

## Preaching the Uniqueness of Christ Today #1

### 1. Introduction.

- a. Why is this such an important topic? 2 reasons.
  - i. 1st: *No greater subject matter than our Lord Jesus Christ.*
  - ii. 2nd: *Day of confusion regarding who Jesus is and what he did.*
- b. What is needed? *Biblical exposition* → *doctrinal/theological understanding/faithfulness.*
  - i. *Not just a text or two* but preaching/teaching the “whole counsel of God.”
  - ii. Goal: Illustrate how to preach/teach Christ (all his glory, faithful Christology) from texts, in light of canon, so that we correctly identify *Who* Jesus is; *What* he does.
  - iii. Today: Look at 2 texts: (1) Acts 17; (2) John 1:1-18.

### 2. Acts 17:16-34 [Paul’s Athenian Address].

- a. *Why this text?* It will frame what we want to say, in terms of methodology, approach.
- b. *How do we preach/teach* theologically?
  - i. Answer: By first placing texts/books in light of the Bible’s own biblical-theological framework (=intratextual) so that the meaning of texts/books is framed by a biblical worldview and not some other frame of reference (=extratextual).
  - ii. *Texts/books* don’t come to us in a vacuum. They come to us embedded in a canon, which is God-given. Apart from the canon, the individual texts/books lose their meaning, and the overall message of Scripture is distorted.
- c. Let’s look at how Paul does this.
  - i. *Initial preaching in Athens* (=synagogue and the street)..
  - ii. Introduction (vv. 22-23). Courteous but bold. *Worldview clash.*
  - iii. Starts with the doctrine of God (Creator-creature distinction, Gen 1) → Bible’s story.
    1. *God is the Creator and Lord* (v. 24). Everything else is creation.
      - a. Christology: (1) Jesus identified with this God – deity; (2) Christ’s 2 natures.
    2. *God is a se* (v. 25) (=“life from himself” → aseity, independence).
      - a. Metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics (=goodness, justice).
      - b. Basis for *grace*. Everything we have from God is *undeserved*.
      - c. If God is to save, he must act, he must provide *himself*.
      - d. Christology: *Jesus’ identity is framed by this concept of God (=uniqueness).*
    3. *Humans and sin* (vv. 26-29).
      - a. One man: Adam. Unity to the race (=no divisions).
      - b. Also: All have the same problem. It will require another man: Last Adam.
      - c. Sin and human responsibility. See God’s sovereign placement of us.
    4. *Jesus* (v. 31). Finally, Paul gets to Jesus. *In light of the doctrine of God, etc. Jesus is presented as utterly unique.* Jesus is a man but more than a man. He is identified with *God and his works* (=Judge of the world). He has been appointed (tied to his entire work). Proof: Resurrection. Jesus is a man, but he does what no mere man can do.

### d. Lessons to learn for Preaching Uniqueness of Christ – *Theological Presentation.*

### 3. John 1:1-18 (=Prologue of John's Gospel).

- a. **Prologue:** Intro to the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel. Sets up later themes (life, light, new birth, glory, truth)
  - i. Lays down truths/structures of thought that are tied to the entire canon, Bible's story.
  - ii. Rich Christological text. Its use in the history of the church vast – **Logos Christology**.
- b. **Christology:**
  - i. It starts in a different place than the other Gospels (=contrast w/ Synoptics). Eternity.
  - ii. Reminds us: To understand who Jesus is, we must go back to eternity, and to understand who Jesus is in light of who God is as triune. *Rudiments of Trinity*.
  - iii. *What frames the entire description of Jesus is the unique title/name – "Word."*
    - 1. How the Word who was with God *is also God*, in relation to God (Father).
    - 2. How the Word who was with God in the beginning came into history by the assumption of "flesh" (incarnation) and became Jesus of Nazareth.
    - 3. Why? To reveal God's glory, fulfill God's plan, to become our Redeemer.
    - 4. Text properly understood, in context of John/Bible, gives us Jesus' uniqueness.
  - iv. *To preach this text biblically-theologically requires:*
    - 1. Unpacking the Trinity (=because cannot understand text without Trinity).
    - 2. Setting it in context of the Bible's entire covenantal story (since this text does so).
    - 3. Connecting it to the *Creedal/Dogmatic tradition* (since it was used this way).
  - v. *Let's look at some key points* → move from exposition to Christological formulation.
- c. **1<sup>st</sup>: Use of "Word."**
  - i. Unique to John. What does it mean?
  - ii. Hermeneutical issue: Do we go to Hellenistic society or the OT?
  - iii. *OT Meaning:* "God's powerful self-expression." *Word is God himself in action (creation, revelation, redemption)*.
    - 1. Creation: All of God's creation is done by speech/word (Gen 1; Ps 33:6).
    - 2. Revelation: This is also present in Genesis (3:8; 12:1; 15:1; 22:11).
      - a. In Psalter, God's word gives us the permanent self-disclosure of his will (Ps 119:9, 25, 28, 41, 58, 65, 76, 107, 116, 140, 160, 169) but also personalized. "Word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him" (Ps 18:30; cf. Ps 107:20; 147:15). 'Word' closely identified with God himself
    - 3. Redemption (Ps 107:20; Isa 55:1). All of God's acts done by his word.
  - iv. *Why does John use Word as a title for Jesus?*
- d. **2<sup>nd</sup>: John 1:1-4. Affirmation of the Deity/Distinctness of the Word.**
  - i. V. 1: It is carefully stated, which cannot be understood apart from the Trinity.
    - 1. It is triadic. 3 clauses with same subject, identical verb. Context: refers to Jesus.
    - 2. Word is *eternal* (1a). Word in *relation* to God (Father) (1b). Word *is* God (1c). Use of *Theos* for Christ (3x in John; Rom 9:5, Heb 1:8, Tit 2:13/2 Pet 1:1).
    - 3. V 1: From eternal preexistence to personal intercommunion to intrinsic deity.

- ii. By 1c, John carefully states that the sum total of God is not the Word. Why? Because the Word is in relation to God (Father), and that God *is Father, Son, and Spirit*.
  - iii. *Here is the grounding to biblical truths that are taught throughout the Bible.*
  - iv. *John is not only unpacking monotheism but Trinitarian Monotheism.*
    - 1. God is not a static deity, lonely, alone. He is tri-personal.
    - 2. Throughout John, the Father-Son-Spirit relation is unpacked. John 17:5.
  - v. Given such a text, it is wise/necessary to explain how this led church to Trinity.
    - 1. Specifically, the person-nature distinction.
    - 2. *Father-Son-Spirit* are persons. Meaning? Subjects distinguished by “relations.”
    - 3. But Father-Son-Spirit are the one true God, share the same identical nature.
    - 4. Identical nature is from Bible’s Creator-creature distinction, which John assumes.
    - 5. Father-Son-Spirit as the one true God are equal yet distinct by their relations.
      - a. *Processions*. Internal relations (*ad intra*), eternal, necessary, and ordered.
      - b. *Missions*. Processions → outward (*ad extra*). Become present in created effect
  - vi. Deity of the Word/Son is further underscored in vv. 2-4 (=plus Trinitarianism).
    - 1. V 2: Re-emphasis from v. 1 of eternity, deity, and distinctness.
    - 2. V 3: ‘Word’ does work of God – Creator. He is agent of creation (=Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2). But God creates → Father through the Son (inseparable operations).
    - 3. V 4: “*Word is the source of ‘life and light.’*”
  - vii. All of this affirms the deity *and* distinctness of the Word, the eternal Word/Son.
    - 1. All of this underscores his uniqueness.
    - 2. Worthy of worship, honor, and praise – as the Father (=John 5:23).
    - 3. He is our Creator/Lord. Grounds our moral responsibility and accountability.
    - 4. We are made by God, for God – we are made by the one who took on flesh – we are responsible to him and him alone. He is also our Redeemer.
- e. **3<sup>rd</sup>: Word is the One who Confronts, Exposes, and Judges Us (vv. 5-13).**
- f. **4<sup>th</sup>: Word Incarnates God and Supremely Reveals Him to Us (vv. 14-18).**
- i. V 14: The Word became flesh. The nature of the incarnation. Mission.
    - 1. “Flesh.” In John, doesn’t necessarily mean what it does in Paul.
      - a. *Lesson in theology*. Use of words. ST steps back and puts them together.
      - b. *Speak of human nature*. What is it? Body + soul. Not docetic (see 1 John).
      - c. *Not fallen human nature*.
    - 2. *Who* becomes flesh? *Who* is the *subject* of the incarnation?
      - a. Word (=person of the Son). Not the divine nature, nor the Father or the Spirit.
      - b. Requires two natures. The nature of the incarnation is assumption/addition.
    - 3. ST: “One person in two natures.” Explain in terms of Nicaea and Chalcedon.
  - ii. Vv. 14-18. Tied to the OT. Revelation of glory. Covenantal change from old to new.

1. *Another affirmation of deity.* Use of “God” in John’s Gospel (John 20:28; cf. John 5:16f; 8:58; I AM statements, etc.). Christ understood in terms of the OT.

#### 4. **Concluding Reflection: The Glory of Christ. Preaching Him Theologically.**