

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

And In Jesus Christ His Only Son

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Matthew 27:32-54

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you have your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to Matthew 27:32-54, we'll be looking at that in just a moment. Today we are going to begin our journey through the HEART of the Apostles' Creed. J.I. Packer says here:

“When it called God “maker of heaven and earth,” it parted company with Hinduism and Eastern faiths generally; now, by calling Jesus Christ God’s only Son, it parts company with Judaism and Islam and stands alone.”¹

So with these words – “and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord” – we enter into the beating heart of biblical Christianity. And the Creed is very intentional in positioning this content AS SUCH.

If you have a copy of the creed in front of you – we’ve been using the translation from the old red Baptist Hymn book – you will see this very easily. We’ll put the Creed up on the screen for you. (Display Slide 1). You can see for yourself the Creed in its entirety; all 110 words of it.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Affirming The Apostles' Creed*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 59.

But now look at this. (Display Slide 2 with highlighted portion) This is the portion of the Creed designated to the person and work of Jesus Christ. 70 words out of 110.

So this, right here, is ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY! And this is what the New Testament is trying so hard to get us all to believe! If you believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah – misunderstood, but ultimately rejected, you are not a Christian. If you believe that Jesus was a great prophet who spoke powerful messages on behalf of God – you are not a Christian. If you believe that Jesus was a holy man and a great example that we should all listen to and follow – you are not a Christian. All of those beliefs about Jesus fall short of authentic biblical Christianity. Christianity is about believing in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son our Lord.

We’ll get to the “our Lord” part next week. This week our objective is very simple. We are really trying to answer two questions: What does it mean to call Jesus God’s Son? And then secondly, what does it mean for us to be called SONS of the living God through faith in Christ? To help get us started with that conversation we’ll read together from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 27 verses 45-54. You will recognize this as the climactic scene depicting the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:45–54 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Matthew's point here is fairly obvious, he is saying that the way Jesus lived and died PROVED that he was THE SON OF GOD – even the Roman centurion saw and confessed him as much.

That is the climax of Matthew's Gospel, so what does it mean to say that Jesus is truly the Son of God?

What Does It Mean To Call Jesus "God's Son"?

Well, again, we should probably begin with what it doesn't mean. We talked about this last week when we were speaking about God as "Father". Gregory of Nazianzus, the 4th century theologian and archbishop put it this way, he said:

“‘Father’ designates neither the substance nor the activity, but the relationship, the manner of being, which holds good between the Father and the Son.”²

Athanasius, writing in the same century said:

“Every bodily thought must be shunned in these matters”³

So that's what it doesn't mean. We are not talking about bodies and biology when we use this familial language. We are talking about relationships and manner of being. So let's get into that. When we call Jesus Christ the Son of God we are saying that:

1. He is of the same essence or reality as God

This is the one that the early church took the most time with – because it is the most complicated. The Apostle John put it this way. He said:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 ESV)

² Gregory of Nazianzus as cited by Ben Meyers in *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 22.

³ Athanasius as cited by Ben Meyers in *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 22.

Now, it is clear that when John speaks of the WORD he is speaking about THE SON – in John’s mind, those two terms are interchangeable and overlapping – they help explain each other. So in John 1:14 he says:

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. (John 1:14 ESV)

So the Word is the Son – and putting that all together we see that the Son was WITH GOD and the Son WAS GOD. So there is unity and distinction. That comes right from the Apostolic confession of Jesus Christ and the early church worked very hard to understand that and to preserve that doctrine precisely. The definitive expression of that doctrine was laid down at the Council of Chalcedon. They put it this way:

“Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and also in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as deity is concerned and of the same reality as we are ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted.”⁴

That is the STANDARD Christian definition – it is referred to as The Chalcedon Definition and it is subscribed to by Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians – if you don’t BELIEVE this you aren’t in any real or biblical sense a Christian. To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus Christ is perfect in deity and perfect in humanity. Actually God and actually man.

If you don’t believe that, then you are not a Christian.

To call Jesus the Son of God is to affirm that very thing.

Alright, that’s the hard part – the rest of this is wonderful and marvellous and fairly self-explanatory.

To call Jesus Christ the Son of God is also to say that:

⁴ *The Definition of Chalcedon 451* in “Creeds Of The Churches”, edited by John H. Leith, Third Edition (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 35-36.

2. He imitates and reflects the Father's character

We mentioned this last week. There is a sense in which God is incomprehensible – not because he makes no sense, but because he exceeds our grasp. He is:

“the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.” (1 Timothy 6:15–16 ESV)

So, as we said last week, we will NEVER know God exhaustively, but we can know God intimately, accurately and truly through his self-disclosure in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John said that at the beginning of his Gospel:

“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.” (John 1:14 ESV)

The Apostle Paul said that about Jesus; he called him:

“He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 ESV)

Paul said that about Jesus – more importantly, Jesus said that about Jesus! He said to Philip:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 ESV)

So to call Jesus Christ the Son of God is to say that he perfectly represents and images the character and nature of God.

That's important for us to understand because sometimes we speak as if God the Father is all about justice and holiness and wrath and judgment, but then the Son is all about mercy and compassion and kindness and grace. But that isn't at all how this relationship works. To BE the Son is to love and respect and IMAGE the Father before mankind. Jesus brings the Father into focus so if you thought that God the Father lacks mercy and patience and kindness – first of all, I would say you need to read your Bible better, but then secondly I would say – you need to look at Jesus Christ. Jesus isn't correcting the Father he is DISPLAYING the Father, so if you see a conflict there, that's on you.

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 ESV)

Jesus is God to us.

Thirdly, to call Jesus Christ God’s Son is to say that:

3. He perfectly obeys the Father’s will

Jesus said that about himself on several occasions. He said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” (John 5:19 ESV)

“I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:29 ESV)

And then perhaps most famously, as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane he said:

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39 ESV)

That is the ESSENCE of what it means to be God’s Son. It means to OBEY HIM – it means to TRUST and PRIVILEGE HIS WILL over your own.

That’s we were all SUPPOSED TO DO – but that’s what none of us have done, apart from Jesus Christ. Humanity fell away from God when we failed to act as a son. Humanity is enabled to come back to God through the one who acted as a Son perfectly. The Apostle Paul makes that very point. He says:

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. (Romans 5:19 ESV)

Jesus is the Son who rescues fallen sons. That is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Christian Gospel.

Fourthly, to call Jesus Christ God’s Son is to say that:

4. He represents the Father in all his earthly business

That sense of the term would have been intuitive to 1st century Bible readers. That was one of the main reasons for having a son. The son inherited and took over the family business. Jesus, in his humanity, as Jesus of Nazareth – fulfilled that role for Joseph. That’s how everyone knew him early on in his ministry:

“Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:55 ESV)

Jesus took on his earthly father’s business and he represented him in all his business concerns. That’s what a son did in those days. In fact, in the Roman world, if you didn’t have a son, you adopted a son – sometimes a faithful slave or the second son of a neighbour or a relative, and you taught him your business and you transferred all your property to his possession and he carried on the family name and trade.

That’s what it means to call Jesus Christ God’s Son – and Jesus taught that in his parables. Do you remember the Parable of the Tenants? Jesus compared the Father in that parable to a rich man who owned a vineyard. He leased out the vineyard to some tenants and he himself went away to a far country. The tenants were supposed to manage the property and send to him a portion of its fruits.

But they did not.

They did not honour him or pay him what was due.

So the owner sent messengers – but the tenants beat them and treated them shamefully. That of course is a reference to the prophets. God sent reforming prophets to the covenant community – we think of Amos and Micah and Isaiah – but the people of God wouldn’t listen.

So Jesus says:

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ (Matthew 21:37 ESV)

That's why Jesus came!

He came to re-assert God's authority over the covenant community. He came to redeem a people who would love and serve him as they should. He came to restore all things to their rightful submission and posture before God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

That's what a son does – and that's what it means to refer to Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But that's not all it means. To call Jesus Christ God's Son is to affirm that:

5. He is the Beloved of God

He is not just another prophet – he is God's BELOVED SON. Peter, James and John learned that lesson in a fairly dramatic way on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. (Matthew 17:1–6 ESV)

Don't even think about comparing my Son to Moses and Elijah as if they are somehow EQUAL. This is not some prophet that you can listen to or not – this is MY BELOVED SON!!!

God was fierce in his OWNERSHIP of Jesus!

Do you know that kind of love?

When I was a new dad, I remember having a strange experience in the mall. It was our first outing with Madison, Shauna Lee needed to get out of the house and to stretch her legs so we went to the mall in Burlington and I had little baby Madison in one of those front snuggly things – I think it was called a Baby Bjorn or some such. And as I was walking around the mall, killing

time as dads will do, I all of the sudden realized that something strange was happening inside me. My pupils were dilated and my eyes were all wide and I was having violent and unsanctified thoughts. I was holding my baby girl and as I was walking by people looking at them I was thinking to myself:

“I will kill you with a fork if you even think of touching my child.”

“You, I will throw over this railing and laugh at you while you fall.”

I felt myself on the precipice of violence. I had to catch myself. What was that all about? But it was all the dad hormones beginning to course through my body and preparing me for a life of fatherhood.

Dads – do you know that feeling?

That’s fierce love.

Now – it is always dangerous to go from imperfect human dad imagery back up to PERFECT Heavenly Father imagery; we are supposed to draw the lines the other way. Our human analogies are always imperfect in terms of how they point to God. I am not saying that God is like an immature 23 year old man. But I am saying that even in my immature 23 year old reactions – there was an echo there that suggests something significant in terms of how God feels about his BELOVED SON Jesus Christ.

That’s not even close to being a stretch.

Do you remember the Parable of the Tenants that we were just talking about? Well the tenants in that story did not respond very well to the owner’s son. Jesus tells it this way, he says:

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”⁴¹ They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” (Matthew 21:38–41 ESV)

Jesus told that story to the Jewish people. He said: How you respond to God's Son will determine how God deals with you. If you reject him, he will reject you. If you kill him, he will kill you.

That's part of what it means to be a father! God chooses this relational metaphor – and Jesus uses this relational metaphor to make this very point. He is saying that JESUS CHRIST GOD'S SON is the apple of the Father's eye and therefore how we respond to HIM will determine our eternal destiny. That's in the Bible friends!! Therefore:

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:12 ESV)

Take refuge in the Son, my friends, and you will be blessed forever! But if you oppose the Son, if you reject the Son, if you revile the Son, you will face the anger and the wrath of God the Father Almighty forever.

God's testimony is clear – he chose these metaphors. He is the one who said:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5 ESV)

So THAT is what it means to call Jesus Christ God's Son.

Now in the few minutes we have left, let's flip that a little bit, as we are supposed to do, and ask the question:

What Does It Mean For Us To Be Called “Sons Of The Living God”?

Because we are – that's the joy and the glory of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul says:

“And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:26 ESV)

That's Christianity in a nutshell. Galatians 3:26 says:

“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Galatians 3:26 ESV)

Hallelujah! Now what does that mean? Well first of all, it means that:

1. In Christ, we are once again, the image and likeness of God

That’s where we began, wasn’t it? In Genesis 1:26:

God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

That’s where we started, but that’s not where we stayed. We sinned – we fell – and the image of God was defaced and obscured. The extent of that fall is universal. Romans 3:23 says:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 ESV)

So we fell away - but thanks be to God – in Christ we are brought back!

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2 ESV)

So we ARE something new and we are becoming something GLORIOUS – praise the Lord!

Secondly, to say that WE are sons of the living God is to say that:

2. In Christ, we can and we will be holy, as he is holy

Jesus came to heal our hearts and to put his Spirit within us – that was the original promise of the New Covenant:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.” (Ezekiel 36:26 ESV)

So when we become a Christian our heart is RESTORED and our character is RENEWED. We have a NEW SPIRIT in our NEW HEART that leads us and guides us in the direction of Jesus Christ. That’s the promise of 2 Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

Thirdly, for us to be called SONS OF GOD is to say that:

3. In Christ, we are enabled and empowered to obey God perfectly

With a new heart and filled with the Holy Spirit we are now capable of being the sons we were created and intended to be. We have the same capacity now that Adam and Eve had in the Garden – we are able to obey, and able not to obey. We are well positioned to benefit from the prayer and benediction of the Apostle who said:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20–21 ESV)

That’s a real possibility now. It may not be your everyday experience – but it can be – and it will be increasingly and one day entirely. We believe that. We believe that:

“he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

Thanks be to God! You’ll get better at this. We all will. Because we are SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.

And fourthly, that means that:

4. In Christ, we are designated and appointed as God’s ambassadors

Jesus said that:

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21 ESV)

The Son came as the Ambassador of the Father and now:

“we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV)

So how people receive us will be how they have received the Son, will be how they stand in eternity before the Father because in Christ, AS CHRIST, we are the beloved of God.

5. In Christ, we are the beloved of God

As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” (Romans 9:25 ESV)

If we are in Christ then WE ARE THE BELOVED OF GOD. WE ARE THE APPLE OF HIS EYE and therefore anyone who loves us will be loved by God – anyone who hates us will be rejected of God.

Jesus said that:

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40 ESV)

Do you understand that? If you are in Christ then you are the BELOVED OF GOD! You walk through the world as his ambassador. What people do to you – how they respond to you – how they perceive you – is taken as evidence of their attitude toward God. That is the punchline of the story of the sheep and the goats. That is a teaching, you will recall, about the FINAL JUDGMENT – do you remember the criteria for that judgment? The King says:

‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:40 ESV)

That is the love that Jesus has for you. It is the love that the Father has for the Son that is now in the Son shared with all those who put their faith and trust in him. Thanks be to God!

Let’s pray together.