

“The Whole Picture”
Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14

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Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? One way or another, we’ve been talking about this for the last month. Who is Jesus? What does Jesus do for us? Why is Jesus special? Who is Jesus?

Today, of all days, it seems like we ought to come to a definitive answer. We ought to be able to say loudly, clearly, and succinctly who Jesus is.

But how do we do that? How do we summarize someone so large and so important as Jesus? How can we hope to clearly and succinctly state who Jesus is?

Some people respond by concentrating on a particular part or aspect. They pick one aspect of Jesus and that’s what they celebrate. Thomas Jefferson, our third president, believed Jesus was above all a great teacher. Most importantly of all, Jesus was a great teacher. Interestingly, Jefferson did not believe in miracles and so he cut all the miracles out of his Bibles. All those miracles Jesus did, Jefferson cut them out of his Bibles. Jesus was first, foremost, and always a teacher.

For some, Jesus is the one who died for our sins. Their Jesus is first and foremost the Jesus of the cross. Karl Barth, arguably the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th Century, kept a picture of the Crucified Jesus on his desk. For him, that’s who Jesus is: the one who was crucified and raised to new life.

Others concentrate on Baby Jesus. The Incarnation. Little Lord Jesus. Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild. They never let Jesus out of the manger. They never let him grow up.

Some time when you're bored, google the famous 'Jesus Prayer' from the movie 'Talladega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby'. Will Ferrell spends the better part of five minutes praying to sweet little, 8 ½ lb, tiny baby Jesus, with your cute little golden fleece diapers and your tiny fists curled up in a ball, use your magic baby powers to help us win tomorrow.

When his wife yells at him Jesus grew up and grew a beard, he tells her it's his prayer and he'll pray to baby Jesus if he wants to. For him, the best Jesus is baby Jesus.

Which one is he? Which one is Jesus? Is he a teacher, the crucified one, the baby in the manger? Yes, all of them and more.

According to our Titus passage, Jesus is the Spirit of God poured out on us. Through Jesus, we are God's heirs and through him we receive eternal life.

Our Hebrews text tells us Jesus is God's word to us. Through Jesus all that was created was created. Jesus is God's glory who keeps the universe in motion and sits at the Right Hand of God. He founded the Heavens and the Earth. Jesus is unchanging, eternal.

John's Gospel begins with the famous prologue. It tells us Jesus is God's word. He is the word, the wisdom, the thoughts of God. All things were created through Jesus. And everyone who receives him, who believes in him, he makes Children of God.

Are you confused yet? I am. Jesus is all this and more. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Holy One, fully human yet fully divine. Jesus is the eternal Word of God become flesh. He is the one who was born for us, who died for us and who was raised from death for us. Jesus is the Wisdom of God. He is our teacher and our savior.

All of this, and much more besides, is absolutely true. But trying to get a handle on Jesus by reading everything about him and examining every passage in detail is not very succinct. We lose

the forest for the trees. It's like trying to look at a large picture one pixel at a time.

We need to back up. We need to see the big picture. But we need to be succinct. Briefly, in just a few words, who is Jesus?

Let me tell you about Will Campbell. Will Campbell was a Baptist preacher. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s he devoted his time and considerable energy to desegregation. He worked to bring an end to segregation. In the 1950s, Will Campbell escorted black children to Central High School in Little Rock. In 1963, when four black girls were killed at a church bombing in Alabama, he went there to comfort the families. He was the only white man present at the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And in 1968, when Martin Luther King was assassinated, Will Campbell was the only white man who went to the Lorraine Motel in Memphis to mourn with the rest of King's friends.

It didn't stop there. Campbell cared for everybody. He even ministered to the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Went to visit them in the hospital and in jail. He would pray for them. God loves everybody, he said. And that means everybody. Will Campbell lived the Gospel.

Somebody once asked Will Campbell to explain the essence of God. He said he wanted it short and easy to understand, ten words or less. Campbell thought a moment and then replied, "We're all bastards, but God loves us anyway."

Let me say that again in case you thought you misheard me. Will Campbell was a giant of the desegregation movement. He helped lead the way to treating people of every color and ethnicity and belief as equal citizens. He was a Christian fiercely committed to loving all God's children. When a friend asked him to give him the essence, the essential God, in just a few words, Campbell replied, "We're all bastards, but God loves us anyway."

We need to understand, Campbell was not maligning the legitimacy of anyone's birth. What he meant was we are all

contemptuous, mean, hateful, spiteful, cruel, arrogant, greedy, envious, sinful. We have all fallen short of the grace and glory of God. In a word, we are depraved.

Depraved! Now that's something we Presbyterians can get behind. We Presbyterians understand, we are all depraved. We are all sinful. We have all fallen short of the grace and glory of God. Some of us more than others, yes. But we have ALL fallen short of the grace and glory of God. ALL human beings are depraved.

Of course, this is why we need a savior. It's the inconvenient truth of Christmas: we need salvation because we are sinful. If we were NOT sinful, there would be no need for Jesus to be born.

The fact is, though, we are depraved. We are all fallen and sinful creatures, but God loves us anyway. We are all depraved, but God loves us anyway. There you have it – short, sweet, succinct.

Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? you ask. If we've learned anything this month, we've learned Jesus is the walking, talking, breathing incarnation of God's love. Jesus is how much God loves us.

Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? If I may borrow from brother Will, I would say, "We are all depraved, but God loves anyway, and Jesus is the proof."

Tell me who Jesus is: short, simple, succinct. Sure. We're all depraved, but God loves us anyway, and Jesus is the proof. That's who Jesus is.

Jesus is the Son of God, the Word of God, the divine teacher, the crucified and risen one, God's love made flesh. All of that. And more. But if you want it short, sweet, and simple I think this covers it. We're all depraved, but God loves us anyway. And Jesus is the proof. Thanks be to God. Amen.