



## SERMON RECAP

### AUGUST 24, 2025

#### Jesus, Incarnation over Atonement

Series: Finding Faith for the Skeptic.

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 7:36-50

Jesus is a pretty big deal. That probably doesn't need to be said, but understanding who Jesus was, who Jesus is, and why he matters is pretty much *the* question of Christianity. There are lots of simple answers people give when asked "Who do you say that Jesus is?"

There are a lot of titles and names that people give Jesus. He is the Christ, the anointed one of God. He is the Son of God, the Son of David, the Son of Man. He has some other titles, like the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel - God with us. He is fully human and fully divine. These are a lot of shorthand answers that people give, but these titles don't tell us a lot.

What if we dig more? What about Jesus, the man? He was a poor, wandering preacher who was born into a backwoods part of a tiny Roman puppet kingdom. He was born in a precarious situation and grew to be an insightful teacher and a charismatic healer who gained a large following.

Followers say that he walked on water, calmed storms, turned water into wine, fed thousands of people with limited resources, healed sick people, cast out demons, made crippled people walk again, restored sight, and even raised people from death.

He, like one of his teachers, mentors, and cousin John the Baptizer, was executed. Unlike John, who was beheaded by Herod, he was crucified by Roman authorities for treason and for claiming to be a King.

After his death however, Jesus' followers continued to experience him as alive. Women found his empty tomb, and Mary said he spoke her name. Others shared stories of Resurrection on a road, in the Upper Room, on the beach with a miraculous catch, and many other examples.

Everyone agrees that the community he built persisted and became the Church. Paul helped carry the message into far-away lands and shared the message with Gentiles. Eventually, the religion that formed around Jesus became known as Christianity and is the most influential religion known to humanity.

The worst atrocities in human history and the most poignant stories of love, justice, and self-sacrifice have been done in Christ's name. Billions of people claim to be his followers, and there is a general understanding that the story of Jesus is not finished. Another mysterious chapter that some call "the second coming," is yet to be written.

So where does this leave us? Who was Jesus? Who is Jesus? This is a deeply personal answer. It is one that we don't have to all agree on to follow him, love him, and honor him. Who was Jesus? I love the answer from that Paul's letter to the Philippians provides.

This short passage is a hymn. It is a song that Paul quotes that is probably a part of the most ancient traditions of those who follow Christ. When the earliest followers of Jesus sang and tried to describe him, they said, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit"

This seems like a good place to lean. "Form of God" is not easily defined, and it shouldn't be. Understanding Jesus' divinity and humanity defies trite explanation. But the key is this, whatever Jesus' relationship to God was, it was not something to exploit. Instead, it was something to use for the sake of all people.

Jesus used his power - whether you believe it supernatural or not - to advance the mission of God. He used his power not for his own gain but to help others. Individuals can lean into the miracles or lean into the more human aspects, but all who follow Christ share in the belief that his ultimate power was love. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, was fully one who embodied love for others, even to the point of death; and in Resurrection revealed the true glory of that love.