

## The Minister's Jealousy, Part 2

2 Corinthians 11:1-4

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### Introduction

Well we return again to our study of 2 Corinthians, so turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. And the last time I was with you in GraceLife, which was a few weeks ago now, we worked through the first three verses of chapter 11, and I mentioned we would get to verse 4 next time, and that's what I'll hope to do today. But those of you who were in church last week know that I preached verses 1 through 3 in the main service. I don't usually take what I've taught in GraceLife into the main pulpit until a significant amount of time has passed, let alone preach the most recent message I've done. But I decided to do that last week because the message of this text had so gripped me that I wanted to share it with the entire congregation. And for those of you who were really dialed in, you might have noticed that I changed the title and the outline. And that's because, for the main service, I knew I was only preaching once and so the sermon had to stand on its own a bit more, whereas in GraceLife I get the opportunity to do a part two. Well, that's what we're going to do today. Let's begin by reading the opening four verses once again. "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. <sup>2</sup>For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. <sup>3</sup>But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup>For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully."

And we began last time by reminding ourselves of the terrifying and heart-breaking reality of apostasy—the reality that there are professing Christians, amongst the fellowship of the Lord's people, and who give every outward indication of being a genuine follower of Christ, who eventually renounce their faith in Christ, and fall away from God, giving evidence that they were never truly saved to begin with. And we were reminded of the horrifying consequences of apostasy. The rejection of God, the rejection of Christ, and the rejection of the Gospel, in full knowledge of and exposure to the truth, means, Hebrews 10:26, that "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and 'the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.'"

As we consider that reality, as well as what that passage goes on to say, namely that "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God," we grieve and mourn over the friends and family members that we've known who have traveled this path, and have laid themselves

open to that terrifying expectation of judgment. We recognize that sense of painful bewilderment. We're familiar with the way the mind races to try to figure out something we could have done, something we could have said, to prevent our loved one from being wooed away by false teaching, from being seduced by wicked living, from abandoning the only hope of forgiveness and salvation. And as I said last time, if there was something we knew we could have said or done, every last one of us would do it—even if it was inconvenient, even if it was difficult, and even if it made us look foolish.

Well, this is the situation the Apostle Paul finds himself in with respect to those whom he regards as his dear spiritual children, the professing believers of the Corinthian church. They had come under the spell of false teaching—a mix of Judaizing legalism and fleshly triumphalism being peddled by a band of teachers from Jerusalem claiming to be apostles. And the church had been taken in by it! But through Paul's severe letter and through Titus's personal ministry to them, the majority of the church repented, repudiated this false doctrine, and reaffirmed their loyalty to Paul and to Paul's Gospel. But a significant minority of the church remained enamored with this prosperity-laced legalism, and so Paul writes chapters 10 to 13 aiming to rescue this unrepentant minority from the horrors of apostasy.

And he has undertaken to do this by a very striking, puzzling method. Throughout the previous chapter, Paul has rebuked the false teachers for their self-commendation and fleshly boasting. But when we look ahead to chapters 11 and 12, we find Paul doing that very thing himself! We find him boasting! In 11:17 he says he's speaking "in this confidence of boasting." In verse 21 he starts boasting. He says, "But whatever respect anyone else is bold, I am just as bold myself." How can he condemn the false apostles for boasting in themselves, and then boast in himself?

Well, he acknowledges that in doing that, he's being foolish. Verse 17: "What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness." Verse 21, "I speak in foolishness." What is going on here? Why would Paul intentionally be foolish by doing the very thing he just castigated the false apostles for doing? Well, the Corinthians have been captivated by the false apostles preeminently because of their excessive boasting in their fleshly accomplishments. So, even though it's foolish to boast in oneself, Paul intentionally adopts the tactics of his adversaries in order to demonstrate how foolish *they* are, and how he could beat them at their own game anyway. "Oh, it's boasting you're impressed by, is it? Well even though that is absolutely foolish, I've actually got more reason to boast than they do!"

You say, "Wow, that really doesn't sound like Paul!" And you're right! It's extraordinary! But he might say, "Desperate times call for desperate measures." And this was definitely a desperate time. The Corinthians—his dear spiritual children—are flirting with apostasy. Flirting with that terrifying expectation of judgment, staring down the fury of the fire that consumes the

adversaries of God. And so he's going to do whatever he has to do to snatch them from those flames.

But as a prelude to that display of foolishness, what we have in the first half of 2 Corinthians 11 is Paul's plea for the Corinthians to excuse him for his foolish boasting. He says in verse 1: "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Indeed, do bear with me!" "Indulge me in a little foolishness, if it means that I rescue your souls from heresy and apostasy!" And then, in the following verses, he explains **why** he engages in this foolish boasting. But as we mentioned last time, the reasons he gives aren't parallel with one another; it's not quite that he's giving three reasons for his boasting. He gives **three reasons**, but they sort of cascade and build on one another.

### **Review I: The Reason for His Foolishness (v. 2a)**

First he gives the reason for his **foolishness**. And you see that in the first part of verse 2. He says, "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy." "Bear with my foolish boasting; I'm acting out of jealousy!" And we know that jealousy can drive someone to rash and foolish actions. Paul's children in the faith are in danger of abandoning faithfulness to Christ for smooth talking prosperity preaching. And so the last thing you can expect from him is sober, dispassionate commentary.

But although Paul's jealousy drives him to do what he wouldn't normally do, it's not a sinful, human jealousy that has overtaken him. He says he's jealous for the Corinthians with a *godly* jealousy—with the same kind of jealousy that God Himself has for His people whom He has joined to Himself by covenant. We saw how the Old Testament portrays Yahweh as Israel's husband, and how the New Testament portrays the Church as the Bride of Christ. And given that relationship, the Lord is characterized by the kind of jealousy that is passionately committed to protecting a love relationship and to avenge it when it is threatened or broken (Packer, 170)—by the kind of jealousy that a husband rightly feels for his wife when her affections are being enticed by another man. For God's people to worship and seek satisfaction in that which is *not* God is to commit spiritual adultery. And as a faithful husband, the Lord appropriately zealous for the faithfulness of His bride. When we are enticed by false gods and false doctrines, the Lord is *jealous* for His people.

And Paul says, "Dear Corinthians, I am jealous for you with that very same kind of jealousy! When you tolerate the heresy of these false teachers—when you allow yourselves to be seduced by those preaching a different Christ and a different gospel—you're flirting with committing spiritual adultery! And so far from being able to sit back, and calmly and dispassionately reason with you, as if it were a matter of no consequence, my love and affection for you compels me to be jealous for you! To be zealously protective of your loyalty and devotion! If I have to stoop to

the level of boasting to protect you from these phonies who boast so much in themselves, then I beg of you, bear with me in a little foolishness!”

## **Review II: The Reason for His Jealousy (vv. 2b–3)**

And then, in addition to the reason for Paul’s foolishness—namely, this godly jealousy for the Corinthians’ faithfulness—we observed, secondly, **the reason for his jealousy**. And we saw that in verses 2 and 3. He writes, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”

Paul sees himself as the father of the bride. When the Corinthians repented of their sins and trusted in Christ through Paul’s ministry of the Gospel, they became both his spiritual children *and* the bride of Christ. Paul likens the period between their conversion and the time when Christ returns to receive His Bride to Himself to a time of betrothal—when a young woman is promised to her husband, but who is not married until the wedding ceremony. And just as the father of that young woman bore special responsibility to safeguard his daughter’s purity during the time of her betrothal, so Paul sees it as his responsibility to safeguard the Corinthians’ exclusive devotion to their husband from any rival paramours who would lead them astray from faithfulness to Christ. He regards it as his job to preserve their moral and especially their theological integrity so as to ensure that they don’t commit spiritual adultery—so he could present them to Christ their husband as a pure virgin.

And we took as a lesson from this that we who love Christ’s Church, the Bride of Christ—each of us ought to feel for our brothers and sisters in Christ something of the responsibility and burden that Paul felt for his spiritual children. Inasmuch as we are called to lay down our lives in ministry to one another in the Church, our hearts ought to be bound up with the spiritual health and well-being of our fellow Christians. We need the watchful eye of a brother and a sister who feels so invested in our spiritual well-being that they burn with a fierce, godly *jealousy* when they see us enticed by sin. And I admonished you last time that if you don’t have those kinds of relationships, I don’t care what else you’ve got going on in your life: you need to *get* those kinds of relationships. You do not have a healthy Christian life if you don’t have brothers and sisters who know you well enough to be regularly speaking into your life, helping you expose and mortify sin in your life, and sharpening you against the dangerous allure of various doctrinal errors and heresies.

Paul betrothed the Corinthians to one husband, in the hope that he would present her to Christ as a pure virgin. But, verse 3, he says, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” He is roused to jealousy because he’s fearful that Satan is going to deceive them into infidelity. And how would he do that? He’d do that the same way he did it with Eve in the Garden of Eden. “Has

God put you in this lush garden and forbidden you to enjoy the fruit of its trees?” He aims to paint God as this narrow-hearted, tight-fisted, prohibitive kill-joy, who hogs all the best blessings for Himself! Eve should decide for herself, and seize for herself the blessings that God won’t let her enjoy!

And Paul says these false teachers are nothing more than messengers of Satan, promising the same triumph, victory, and autonomy that Satan promised Eve. Through false teachers, Satan comes speaking with plausible, smooth-sounding lies—and attempts to deceive us into believing that there is greater pleasure to be had in sin and apart from communion with God than there is pleasure to be had in a pure and single-minded devotion to Jesus. And so we mentioned that knowing the truth about Jesus—knowing Him as He actually is, as He’s revealed Himself in the Scriptures, and not as we’ve imagined Him to be—is the source of our satisfaction in and devotion to Him. Truth perceived in the mind fires the furnace of our devotion to Christ. Doctrine drives devotion. Theology fuels doxology. Our weapon against Satan’s seductions is the surpassing pleasure knowing Christ. You can’t be satisfied by a Jesus you don’t know. An unknown Christ is an unenjoyed Christ. And it’s the joy of the Lord that is our strength. And so if we would devote ourselves to the worship of Christ, we must devote our minds to knowing Christ as He’s revealed in the Scriptures.

### **III. The Reason for His Fear (v. 4)**

Paul is asking that the Corinthians would bear with him in a little foolishness. The reason for his foolishness is that he’s been provoked to a godly jealousy over the Corinthians. And the reason for his jealousy is that he’s betrothed them to one husband, but he’s fearful that they’re being led astray from single-minded devotion to Him. And here we come to our **third** point: **the reason for his fear**—namely, that the Corinthians so willingly tolerate these false teachers. Verse 4: I’m afraid, “*for* if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.” “You bear it beautifully! I’m afraid that Satan is going to deceive you and lead you astray from pure devotion to Jesus, because you so eagerly and gladly tolerate these teachers who come to you preaching another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel!”

#### *Jesus, Spirit, Gospel*

And these three terms—Jesus, Spirit, and Gospel—function as a summary of Christian doctrine, the very content of Paul’s preaching as a minister of the New Covenant. He encapsulates his entire ministry in a single phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:23 when he says, “But we preach *Christ crucified*.” And again in 1 Corinthians 2:2: “I determined to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*.” And again in Colossians 1:28: “We proclaim *Him*.” In Acts 13:33, he declares to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, “that God has fulfilled [his promise made to

the fathers] in that He raised up *Jesus*.” And he says in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that all the promises of God are yes in Jesus. This Jesus is the very substance of our salvation! The fulfillment of the covenant promises! God’s grace to sinners *incarnate*!

And the ministry of Jesus is inextricably linked to the Holy Spirit. Jesus was begotten in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:35. He was led by the Spirit, Luke 4:1. He went about in the power of the Spirit, Luke 4:14. Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit, Matthew 12:28. Hebrews 9:14 says Christ the High Priest offered Himself as a sacrifice to God “through the eternal Spirit.” And Romans 8:11 says the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. And not only was the Spirit intimately involved in every aspect of the earthly ministry of Christ. The Spirit now *applies* the salvation Christ accomplished to His people in real time. Sinners are united to Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul says that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” By this one Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, we were all baptized into the body of Christ. Romans 8:9 says, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” Which means, if you do belong to Christ, you do have the Spirit of God dwelling in you. We learn from Ezekiel 36 that the very promise of the New Covenant consisted in great part in the promise of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In verses 26–27, God says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. *I will put My Spirit within you* and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” And so in 2 Corinthians 3:8 Paul calls the New Covenant “the ministry of the Spirit.” And that ministry is fulfilled, Ephesians 1:13 says, in that, “having also believed, [we] were sealed in [Christ] with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.” The indwelling Holy Spirit is God’s down payment and guarantee of the glorious inheritance that we will inherit in resurrection life on the New Earth!

And it is the finished work of Christ, accomplished by the power of the Spirit and now applied to sinners by the ministry of the Spirit, that constitutes the Gospel that the Apostles preached. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, “Now I make known to you, brethren, *the gospel* which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” The Gospel consists in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit! In his sermon in Acts 13, Paul says in verse 32, “And we preach to you the *good news* of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus.” And he goes on in verses 38 and 39, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that *through Him* forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and *through Him* everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” This is the bone marrow of Apostolic ministry: the

Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins through faith alone, sealed by the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit of promise!

### *The Intruders' Heresy*

So when Paul describes these intruders from Jerusalem as those preaching *another* Jesus, a *different* spirit, and a *different* gospel, he is unequivocally condemning their doctrine as damnable heresy. In Galatians chapter 1, when he was, several years earlier, battling the Judaizers on a different front, he condemns their teaching as “a different gospel; which is really not another”—or, as another translation says, “which is really no gospel at all” (NIV). There’s no such thing as another gospel! There’s only the one true and saving Gospel by which we can have our sins forgiven and be declared righteous before God. And that is the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And if anyone—whether it’s Paul himself, or even an angel from heaven—if anyone comes preaching a different gospel, he says in Galatians 1:8–9, that one “is to be accursed!” He is to be *anathema*—condemned to eternal hell! And so when he says the false teachers in Corinth are preaching another Jesus and a different gospel, he is unmistakably condemning their doctrine as heresy, and therefore is damning them under the curse of Galatians 1.

Well, what is their doctrine? Earlier I summarized it as a mix of Judaizing legalism and fleshly triumphalism. In the first place, these intruders were Judaizers. They taught, as Luke records in Acts 15:1, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Faith in Christ was necessary for salvation, but it was not sufficient. You had to add your own works to faith in Christ’s work for salvation. And in the second place, in addition to that legalism, these men were what we have called triumphalists. They had a fleshly view of the nature of the triumph and victory that marks the Christian life. Yes, Jesus is the King! Yes, He has risen in victory over sin, death, and judgment! Yes, He shares that victory with all those who are united to Him by faith! But that does not mean that the full consummation of that victory is ours to be enjoyed here and now. Jesus Himself said, John 16:33, “In this world you will have tribulation.” In John 15:20 He promises that we will experience the persecution that He experienced. Paul will actually say in 2 Timothy 3:12 that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, and that it has been granted to us, Philippians 1:29—along with our believing in Christ—to suffer for His sake! Oh, the crown is coming! But just like our Lord, the crown comes only after the cross—after we, as Jesus said, deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him in the living martyrdom of self-sacrificial service.

These men didn’t teach that. They measured ministerial success by fleshly externals—by a weighty personal presence, by rhetorical eloquence, by commanding significant speaking fees, by growing large followings, and by having ecstatic, mystical spiritual experiences. Suffering

was an unmixed evil, what could only be a mark of God's displeasure and judgment. This is the prosperity gospel!

And so on both fronts—(1) the legalism that requires us to add *our* works of righteousness to faith in *Christ's* righteousness for acceptance with God, and (2) the triumphalism that makes an idol out of success, comfort, and influence—on both fronts, these were not minor disagreements on secondary issues! These were not matters of different styles, or differing emphases in ministry! These errors are so fundamentally contrary to the substance of the Apostolic message that Paul says these men preach a different gospel. And therefore the savior proclaimed in that gospel—the Jesus of this false gospel—is not the Jesus of history and Scripture; it is another Jesus. And thus the spirit that energizes such teaching is not the Holy Spirit of God, but a different spirit—as 1 Timothy 4:1 calls them: “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” And now it becomes plain why Paul is talking about Satan in this context: because the energizing power behind the false doctrine of the false apostles is none other than Satan and his demons. False doctrine is not merely wrong, it is demonic. It is Satanic. “Dear Corinthians, you're welcoming these men, and these heresies into your midst?! Oh, I fear for you! I fear that Satan is using his emissaries to lead your minds astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ!”

### *The Existence of Heresy*

Now, one thing that we have to observe here is that Scripture is plainly teaching that there really is such a thing as heresy. There really is such a thing as believing something about salvation and spirituality that is so fundamentally contrary to the Gospel that it actually precludes someone from being saved. There really is such a thing as believing certain things about the person and work of Christ that are so fundamentally contrary to what Scripture reveals that it means you've concocted a whole other Jesus in your imagination, and therefore you don't believe in the biblical Jesus. There are people who profess faith in the Gospel and profess faith in Christ—who think they're Christians—who are enemies of the Gospel, enemies of Christ, and who are just as dead in their sins as any Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or atheist.

I want you to think about just how much these Judaizing triumphalists got right—how much they would have shared in common with the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. After all, these men didn't come from Jerusalem preaching another religion. When Paul says they were preaching another Jesus, it wasn't that they were saying, “Oh! You thought *Jesus of Nazareth* was the Son of God sent into the world to save us from our sins! No, no, no! You got the wrong guy! It was Jesus ben-so-and-so from such-and-such a place!” When he says they were preaching a different gospel, it wasn't that they were suggesting some entirely different means of salvation *apart* from faith in the cross of Christ. No, these men would have been monotheists, confessing faith in one God amid the pantheon of Roman and Greek deities. They would have believed that

Jesus was Israel's Messiah in fulfillment of the Old Testament. And therefore, because they knew the Old Testament's prophecies, they would have believed that Jesus was both fully God and fully man—of the same essence as Yahweh the God of Israel and yet nevertheless a genuine man as the Son of Mary. That means it's entirely plausible for them to have believed that the one God exists eternally in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There's no question that they believed in penal substitutionary atonement—that Jesus bore the punishment of God's wrath against the sins of His people when He died on the cross, so that they might be free from the penalty and power and (one day) the presence of sin. They would have believed the historical facts of the Gospel that Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians 15: that Jesus died for sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose from the grave, bodily, on the third day. And they would have confessed that repentance from sin and faith in Christ was absolutely necessary for forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God in heaven.

That is a lot of really important doctrine to get right! They were confused on what could be boiled down to just two matters: (1) whether good works were the cause or the result of salvation—that is to say, was law-keeping the ground or merely the evidence of saving faith? Are we saved by faith *alone*, or by faith in Christ *plus* our religious observance? and (2) whether the eschatological victory won by Christ could be enjoyed already in the here and now or whether we need to wait till our death or the return of Christ to experience those blessings. I think you'll agree with me that those are admittedly fine distinctions. And yet Paul says that these errors make a different Jesus out of Jesus and a different gospel out of the Gospel! In verse 13 of chapter 11, he says the men who teach these things are “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” when really, verse 15, they're servants of Satan! Those are strong words for what amounts to a disagreement on the *ordo salutis*!

What this teaches us is that there will be people who call themselves Christians, who believe a significant amount of orthodox doctrine, who are not actually Christians. They'll confess the Trinity! They'll confess faith in a savior named “Jesus” who died for sinners and rose again on the third day. They'll say the only way to be saved is to repent and believe in Him. But then they will also teach something about Jesus that is so fundamentally unlike the true Christ that their “Jesus” is different from the only Jesus who actually exists. Or they'll teach something about the way of salvation that so fundamentally undermines the true Gospel that their “gospel” is a different gospel and therefore no true Gospel at all. Friends, if there was ever a text that taught us that simply naming Jesus as your Lord and Savior means you're a Christian—or that simply professing faith in the Gospel means you're saved by the Gospel—is a foolish idea, it's this one! We've got to press that and find out: “*Which* Jesus? The Jesus of the *Scriptures*? or the Jesus of the false teachers?” “*Which* Gospel? The *biblical* Gospel? or the gospel of the false teachers?”

There are certain things which, if believed, preclude someone from salvation, because to believe those things is to believe in another Jesus—in a phantom savior that doesn't exist, and therefore

who cannot save but only condemn. It is to believe a different gospel, which is really no true gospel at all, and therefore which cannot save but can only condemn. It is to expose oneself to the influence a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit who seals and indwells and leads all believers into the truth.

### *No Other Jesus*

If you have another Jesus, you have another spirit, and another gospel. There's only one Savior, and there's only one salvation that He accomplished, and one Spirit by which He accomplished it. If you get the saving Gospel wrong, you don't have the Savior or the Spirit. And if you get the Savior wrong, you don't have a saving Gospel. They are entirely, inextricably linked. And so I want to take some time and consider the many other "Jesuses" that Satan and the world system that lies in his power tempts us with. What are those things you can believe about Jesus that would make Him "another Jesus"? Do we have to have an absolutely perfect Christology in order to be saved? No. But when considering whether a particular teaching about Christ is merely an error or whether it breaches the boundaries into heresy, we ought to ask: Does this teaching affirm something about the person or work of Christ that is so false—so antithetical to His nature and ministry—that to believe it is to truly believe in a different Jesus?

Certainly, the denial of Jesus' deity is certainly one of those heretical doctrines of Christ that make Him to be an entirely different "Jesus" than the Jesus of Scripture. John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then in verse 14: "And the Word"—this same Word who was with God and who was God—"became flesh, and dwelt among us." The Man, Jesus, who lived and dwelt on the earth among men, was the eternal Word: God Himself. And back to verse 3 of John 1: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." He is the eternal, uncreated Creator of all things! All the things that we can put into the category of "made"—of "come into being"—Jesus created all those things! And because you can't create yourself, that means that Jesus does not fit in the category of "that which has come into being." He always was. He is "our great God and Savior," Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1. He is "over all, *God* blessed forever," Romans 9:5. In Hebrews 1:8, the text says, "But *of the Son* [God] says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever!'" Here we have the Father calling the Son 'God'!

And yet the history of Christianity is littered with heresies that deny this fundamental truth. The early adoptionists denied the genuineness of Jesus' deity. They taught that the merely-human Jesus was "adopted" by God at His baptism, where He was endowed with divine power but nevertheless remained a mere man. The fourth-century heretic Arius, and his followers, labeled Arians, denied the fullness of Jesus' deity. They taught that He was like God—that He was of a similar substance as the Father, but not of precisely the same and identical essence. He was not *homoousios*—of the *same* nature; He was *homoiousios*—of a *similar* nature. He was not the

uncreated Creator but was the first and greatest being created by the Father. The modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses hold to just such an Arian Christology, arguing that the man Jesus pre-existed as Michael the Archangel—the greatest angel of heaven, but not God. The Mormons teach that Jesus, like Lucifer, was the spirit-child of God—created, not Creator. Muslims believe that He was a great human prophet, but not the Second Person of the Trinity. Present-day apostate Judaism believes Him to have been no more than a human heretic. And we could go on.

You say, “OK Mike, I agree with you that Scripture teaches that Jesus is God, and so I'm willing to say that these teachers are wrong. But are they heretical? Does this preclude them from salvation? Does denying Jesus' deity make Him into *another* Jesus?” And the answer is: absolutely, yes. Why? Because there is no more fundamental of a difference than the difference between God and what is not God. God is infinitely above, infinitely beyond, infinitely different than man. The difference between “God” and “not-God” is an *infinite* difference. Therefore, the difference between (a) the biblical Jesus who is the eternal Creator, God the Son incarnate, and (b) a “Jesus” who is *not* God, is an infinite difference. A Jesus who is *not* God could never be said to be the same Jesus who *is* God, just understood a bit differently. No, a Jesus who is not God is “another Jesus,” fundamentally different—infinite different—than the Jesus of Scripture! And that “another” Jesus simply cannot save those who trust in him, because he does not exist! Those who say they believe in and love Jesus, they just don't believe He's God, put their trust in a fictitious savior. And that means they have no savior. There's only one Savior, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And it's not just the deity of Jesus that fits into this category. It's also the genuine humanity of Jesus. In 1 John 4, verses 1 to 3, the Apostle John makes confession of the genuine humanity of Jesus a cardinal doctrinal confession of all those who would profess to follow Christ. He says, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.” A Jesus who is not human is not the Jesus of Scripture. And therefore, it is absolutely essential to confess that Jesus was born of a virgin—born, and therefore genuinely man, and apart from natural human generation, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore genuinely God.

The only Jesus who exists is the Jesus who is the sole Savior of mankind—who came to earth not to be a mere prophet, not to be a philosopher or a guru, not to be a political revolutionary, not to be a social justice warrior, not to be a mere good example, but to live the life that fallen human beings were commanded by God to live but failed to live, and to die on the cross as a sinless substitute, bearing the wrath of His Father for all who trust in Him. The Jesus who did not offer Himself as a penal substitutionary atonement for His people is *another* Jesus. And the Jesus whose atonement was so insufficient that it has to be repeated week by week in a Mass, or completed by baptism and works of penance, or any other good religious works, is a fundamentally different Jesus than the Jesus of Scripture.

The only Jesus who exists is the Jesus who, after lying dead in Joseph's tomb for three days, rose again from that grave. The bodily resurrection of Christ is an absolutely essential doctrine of the faith. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain," and in verse 17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." Verse 19: "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." The Jesus who simply died as a glorious martyr for righteousness' sake is a fundamentally different Jesus than the Jesus of Scripture, whose bodily resurrection demonstrated that death had been defeated, sin atoned for, and salvation accomplished!

The only Jesus who exists is the Lord of His people, who said in Luke 9:23–24, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." Who said in Matthew 10:37–38, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Who said in John 8:31, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." Who said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Jesus is Lord! And so any conception of a Jesus whom you can receive as your savior but not obey as the Lord and Master of your life is *another* Jesus. A Jesus who pays the *penalty* for your sins but does not break the *power* of sin in your life is a fundamentally different Jesus than the Jesus of the Scriptures.

The only Jesus who exists suffered in His life here on earth, and promised that same life of trouble, suffering, and persecution to all those who followed Him in truth. We read those verses earlier: "A slave is not greater than his master. If they hated Me, they'll hate you. If they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you." "In this world you will have tribulation." "You'll be betrayed by parents and brothers and relatives and friends." "You'll be outcasts." "There's coming a time when they'll kill you and think they're offering service to God." And so a Jesus that promises to make you rich, and healthy, and prosperous, and famous, and well-liked, and comfortable, and free from all conflict is another Jesus—a fundamentally different Jesus than the Jesus of Scripture. The Jesus of Scripture promises to so satisfy you with Himself in the midst of the *loss* of all those things that you can lose them all and cry, "*Gain!*"

## Conclusion

*This* is the Jesus of Scripture. *This* is the Jesus that we trust in. And *this* is the Christ we preach. I want to read the statement that Pastor John wrote for the Christology summit at last year's Shepherds' Conference. It's entitled, "We Preach Christ." He says:

We preach Christ, who is the eternal Son, one in nature with the eternal Father and the eternal Spirit, the Triune God;  
who is the Creator and life-giver as well as the Sustainer of the universe and all who live in it;  
who is the virgin-born Son of God and Son of Man, fully divine and fully human;  
who is the one whose life on earth perfectly pleased God, and whose righteousness is given to all who by grace through faith become one with Him;  
who is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin that pleases God, and whose death, under divine judgment, paid in full the penalty for the sins of His people, providing for them forgiveness and eternal life;  
who is alive, having been raised from the dead by the Father, validating His work of atonement, and providing resurrection for the sanctification and glorification of the elect, to bring them safely into His heavenly presence;  
who is at the Father's throne, interceding for all believers;  
who is God's chosen Prophet, Priest, and King, proclaiming truth, mediating for His church, and reigning over His kingdom forever;  
who will suddenly return from heaven to rapture His church, unleash judgment on the wicked, bring promised salvation to the Jews and the Nations, and establish His Millennial reign on earth;  
who will, after that earthly reign, destroy the universe, finally judge all sinners and send them to hell, then create the New Heavens and the New Earth, where He will dwell forever with His saints in glory, love, and joy.  
This is the Christ we preach.

Dear people, is that the Christ you trust in for salvation? He's the only Christ there is. Don't turn Him away in favor of *another* Jesus—a Jesus who is a bit more palatable, a bit more suited to your preferences and sensibilities—because that Jesus is a figment of your imagination, an idol created in your own image. The Jesus who *is*—the Jesus of *Scripture*—is impossible to be improved upon. He is the lily of the valley! The pearl of great price! Fairer than the fairest of ten thousand! The treasure of surpassing value whose lovingkindness is better than life! Don't be seduced, dear friends, by counterfeit Christs. Develop a holy intolerance for false teaching by feasting the appetites of your soul on the sweetness of the Jesus who *is*, by saturating the eyes of your heart with His glory. So that if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you *won't* tolerate that. You *won't* bear that beautifully. And so you won't be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.