

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?  
 SERMON: *The Word Became Flesh*  
 SCRIPTURE: John 1:14  
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black  
 DATE: December 25, 2011

At our house, we have what I would call a limping toaster. It gets along, but not very well. Bear in mind we have a family of 8. So, on cinnamon toast morning or waffle morning it takes a while to get everybody fed when you have a limping toaster. Last year I gave Maggie a new toaster for Christmas, one that would make 6 pieces of toast at a time! That's a very thoughtful gift, right? Wrong. You should never get your wife a kitchen appliance for Christmas unless they ask for it. Long story short, we took the toaster back and haven't replaced it yet.

Why do I tell this story? Let me assure you it is not because I want one of you to buy us a toaster. It is because I want to illustrate what is at stake when we don't receive a gift. Why do we give gifts at Christmas in the first place? Hopefully it is to celebrate the greatest gift of all. God gave us his one and only Son, Jesus to save us from our sins.

What is the cost of not receiving a gift? It depends on the nature of the gift and the need for the gift.

What did it cost Maggie to not redeem the gift I gave her? To answer that question we need to ask, "What is the nature of the gift and what is our need for the gift?" What is *the nature* of a toaster? It's a toaster. It's made of plastic and metal. It isn't very expensive and it does nothing more than make bread and waffles toasty. It's a one-hit-wonder. And what is *the need* of toaster? On mornings when we're eating cereal or oatmeal there is no need for the toaster. On waffle day we need a toaster and it would be nice to have a big efficient one, but at the end of the day we all get fed with the crummy one we have. So the need is not that great.

When you evaluate the nature of the toaster and the need for the toaster what did it cost Maggie to not receive the gift? Well it costs her a little extra time on waffle morning and a lot of heckling from me. But in the grand scheme of life it didn't cost her or our family that much. After all, it's a toaster and we're talking about the need for toasty bread and waffles.

But what about the gift God has given us in Jesus Christ? What is at stake if we don't receive the gift of Christmas? To answer that question we need to ask, "What is the nature of the gift and what is our need for the gift?" That brings us to our text this morning.

**John 1:14 (ESV)**

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

What is *the nature* of the gift of Jesus? The Word became flesh. Or in other words, God became a man. This is called this the incarnation (in *carne* – flesh). So what is the nature of the gift?

Jesus is fully God and fully man. This is really important! This is the reason we celebrate Christmas. God became a man.

And what is *the need* for the gift?

**Romans 8:32** (ESV)

*32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

This verse refers to God giving Jesus as a sacrifice for our sin (cf. Gen. 22). If God gave his own Son as a sacrificial gift, our need must have been pretty great. Milton Vincent, the author of *The Gospel Primer*, says “a gruesome death like the one that Christ endured for me would only be required for one who is exceedingly sinful and *unable* to appease a holy God.”

In our sin we are unable to know God, we are alienated from God, and we are destined for eternal death without God and without hope in the world. This is quite a different need than the need for toasty bread. We are in desperate need for a Savior.

Many people over the centuries have been willing to receive Jesus as a great moral teacher, a great example of a man who has inspired humanity to love God and to love others, but unwilling to accept him as fully God and fully man. In fact I attended a Christmas program *at a church* last year where the director of the Christmas program said, “We celebrate Jesus at Christmas because he came to teach us how to live and how to love.”

But the Bible presents Jesus as much more than an inspiring person who came to teach us how to live and how to love. The Bible says that the Word became flesh in order to save us from our sins (cf. Mt. 1:21). And the Bible teaches that if Jesus is not fully God and fully man then he is not able to deal with our need to know God, to be reconciled to God, and to be changed by God.

So, what is the cost of not receiving the gift of Jesus as fully God and fully man? What is at stake? Everything is at stake.

Here’s my sermon in a sentence: We must receive Jesus as fully God and fully man in order to know God and be saved from our sins.

I’d like to consider three things that are at stake if we don’t receive the full gift of God.

**REVELATION**<sup>1</sup>

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First of all, revelation is at stake, or in other words, knowing God is at stake.

**Hebrews 1:1–2** (ESV)

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelical Convictions*, 96.

Only if Jesus is fully God and fully man can he be the complete revelation of God.<sup>2</sup> God spoke and made himself known in the past, but he made himself known supremely in his Son. The Word became flesh. God became a man; God came near. The Creator became one of us.

**John 1:18 (ESV)**

*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side [his Son – Jesus], he has made him known.*

**John 14:9 (ESV)**

*... Whoever has seen me [Jesus] has seen the Father...*

We are blind in our sin and unable to see or know God. But Jesus is the light of the world. The Word became flesh. God became a man. Jesus has made God known to us. This is a great gift, but only possible if Jesus is both fully God and fully man. If we don't receive Jesus as fully God and fully man, revelation is at stake; knowing God is at stake.

**RECONCILIATION<sup>3</sup>**

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Secondly, reconciliation with God is at stake.

**Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created ... <sup>17</sup>And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [He is God] <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [He is the God-man] <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Only if Jesus is fully God and fully man can he make peace between God and man. In our sin we are alienated from God, but through Jesus Christ, the God-man, we are able to be reconciled to God.

Why are we alienated from God? In our sin, we have failed in our actions and attitudes to honor God, to submit to his authority, to keep his commandments. As a result we are estranged from God eternally. We deserve the just judgment of God; we deserve his wrath; we deserve death.

But Jesus has come as the substitute for sinful man. He lives the life that we fail to live in our sin – he offers his perfect obedience as a substitute for our disobedience. And he has died the death that we deserve to die – he offers the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Only if Jesus is fully God and fully man is he able to serve as our substitute. I'll share 4 reasons why this is the case.

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<sup>2</sup> *Evangelical Convictions*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer, "The Vital Question," 85.

**1. Only God is powerful enough to save.**<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem says, “Only someone who is infinite God could bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him – any finite creature would have been incapable of bearing that penalty.”<sup>5</sup>

**2. Only God is sinless.** In order for the substitute to be acceptable to God it had to be a perfect, sinless sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> Only God is without sin. Jesus being God was without sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that “He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

**3. Only a man is qualified to be a substitute for obedience.** It is man who is guilty of sin. Therefore, only a man is qualified to offer his life and obedience as a substitute for ours. We are sinners by nature and choice.<sup>7</sup> Adam, the first man, represented the whole human race and led the whole human race into sin. Jesus was what Paul calls the last Adam or the second man (1 Cor. 15:45, 47) who obeys in place of Adam’s disobedience and our disobedience.<sup>8</sup> He is our perfect, sinless substitute for righteousness.

#### **Romans 5:18–19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup>Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

**4. Only a man is qualified to be a substitute for death.** Since it is man who has been given the penalty of death for sin, only a man is qualified to be a substitute sacrifice for us.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Hebrews 2:14–17 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup>Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things [he became a man], that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,<sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery...<sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [atoning sacrifice<sup>10</sup>] for the sins of the people.

We are all alienated from God and under God’s wrath in our sin. But God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world, God became a man, in order to save the world from their sins and reconcile man to God; whoever receives this gift will not only be reconciled to God – they will be sons and daughters of God, adopted into the family of God. The Son of God became a man so that men and women, boys and girls, might become sons and daughters of God.<sup>11</sup> This is a great gift, but only possible if Jesus is fully God and fully man. If we don’t receive Jesus as fully God and fully man, reconciliation is at stake.

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelical Convictions*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 553.

<sup>6</sup> J.I. Packer, “The Vital Question,” 85

<sup>7</sup> EFCA Statement of Faith, Article 3.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 540.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 541.

<sup>10</sup> Grant Osborne’s translation.

<sup>11</sup> Athanasius and Irenaeus both said something similar.

## RENEWAL<sup>12</sup>

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Thirdly, renewal is at stake if we don't receive Jesus as fully God and fully man. Even though Christ has come to reconcile God and man, we still live in a fallen and broken world. There are still sickness and death, pain and sorrow all around. The holidays expose this reality so emphatically. "'Tis the season to be jolly," right? "'Tis the season to remember the loss of loved ones, to be reminded of broken and strained relationships," is perhaps a more fitting statement for some. Christ has come to bring peace on earth, but it appears as though we're far from it. There is hope. But only if Jesus is fully God and fully man is there hope for renewal.

The God-man was raised from the dead. And his resurrection is what the Bible calls the first fruits of the final resurrection (1 Cor. 15). When Christ returns all the dead in Christ will be raised (1 Thess. 4:16). Sickness and death will be no more, pain and sorrow will be no more (Rev. 21:4). All of creation will be renewed. Only if Jesus is *God* is the resurrection possible. Only if Jesus is *man* do we have hope of joining him in his resurrection. We can enjoy peace with God now through Christ's sacrificial death, but it is only through his resurrection that we can experience hope. This is a great gift, but only possible if Jesus is fully God and fully man. If we don't receive Jesus as fully God and fully man, renewal is at stake.

But if Jesus is fully God and fully man we can know God (revelation), we can be reconciled to God, and we can have the hope of full renewal when Christ returns.

## RESPONSE: RECEIVE AND REVERE

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If this is the case, how should we respond? Let me offer two ways we should respond.

**1. Receive the gift.** We need to receive the gift as it has been given to us though. As I said in the beginning, there are many people who are willing to receive Jesus as a great moral teacher, an example who teaches us how to live and love, but who are not willing to receive him as fully God and fully man. But a great moral teacher who came to teach us how to live and love is not the main way the Bible describes Jesus and a great moral teacher is not able to fully reveal God to us, reconcile us to God, and provide the hope of final renewal of all things.

How many of you think that gift receipts are one of the most brilliant concepts ever introduced to the marketplace? Some of you already this year have received a gift you were disappointed about. But then you saw the gift receipt and became excited. You thought to yourself, "I'll just exchange the gift for something I want. After all it's the thought that counts, right?" I'm not here to discuss the propriety of exchanging gifts at Christmas. I'm here to say that there is no gift receipt on Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

We either receive him as fully God and fully man or we lose everything. You can't exchange him for something you like better. If you exchange him for a great moral teacher who came to teach us how to live and to love you gain nothing of eternal significance. If you exchange Jesus for a nice example then you're still dead in your sins without God and without hope in the world.

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<sup>12</sup> J.I. Packer, "The Vital Question," 85.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. C.S. Lewis Quote from previous sermon.

Your main need isn't for great moral teacher. You need a great Savior. And the nature of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man is the only way he can meet your need for a Savior.

John 1:11-12 says, *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

If you try to exchange the gift you lose everything. But if you receive the gift as it has been given it will meet the need for which it was given – eternal life and a restored relationship with God. How do you receive the gift?

It's not like the toys that are given to children these days. These things are so hard to open you need your parents to help you. And parents need an engineering degree to get them open. And if your toy is still intact after the dismantling of the box, it's a miracle. Children, you don't need your parents to receive this gift; nobody can receive the gift for you, and you don't need to work hard. You simply believe that Jesus is who he said he is, fully God and fully man, and that he died for your sins, was raised from the dead, and is coming again to make all things new. If you believe this good news, you will be saved.

**2. Revere the gift.** Or in other words we are to believe in Jesus as fully God and fully man *and* worship him as fully God and fully man. One of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith is it costs you nothing to receive eternal life in Jesus Christ, but it costs you everything. Salvation is a free gift. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). But if Jesus is the God-man who came to save us, then he deserves our complete devotion and is worthy of our worship.<sup>14</sup> In response to this amazing gift, let us receive with joy the full gift and let us bring an offering of worship to our king this Christmas. O come let us adore Him. And let us offer ourselves to him in renewed devotion throughout this New Year.

### **Benediction**

May Christ, the Son of God, be manifest in you that your lives may be a light to the world; and the blessings of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Evangelical Convictions*, 96-97.

<sup>15</sup> *Worship Source Book*, 517.

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