story. Corruption at high places. It is not.

5. If Jesus is your defense attorney – your representative – which is what a priest does. Then the outcome of the trial is certain. But not because of corruption, because of something else.

I. Nine: Jesus is the Sacrifice

1. Jesus is the one who pays our debt. And the payment is His life.

2. If you have read the Old Testament, you know that the blood flows early and often. This is because it is the currency in God's economy.

3. Three of the biggest ideas that are established in the first few pages are that: 1) Sin is a capital offense; 2) But that innocent third parties can die as substitutes so that guilty people can go free; 3) The payment is blood.

4. The outcome of our trial is not that we are found innocent. The outcome is that our debt has been paid. And that is because Jesus is the payment. He is the ultimate sacrifice. He is the true Passover Lamb.

J. Now I only get one more. And that is hard

1. The book of Revelation makes much of the fact that He Jesus is the groom and we get invited to this huge wedding celebration in heaven – where he marries the church. Revelation also describes him as the Lion of Judah and the Conquering Lamb

2. Jesus uses a bunch of terms to describe himself: the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

3. Last week I got a few people agitated by suggesting one of the qualities of God is that He is wild. I said it wasn't a perfect term. But I used it to stress that we do not control God. He is in charge. And, to use Lewis's phrase from the Chronicles of Narnia, he is not a tame lion. Well, the term wild is easier to see with Jesus. His actions pretty consistently shocked everyone, especially the religious elite. He broke all kinds of rules, championing the Samaritans, speaking with women, and

4. It would be criminal if I didn't note that one of the titles used of him most frequently is Lord – which means master. Be under no illusions, Jesus is in charge.

K. And there are dozens of other titles: He is First Born from the Dead, He is the Coming King, our kinsman redeemer, the Lilly of the Valley, the Rock of Ages, the Prince of Peace

L.

V. Jesus is Our Savior:

A. Jesus is not only all of these things – He is the one sent to rescue you. If you are going to gain eternal life, it is because we are saved by the work of another. Christianity is not a morality play, it's not a self-improvement plan.

B. It was an assignment that required great suffering and sacrifice. But He did it.

C. Jesus is the Passover Lamb: Remarkably, Jesus is not just our Savior. He secured our rescued by dying in our place – i.e., by trading his life for ours.

VI. Well, as I said, there is more. There is an eternity of insights about Christ that will amaze. But I need to land the plane, so let me say:

A. We need a bigger view of Jesus. Always. A bigger view of Jesus brings hope and peace.

B. We also need to remember, He is not looking for fans, He is looking for followers.

C. Let me put it this way: the right response to Jesus is worship and obedience. If you are inclined to do something else, it is because you need a bigger view of Jesus.

VII. Finally, let me say this to those of you who are on the outside looking in.

A. Jesus loves you – and He welcome you into the family.

B. Please understand, while it is possible that Jesus is not the things I have laid out.

¹ What is beyond dispute is that Jesus of Nazareth is one of those perennial question marks in history with which mankind is never quite done. With a ministry of two or three years he attracted and infuriated his contemporaries, mesmerized and alienated the ancient world, unleashed a movement that has done the same ever since, and thus changed the course of history forever. J.P. Meier

² The Gospels have been translated into more languages than anything else ever written, and numerous people devote decades of their life to learn languages with the expressed purpose of translating the New Testament into that language.

³ Though a move has been made to change the BC / AD division to BCE / CE, few can refute that his birth was the intended dividing line.

⁴ To cite C.S. Lewis from his book *God in the Dock*: If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, “Are you the son of Bramah?” he would have said, “My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.” If you had gone to Socrates and asked, “Are you Zeus?” he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, “Are you Allah?” he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked

Confucius, “Are you Heaven?” I think he would have probably replied, “Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.” The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.

⁵ I am referring here to the Nicaean Creed.

⁶ *Carnos* is the Greek term for flesh. (A carnos-ivor is a meat eater, chili-con-carnos is chili with meat). The incarnation – which is what is celebrated at Christmas – is when God became incarnate.

⁷ The phrase “new and better” and all of the instances listed, come from Tim Keller, who lists many others as well.

⁸ You may have seen the fish as a symbol for Christian. It lost out to the cross as the logo for the faith. But it made a run at it because

⁹ “At the literally mundane level Jesus knew how to transform the molecular structure of water to make it wine, that knowledge also allowed him to take a few pieces of bread and some little fish and feed thousands of people. He could create matter from the energy that he knew how to access from the heavens right where he was. He knew how to transform the tissues of the human body from sickness to health and from death of life. He knew how to suspend gravity, interrupt weather patterns, eliminate unfruitful trees without saw or ax he only needed a word. Surely he must be amused at what Nobel prizes are awarded for today. In the ethical domain he had an understanding of life that has influenced world thought more than any other. Death was not something imposed on him by others, he explained to his followers in a moment of crisis that he could at any time call on 72,000 angels to do whatever he wanted...he plainly said nobody takes my life, I lay it down by choice...All these things show Jesus cognitive and practical mastery of every phase of reality: physical, moral and spiritual...Saying Jesus is Lord can mean little in practice for anyone who has to hesitate in saying Jesus is smart...he is not just nice, he is brilliant, he is the smartest man who has ever lived. He is now supervising the entire course of human history while simultaneously preparing the rest of the universe for our future role in it. He always has the best information on everything and certainly on the things that matter most in the human life.” Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*

¹⁰ There clearly was a time during his childhood when he does not access that information. But at some point he did. Jesus knows all things.