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We preach Christ Crucified 2

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Annual Moore College Lectures 1978
J. I. Packer: *We preach Christ crucified*

Lecture 2: *The man Christ Jesus* a date between 1978-09-13 and 1978-09-19

(00:00) My title: *The man Christ Jesus*. (00:04)

(00:08) That Jesus, called Christ, that Galilean Jew, who was crucified, probably in AD 26,
(00:19) was, as we said in our first lecture, not a mythical figure but an historical character, and
(00:32) certainly a man, (00:32) is something which nobody, I think, has ever doubted, since the first-
century Docetics who thought that he was a theophany, (00:42) apart from that tiny band of
scholars—Drews, Wells, and I really don't know who else—who believe that he never existed.
(00:54) But the question presses: Was he the sort of man that the New Testament, both the
gospels and the epistles (01:06)—particularly Paul in Colossians and Hebrews chapter 1—tell
us that he was? (01:13) Was he, in other words, a man whose true identity was this: that he
was God's eternal Son. (01:23) Or was the real Jesus a person who should not be described
in those terms? (01:29)

(01:31) That's the question which is pressed by number of folk within the Christian church at
the present time. (01:38) One might have expected it to be pressed constantly by folk outside;
it's a little more surprising when it's raised inside. (01:48) Raised, however, it has been, and
we must face it. (01:53) And I'll tell you what I'm going to do.

(01:56) I want, first, to make a comment on the nature of the gospels, where the person of the
man Jesus is presented to us, (02:05)—where we see him, as it were, walking to and fro, we
hear him speak, we watch him at work.

(02:13) Second, I'm going to offer you a summary—it has to be a very brief and inadequate
summary, I'm afraid—of New Testament faith (02:23) concerning the person and place of this
man Jesus; in so far as we can pack a summary of that matter into five minutes, (02:31) or ten
minutes, I shall attempt to do so.

(02:34) Then, thirdly, I shall offer you a review of what is called humanitarian Christology, that
is to say, (02:43) the alternative view of the person of Christ which is offered by those who
doubt the propriety of calling him the Son of God. (02:54) They speak of him—this man—as at
most a uniquely Spirit-filled man, a prophetic man, a remarkable and outstanding man, (03:08)
but when you've said that, according to them, you've said it all. (03:12) They have effectively,
by their line of thought, reduced the incarnation of the Son of God to a special case of the
indwelling of the Spirit in a man—just that. (03:26) We'll review the humanitarian Christology
and see how it works.

(03:31) And then the fourth thing we'll do, as I close; I want to offer you a presentation of the
humanity of Jesus, as set forth in the letter to the Hebrews, (03:41) where, it seems to me, a
series of points of crucial relevance are made for our instruction.
(03:51) That then is the agenda and I plunge straight in with my initial comment on the nature of the gospels which present this man to us. (04:01)

(04:05) As, in general, the New Testament is a confession of faith, written by believers in Jesus for believers in Jesus, (04:17) so, in particular, the four gospels were written by men who held the faith of the epistles concerning Jesus, (04:27) in order to help others enter more deeply into the faith of the epistles concerning Jesus. (04:37) That is a thesis which I don't think can be controverted. (04:42) The gospel – in the sense, I mean, in which the work of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are gospels – the gospel was a new literary form, (04:54) corresponding to nothing that had existed before. (04:59) It was so called, quite plainly, because the selection of narratives of Jesus' words and deeds which each writer presented in the course of his book (05:12) and then the elaborate passion story to which the introductory narrative led (05:25) were carefully calculated presentations of the good news. (05:30) These stories were intended to add up – when taken together in their plain, natural sense – to add up to a presentation of the gospel of Jesus. (05:44) And, because the four writers believed that that was what their narratives did add up to, (05:49) they called their work the gospel. (05:54) This is very obvious in fact in John's gospel, where you have a didactic prologue to start with, (06:02) you have interpretative comments by the apostle at many key points in the story as it goes along, (06:09) and you have, of course, elaborate doctrinal discourses as part of the gospel, discourses in which all these things are made very plain indeed, from the lips of Our Lord himself. (06:22) What you have in John is thus what we might call old-fashioned storytelling, in which the author makes the point of seeing that the moral of his tale (06:34)—the meaning, that is, of the story he's narrating—comes out very clearly. (06:42) The synoptics, by contrast, Matthew, Mark, and Luke – they tell their story in what we might call the modern manner. (06:51) They narrate without comment; (06:57) they hope, and indeed plan, to make their impact on the reader simply by their arrangement of material (07:05) and by the build-up of the storyline as the narrative develops. (07:13) These first three gospels are as far as possible from being artless memoirs, as the critics of two generations of ago urged that they were. (07:24) No indeed. They are carefully wrought theological documents in which all the details of the storytelling have been carefully shaped and angled (07:36) in order to force upon the reader's notice a particular presentation of the gospel which is Jesus (07:45)—or, shall I say, a particular presentation of Jesus as the gospel—with which each writer is concerned, Matthew presenting him as the saviour king, (07:56) Mark presenting him as the servant of God who makes atonement, Luke presenting him as the perfect man who is also God's perfect and final prophet, (08:08) and John, of course, as we know, telling the story in his more old-fashioned manner, rounded it all off by presenting him as the Son of God incarnate. (08:22)

(08:24) The recognition, by the scholars, that each of the evangelists had his own special purpose of this kind (08:34)—and shaped and selected and angled his narrative to that end—(08:40) has produced a new critical technique, which the scholars have added to source criticism and form criticism, (08:49) the two techniques they've been using for many moons now in their study of the gospels. (08:55) The new technique is called redaction criticism. (09:00) It's emerged into the light of day in the past twenty years. (09:04) It's precisely the study – so far as the gospels enable us to discern this – the study of how each evangelist
angled, shaped, and selected, in the telling of his story, in order to get his own particular message across. (09:25) It’s a sad fact that, just as source criticism and form criticism have been pressed into the service of scepticism (09:35)—the service, that is, of the supposition that, in the course of transmission, the facts concerning Jesus (09:42) have been falsified, forgotten, and then reconstructed imaginatively in a way that puts the narratives right out of step with what really happened—(09:53) so redaction criticism has been pressed into the service of scepticism. And books by redaction critics have gravely explored from all sorts of angles (10:07) the question of how far the evangelists felt at liberty to twist the tradition and falsify the facts in order to make their own theological points. (10:18) There is in fact no good reason whatever to believe that this was what they did. (10:26) I, as a writer of books myself, make bold to say to you: (10:33) it is part of every author’s responsibility so to present the facts that he selects (10:42) that their meaning, at least what he takes to be their meaning, will be most clearly understood by the readers. (10:49) And redaction criticism is the study of how the evangelists fulfilled authorial responsibility.

(11:01) Is that responsibility compatible, however, with falsifying the facts, in order to make a point? (11:10) It is not thought so today; there is no reason to believe it was thought so in the first century AD. (11:21) Is there however reason to believe that the evangelists laboured to be faithful in the witness they bore to the historical Jesus? Yes indeed there is. (11:32) At the end of John’s gospel and at the beginning of Luke’s gospel are claims and attestations to the effect that what is being read in these books can fairly be taken as truth, (11:45) for it’s based on knowledge and its faithful witness. (11:51) And, until that assurance proves impossible to accept, we must, as rational students, accept it as our working hypothesis.

(12:10) But that doesn’t mean that the concern which the redaction critics have to explore the ways – the precise ways (12:21) in which the evangelists have shaped their story so that it might be better understood should be discounted. (12:27) No indeed. It’s very helpful in the study of the gospels to pursue it. (12:34) Again I will make bold to tell you: I have been a redaction critic myself since the time before redaction criticism was invented – I mean the time before the word existed. (12:46) I was a redaction critic, I now discover, as along ago as 1949, when I heard a senior New Testament scholar read a paper to a learned society (13:00) in which he sought to explain the Lukan passion narrative entirely in terms of a scissors and paste hypothesis about what Luke was doing with his sources, (13:12) and I ventured in discussion to suggest that the shape of the story as we have it (13:18) might rather be due to the particular theological emphases which Luke saw in the story and wanted his readers to pick up from the story. (13:28) And lo and behold the day after I was visited by the late professor R. H. Lightfoot, who had been sitting in the meeting, and who had himself begun to explore this line of thought (13:40)—now called redaction criticism—as long ago as 1936, and to my utter amazement he spoke to me as if I were virtually a prophet, (13:49) because in fact I’d been speaking along the lines of his own study.

(13:53) Of course it's familiar ground to all evangelical Bible students; we know, simply from careful attention to the text, that each evangelist had his own angle (14:05) and his own emphasis, and that he selected and arranged his material in order to bring out his own emphasis; (14:13) that [there?] [is] really nothing new for us in this point at all. (14:17) Why
then am I laying such stress on it? Well, simply in order to provide myself with a foundation for saying this: (14:26) That, when one reads the gospels as presentations of the gospel, one finds that, in the case of all four, (14:37) the purpose of the narrator is exactly as stated—stated explicitly—by John in chapter 20 and verse 31 of his gospel: (14:51) “these things are written”, says John, “that you may believe that Jesus”—the man—“is the Christ, the Son of God, (15:03) and that believing you may have life in his name”.

(15:10) And this proves on inspection to be wholly in line with the gospel, the Christological message of the whole of the rest of the New Testament. (15:20) It is very striking to see how though the various New Testament books — and I'm speaking now of the epistles rather than the gospels which are simply narratives (15:31) — how the New Testament books use many different concepts, many different ways of expressing the truth, (15:42) but nonetheless all converge on the same point, precisely the point which these words that I've just quoted from John are making: (15:52) Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and these things we proclaim in order that, believing, you who hear us, you who read us, may have life through his name.

(16:06)

(16:08) And that leads me to the second thing that I said I would do. I want to offer you, as pointedly as I can, a summary of New Testament faith as a whole, (16:22) concerning the person and place of the man Christ Jesus. (16:28) I'm very conscious that I have to oversimplify here; I'm very conscious that I'm doing little better than cartooning, leaving out, I mean, from my picture, many subsidiary details, (16:42) and highlighting, perhaps overstressing, the key points, simply in order to underline them; that's what cartoonists do.

(16:51) But if you think that cartooning is a valid art form perhaps you will be patient with me for the next ten minutes as in my simple cartoonist style I summarise the New Testament faith concerning the person and faith of Jesus. (17:07) Essentially, it seems to me, it reduces to four points, like this:

(17:15) One. Jesus of Nazareth is God's promised Christ, the long foretold Messiah. (17:26) Christ, Greek Christos [or Χριστός], representing the Hebrew Mašiâh [or מֶשְׁכָּה], Messiah, is not of course a surname, (17:37) like Dumbrell or Packer or Knox; (17:42) it's something far more significant than that: it's an office title, as our Presbyterian friends would say. (17:49) It means literally “the Anointed One”; it designates God's promised saviour king. (17:58) That the Galilean rabbi who was crucified and rose from death is the Christ, God's long-prophesied Messiah, was always the basic Christian conviction, (18:09) and all strands of the New Testament express it. (18:15) The revelation of it—the demonstration of it, you might say—is the plot of the synoptic gospels. The announcement of it is the main theme of the sermons in Acts; (18:30) the explanation of it, one of the main themes of the epistles. The Messiah's fulfilment of his earthly ministry in face of incomprehension and hostility, (18:43) right up to his dying and his rising, is the storyline of all four gospels as a matter of fact. (18:51) That Jesus' own mysterious title for himself, Son of man, and equally the title given him from Pentecost onwards, the title Lord, (19:01) are titles which point first to the reality of his Messianic rule is something nowadays generally agreed in the world of scholarship. (19:12) Not, indeed, that Jesus' concept of Messiahship corresponded to Jewish expectation; no, indeed, this point of course is familiar to us all. (19:23) His notion of Messiahship reflected his view of God's
eschatological kingdom—which he preached as a reality that his own ministry brought into being—and he saw that kingdom in a way in which no previous Jewish teacher had seen it, (19:38) namely as a new relationship between penitent sinners and God as their heavenly Father, (19:45) a relationship which was achieved through commitment to Himself in faith as their sovereign saviour. (19:53) And he saw his own lordship in the kingdom as based on his call to be God's suffering servant—(20:00) the innocent one, who, having died for others' sins, is then vindicated by being restored to life, according to Isaiah 53. (20:12) Calvin well summarised Jesus' notion of his own Messiahship—and with it the overall New Testament view of the Messiah's role—(20:20) when he spoke of Jesus as fulfilling the threefold office to which men were anointed in the Old Testament, the office namely of prophet—bringer of messages from God—priest—offerer of sacrifice to God—(20:35) and king—ruler of the people of God—and all those three offices as one comprehensive office fulfilled in his own personal ministry—(20:45) in his life, in his death, and in his risen reign. (20:50)

(20:53) In the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ is bound up a claim which is at the heart of Christianity, (21:05) the claim, namely, that Jesus, the man of Galilee, is central and essential to a true understanding of history. (21:14) For, according to Old Testament prophecy, God's Messiah, and the kingdom in which he reigns – the son of David (21:21) reigning in a kingdom greater than that of David – this kingdom and this reign is the centre of world history, the heart of it, (21:32) the moment of supreme significance, that which gives meaning to everything else, (21:38) and it's this, say the New Testament witnesses with one accord, which has become reality, through the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. (21:48) So this is the first strand in the New Testament faith, concerning the person and place of Jesus. (21:56) Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, and this is what his Christhood, his Messiahship, means. (22:04)

(22:06) And then a second thought: (22:09) Jesus of Nazareth, says the New Testament, is the unique Son of God. (22:16) (22:19) Granted, there are places in the first three gospels and in Acts too, where Son of God may be no more than an honorific title for the Messiah, modelled on Psalm 2 verses 6 and following, (22:33) where, you remember, God says—and this was originally said, it would seem, to Israel's king—"thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee". (22:46) But it's certain that, in the epistles and in John's gospel, Son of God signifies a unique relation of solidarity with the Father (22:59)—a relation entailing both a revelatory function and also a share in the Father's work of creating, sustaining, reconciling, ruling, and renewing the world. (23:12) For the revelatory function of Jesus the Son of God, think of John chapter 1 verse 18: (23:21) “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who's in the bosom of the Father”—that at least is what many of the texts read—"has expounded Him." (23:32) That's what the Greek verb literally is expressing: the thought that Jesus offers us an exegesis – it's the word which gives us that noun exegesis – (23:43) the Son has offered an exegesis of the Father; the only begotten Son has expounded Him. (23:51) For his share in the Father's work of creation and redemption, well, think of the opening sentence of the letter to the Hebrews: (24:03) “The Son, in and through whom God has now spoken to us, being the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person and the one through whom he made the world, (24:17) when he had himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.” (24:24) There is solidarity in the
work of creation and redemption. (24:31) And certainly there are places in the first three gospels where the witness borne—the witness which Jesus bears to his knowledge of his own unique filial identity (24:43) in relation to the Father—is very plain indeed. (24:47) Where, for instance, again just one text for many, he says (24:52) “all things are delivered to me by my Father, no one knows the Son save the Father, and no one knows the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal him”. (25:05) Jesus sees himself as the Son, the only one of its kind. (25:12) And of course the witness of the voice from heaven heard at the baptism and the transfiguration bears the same testimony: “This is my beloved Son.” (25:23) And the lexicography of that word translated “beloved” suggests uniqueness as part of the meaning. (25:33) Secondly, personal distinctions within the unity of the Godhead constitute perhaps the hardest notion round which the human mind has ever been asked to wrap itself, (25:43) and the thought was never adequately conceptualised until the fourth century. (25:50) But faith that Jesus was in the true sense the Son of God made flesh and therefore to be worshipped marks Christians out from the start. (26:01)

(26:05) There is here, too, a central claim which Christianity makes—the claim, namely, that Jesus Christ, Jesus the man of Galilee, is central and essential to a true understanding of God, (26:20) as well as to a true understanding of man. (26:24) Perfect and ideal man indeed he is, but that’s not the whole of the story nor perhaps the first part of the story; (26:32) the first part of the story is that, in this man, we see, in person, God come to save. (26:42) And if we are going to think Christianly about God we must start from the axiom so well formulated by Michael Ramsey in the three simple words “God is Jesus-like”. (26:55) (26:57) For Jesus is God. (27:01) Well this is the second strand in the New Testament witness to the man Christ Jesus. (27:06)

He is the Messiah; that’s his office. And he is the Son of God; that’s his personal identity. (27:14)

And that leads on to the third claim which the New Testament makes—a third strand of teaching which it gives. (27:22) Jesus of Nazareth, says the New Testament, is the only way to the Father—the only way, that is, whereby we may come to know God the Creator as Father (27:36) and stand related to Him as Father, so that we may know ourselves as children in His family. (27:44) Here is a key theme of Jesus’ own teaching, of Paul's teaching, and of John’s teaching. (27:51) And upon it, we may say at once, is based the crucial Christian claim that it’s only through Jesus of Nazareth that we may have true understanding of God's love. (28:06)

(28:07) For the New Testament views the knowing of your Maker as your Father and the knowing of yourself as His child and heir as being the highest privilege and the richest relationship (28:20) of which any human being is capable. (28:23) Not to know God in this way, however, is to be in a state of fallenness and guilt, to be cut off from God's life, to be exposed to His judgement, (28:35) and indeed to be living under demonic control, from all of which flows only misery. (28:41) Yet this is every man’s natural condition says the New Testament. (28:46) “Can it be changed?” we ask. Jesus is reported by John – chapter 14 and verse 6 of his gospel – as answering that question in the affirmative by saying this (29:00)—“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me”—(29:07) as if he’d said “Yes, a filial relationship to God is possible through being related to me and to my
mediatorial ministry, but not otherwise". (29:20) Sonship to God that guarantees mercy and glory is not [a] fact of natural life but rather a gift of supernatural grace. (29:30) John, in one of his expository comments in the prologue to the gospel, states this in turn: (29:38) “To all who received him, who believed on his name, he gave power”—the right, the prerogative, the privilege; the word means all those things—“to become children of God.” (29:51) The doctrine of the bestowal of sonship then is part of the proper exposition of 1st Peter 3 verse 18: (29:58) “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” (30:07) “Bring us to God” understand as children: bring us to God as God's own adopted sons. (30:15) The only begotten Son who died for us presents us to his Father as his brothers and sisters. (30:23) And thus we are adopted into the family and become – we sinners taken as it were from the moral and spiritual gutter – we become royal children, children in the royal family. (30:36)

(30:39) Jesus is thus the way, the only way, to know God as father. (30:44) And a true understanding of God's love has to do with the recognition that God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son (30:55) that those who believe in Him should not perish but have this eternal life, the eternal life which involves not only forgiveness of sins, (31:05) not only fellowship with God in a broad and general sense, but quite precisely adoption into the royal family and life as God's sons and heirs, (31:16) objects of His special, adopting love. (31:22) And as no other relation to God save sonship brings the salvation to which God's children are heirs, (31:32) so apart from Jesus who effects our adoption, there is, according to the New Testament, no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. (31:45) So this is claim number three and it's an exclusive claim. (31:49) Jesus of Nazareth is the only way to the Father. (31:54)

(31:55) And then the fourth claim, the final point: Jesus of Nazareth is the only hope for any man. (32:06) (32:08) Hopelessness, as the Bible knows, and as we today know, is hell, literally. (32:16) As God made us to fulfill a function and attain an end—“for man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (32:25) as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it—so he made us creatures for whom hope is life, (32:33) and whose lives become a living death when we have nothing good to look forward to. (32:39)

(32:41) As the deep hopelessness of this post-Christian Western world tightens its chilly grip on us, we are made to feel this increasingly in our day. (32:51) And so we can better appreciate the infinite value for our lives of that exuberant, intoxicating, energising hope of joy with Jesus in the Father's presence (33:03) which is so pervasive a mark of New Testament Christianity. (33:08) Men without Christ are there declared to be without hope. (33:13) But Christians are declared to live already in a light which brings hope and which shines brighter until the perfect day. (33:26) They know, as Paul puts it, Christ in you [sic], Christ in them, the hope of glory. (33:33) It's a pity I think that we hear so little in these days about what has well been called that unknown world with its well-known inhabitant, (33:45) to which the New Testament teaches Christians to look forward. (34:49) For, as the hymn says, “the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land”, and the hope of Emmanuel's land is part of the glory of the gospel. (34:00) So here is the fourth strand under which the New Testament witness to Christ may be expounded (34:07)—the strand under which the hope of the Lord's personal return of
course must be subsumed as a very prominent element in the exposition of it—(34:16) Jesus of Nazareth, a coming king, is the only hope for any man. (34:22)

(34:25) And on these four claims, on this fourfold testimony to the person and place of Jesus, (34:32) on this declaration that he's Christ and Son of God and the way to the Father and man’s true and only hope, (34:42) there rests classical Christian Christology, as set forth by Chalcedon (34:50) – classical Evangelical preaching too, for it's only on this basis that we are warranted to say “Christianity is Christ” (35:00) and warranted to tell folk that being a Christian is a matter of a personal encounter and a personal relationship with this personal divine saviour. (35:11)

(35:14) And this is the line of teaching to which I suppose you and I are accustomed, and this is a line of teaching which perhaps we never thought that folk within the church would question. (35:26) But as I've already said it is questioned. (35:30) And now we must turn to look at the line of thought which questions it and passing [?] review the humanitarian Christology which offers itself as an alternative to acceptance of this New Testament witness of a saviour. (35:45)

(35:47) So I offer you now—again, I'm afraid, in simplified, perhaps oversimplified, perhaps cartoon terms—a rundown of humanitarian Christology, (36:02) as exhibited for instance in a book like The Myth of God Incarnate or Maurice Wiles’ [The] Remaking of Christian Doctrine. (36:12) My concern is not so much to engage with any particular exponent of it—there are a number of exponents of it, all telling the story in slightly different accents—(36:23) but rather to show you how this hypothesis, viewing it generically, works; (36:31) for it has the same generic shape and works in the same basic way in the minds of each of its expositors, and it goes like this: (36:40)

We begin with two a prioris, two things which the theologians who take this line assume and treat as granted.

(36:52) The first is that the Bible, in particular the New Testament, is a book of religion, a testament of experience and faith, (37:06) rather than a written revelation from God. (37:12) And, because its status is only that it's a testament of faith, it's not necessarily reliable, either on its facts or on the meaning which it gives to the facts that it records. (37:26) There is nothing necessarily definitive about its teaching, just as there is no necessary accuracy, no necessary truthfulness attaching to the details of its witness.

(37:40) And a priori number two is this: Reconstructions of the past, including the Christian past, that section of the past that deals with Christian origins, (37:55) and, with that, explanations of the evidence concerning Christian origins that we find in the New Testament books – (38:03) reconstructions of the past and explanations of the evidence which do not involve the supernatural, which do not involve I mean the miraculous and the unique, (38:16) are preferable to those which do.

(38:20) Here are the two a prioris which operate as springboards to start this hypothesis off. (38:29) On the basis of these two a prioris the scholars feel at liberty, (38:36) first to separate the figure of the Jesus of history whom they seek to reconstruct from the Christ of faith in the
New Testament (38:50)—they feel themselves at liberty in other words to call in question whether the Christ of New Testament faith does faithfully represent what the Jesus of history really was—(39:01) and secondly they allow themselves to separate that which they can regard as natural, I mean the ethical teaching and the moral and spiritual example of the Lord Jesus, (39:19) from that which they regard as supernatural in the stories, I mean the record of his miracles and his resurrection and indeed his incarnation, the incarnation of the Son, itself. (39:33) And they allow themselves to press the question “Must we include these supernatural elements in our reconstruction of the Jesus of history?” (39:43) “Do we have to say more about him than that he was a good, godly, Spirit-indwelt man (39:51) who gave teaching of unique value and set an example of unique significance?” (39:59) And out of that sort of questioning comes the hypothesis which we label humanitarian Christology which generically runs thus: (40:09) Jesus was in fact precisely a prophetic man, God indwelt, speaking words such as no man had ever spoken before, (40:24) living a life of a quality which no man had ever matched before. (40:29) But he was supernaturalised by his followers. (40:34) Because they so revered him for his teaching and for the power of his life, (40:40) they ascribed miracles to him, they ascribed deity to him, they proclaimed that he rose from the dead, (40:50) they persuaded themselves that he had done so, that he must have done so. (40:56) But the truth about him corresponds to the view of the Greek gods put forward by the fourth-century [BC] Macedonian philosopher Euhemerus that they were men worshipped after their deaths. (41:12) And so – says this hypothesis – so it is with Jesus.

(41:19) The supernaturalising of Jesus, so these scholars affirm, was a development influenced and shaped by Hellenistic mystery religions, (41:29) all of which had at the heart of them some myth about some god, (41:36) and some promise of contact with that god. (41:42) And, say the scholars, this same pattern of thinking was taken up by the Christian theologians and it produced the developed theology, Christology, (41:56) which our New Testament gives us. (42:00) But the truth is that New Testament theology and the Christian tradition which has followed it—in deifying Jesus and making him the mediator, (42:13) and so setting him apart from us as unique in his own person—made a great mistake. (42:20) And the gospel must be reconstructed so as to eliminate this mistake. (42:25) The truth of the matter, as we said, is that Jesus was a godly man—you may use the word unique there if you like, they say, (42:34) a uniquely godly man, uniquely guided, enlightened, led by the Holy Spirit—(42:41) whose significance for us, whose value for us, is this: (42:48) that he was, in a wonderfully inspiring and indeed life-transforming way, a teacher of godliness and an example of godliness (43:00) whom one cannot contemplate without being changed. (43:06) It’s in this way that these theorists seek to preserve the Christian sense of the uniqueness of Jesus. (43:16) It’s not that he is the Son of God incarnate; it is that he lived a life of uniquely potent quality, (43:25) which makes a uniquely strong and uniquely transforming impact on those who come in contact with it.

(43:37) And that’s the hypothesis—generically—which you’ve got spelt out in slightly different terms from chapter to chapter by the different essayists who contributed to the book The Myth of God Incarnate. (43:52) As we said in our first lecture, the word myth in that title means an imaginative story – (43:59) not a matter of public, objective, space-time fact but a product rather of the creative imagination (44:10) – an imaginative story which gives an understanding
of the world and of our existence in it. (44:17) And that, according to the scholars, is the special significance of myths. (44:23) It gives understanding of the world and our existence in it. (44:27) And the myth of the incarnation, say these men, was devised in order to try and spell out in terms (44:35) the sense of being transformed down to your roots which had come to Jesus’ first disciples in virtue of their contact with him (44:46) and, in the case the of their first converts, their knowledge about him.

(44:52) That word myth then is not intended to degrade Jesus in the mind of these men; it’s intended rather to point to the fact that New Testament theology is supremely concerned (45:05) with the impact that the figure of Jesus made on those first disciples and can make still. (45:13) And, say the authors, the New Testament still has some value because it continues to mediate that impact. (45:21) But if we ask the authors of The Myth what, really, the Jesus of history was, well they’d say different things. (45:31) John Hick, for instance, says that he was one of the many saving manifestations of the cosmic divine logos, (45:39) but, says Hick, what we must do with him is bracket him with the Buddha and other great religious teachers of history and now I quote him (45:50) – I don’t want you to think here that I’m doing anything but quote him, though the quotation may well take your breath away when you hear it – this is what he writes: “What we can not say is that all who are saved are saved by Jesus of Nazareth.” (46:07) So much for Acts 4 verse 12 then, which I quoted earlier: (46:12) “no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved”. (46:19) Maurice Wiles expounds the matter this way; he believes that the man Jesus still operates as the focal point of God’s mystical revelation to the soul, (46:33) God’s pressure on the soul, whereby He convinces us that He is there and that He has goodwill towards us and towards all men – (46:43) Maurice Wiles appears to be a kind of a deist and that’s all the doctrine of God that he really has (46:49) – but he believes that that sense of things is mediated through Jesus, and so he writes, again I quote... (46:56) [repeated section of recording:] God’s pressure on the soul, whereby He convinces us that He is there and that He has goodwill towards us and towards all men – (47:07) Maurice Wiles appears to be a kind of a deist and that’s all the doctrine of God that he really has (47:13) – but he believes that that sense of things is mediated through Jesus, and so he writes, again I quote: “The truth of God’s self-giving love and the role of Jesus in bringing that vision to life in the world (47:26) would remain even if the doctrine of the incarnation were abandoned”—as Wiles urges it should be. (47:37) So much then, I comment, for 1st John chapter 4 verse 10, where the apostle explains his statement “God is love” in these terms: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God [sic] loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (48:00) Apparently not, but still the message of God’s love comes through, according to Wiles. (48:07) The most robust thinkers in fact at this point in The Myth book are Don Cupitt and Dennis Nineham, (48:17) who seem to be saying that Jesus’ significance for us is like the significance of George Stephenson in the history of railways. (48:27) Jesus was the one who set it all going. (48:31) He set going the experience of God, which is transmitted by contact down the ages in the church. (48:39) But his significance apparently is only historical and for us who live in these latter days, not direct, (48:47) any more than a person designing a railway system today would go back to study George Stephenson before he allowed himself to decide how he was going to do it.
(49:00) Well, alright, I make those quotations not in order to guy their authors but simply to show you how this Christology works out (49:09) in terms of the question which we all of us want to ask: “What then is the importance of Jesus for us today?” (49:17) What should we say about this type of thinking, this humanitarian Christology? (49:25) I don’t want to question for one moment the sincerity or the erudition of its exponents, though I do think they are showing themselves rather obviously to be men of their time, (49:38) prepossessed by some fashionable modern prejudices, which have determined the way that they think. (49:45) However, I would point out to you, first, what surely is obvious to us all; I need not spend time on it: (49:54) this is a total destruction of apostolic Christianity, (50:02) for it leaves us with no saviour of the kind that the New Testament presents. (50:10) And, second, I would point out to you: this view appears to involve what one can only call an arbitrary disregard of evidence.

(50:21) On this I must spend a moment in order to make the point; it’s a point that has three branches.

(50:27) First, in this twentieth century, scholars such as James Denney, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, Oscar Coleman, (50:40) Professor Charles Moule, Professor A. M. Hunter, Professor F. F. Bruce, and many more have demonstrated (50:50)—in a way which seems to me very cogent indeed—that transcendent claims for Jesus, transcendent claims indeed made by Jesus (51:02) – that’s the phrase I should’ve used – transcendent claims made by Jesus for himself are there in the earliest synoptic material. (51:12) However early you go, by the use of accepted critical techniques in your analysis of material in the gospels, there, still, you find Jesus of Nazareth (51:23) claiming an allegiance which only God has a right to claim and claiming that allegiance on an exclusive basis as part of men’s service of God. (51:36) And, if you accept the hypothesis which seems to be gaining ground in these days that the gospel of John is early rather than late, well there is abundant more material of the same kind in John’s gospel (51:50) and the earlier … [unintelligible: is?] the date at which you put that gospel the harder it is to believe that none of this material is in the least authentic. (51:59) That’s evidence then. And that’s the first thing to say.

(52:02) And then a second point under this heading. (52:06) John Robinson’s book, Redating the New Testament, has made the point, not indeed that the whole New Testament was written before 70 AD (52:20)—that he cannot prove and does not suppose himself to have proved—(52:25) but that it is arbitrary and unnecessary to suppose that any of the books of the New Testament were written after 70 AD, (52:36) and so it is arbitrary to embrace any theory which presupposes a late date for any New Testament book as part of its foundation and which could not stand unless that late date were assumed. (52:52)

(52:55) If you are going to assume that Jesus has been so comprehensively misremembered—or shall I say forgotten—(53:05) and then reconstructed prior to the writing of the New Testament, as this humanitarian Christology assumes, (53:15) you have to allow much more than a generation for that process to happen. (53:23) And there simply isn’t time for it to happen prior to AD 70. (53:29) The proof of the fact that it couldn’t have happened before AD 70 is that here am I, a man of 52, quite well able to remember the Second World War, (53:41) which broke out in 1939. (53:44) Many of you I’m sure can remember it too. And
the time interval is exactly the same, (53:51) just under 40 years. (53:53) (53:56) This it seems to me is a point which tells very strongly against the humanitarian Christology.

(54:03) And then there's a third point too. (54:06) New Testament Christianity from the historical standpoint is simply inexplicable (54:14) save on the basis that there was an empty tomb and there were appearances of the risen Lord and men did know his personal presence with them in those early days. (54:29) It's a rule of historical thinking that you must posit a cause adequate to the effect. (54:36) The effect that you're seeking to explain here is lives transformed and men willing to live and die in order to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus. (54:47) It seems to be unsound historical reasoning to suppose that any cause could have produced that effect save an empty tomb, resurrection appearances, (54:59) and the sense of Jesus' presence through the outpouring of the Spirit which in fact the narrative of Acts says was the thing that was there at the start. (55:14) On the principles of humanitarian Christology, however, there was no physical resurrection (55:22)—any resurrection appearances that men thought they saw were hallucinatory, have to be—(55:31) and where the sense of Jesus' presence came from is anybody's guess. (55:38) It is a rather forlorn hypothesis, don't you agree, on which to explain the revolutionary, transforming dynamic effect of early Christianity. (55:50)

(55:53) So I think we do not surrender our intellectual integrity by being deeply sceptical of the scepticism of the humanitarian Christologists, (56:06) and that leads me briefly to the last thing that I want to say tonight. (56:11) Just a quick word about the presentation of the humanity of Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews (56:19) which I want you to contrast with the presentation of the man Christ Jesus in the humanitarian Christology. (56:28) How does Hebrews set forth the man Christ Jesus? Why, like this: (56:36) By affirming two propositions. First, that the preexistent Son of God took flesh and blood and became man, (56:47) and that this is the real secret of the identity of Jesus—this is who he is. (56:54) And, second, that the purpose of the Son of God in taking flesh and blood was to save his brethren. (57:03) In other words, the letter to the Hebrews affirms incarnation—and incarnation as a means of saving ministry.

(57:13) In the first two chapters, incarnation is affirmed: (57:20) “God brought his first begotten into the world”, says the writer in chapter 1 verse 6, (57:28) and in chapter 2 he quotes Psalm 8—“What is man that thou art mindful of him?”—and having quoted Psalm 8 (57:38) he then goes on to see now we don't as yet see all things made subject to any man, but we do see Jesus. (57:47) How does Jesus come in? Why, Jesus comes in as the man in whom this pattern of dominion is fulfilled archetypally through his saving ministry. (57:59) We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

(58:12) We read in the book further. Who was this Jesus? Why, he was as we've seen the Son of God, (58:20) who took to himself human flesh and blood in order that he might draw men to himself and bring them to glory as his own brethren, (58:32) sons of God in the family in which he is the elder brother. (58:36) And, it says in verse 14: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy death” (58:48) (58:51) – sorry – “that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.” (59:04) The Son of God took to himself flesh and blood, and did so in
order to save. (59:10) You don't need me to remind you how the letter to the Hebrews goes on to spell out his saving ministry in terms of high-priesthood, (59:19) and to spell out the nature of high-priesthood in terms of the godward ministry of offering sacrifice (59:26)—he, the high priest, offered himself—and in terms of the manward ministry of help, sympathy, guidance, and support—grace to help in time of need. (59:41) You don't need me to remind you how the epistle to the Hebrews sets before us our one high priest on high, his atoning work done, (59:50) now ever living to make intercession for us and able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, (59:59) just because, having been tempted, he's able to help them that are tempted and, through his intercession, to secure for us grace to help in time of need. (1:00:12) This is the presentation of the man Christ Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews: he is the Son of God made flesh; (1:00:20) he took to himself flesh and blood, in order to be our great high priest, in order to save. (1:00:28) Were there no incarnation, according to Hebrews, there would be no mediation and no salvation either. (1:00:35) (1:00:39) So indeed there is no [other] name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

(1:00:46) Let me sum it up quickly like this: (1:00:49) First, to review what we've said, the gospel set forth in the New Testament, as a whole presents the historical figure of Jesus as the divine saviour. (1:01:04) "We preach Christ crucified", says Paul—this is history—and the Christ who was crucified is the Son of God. (1:01:15) We have looked at the humanitarian Christology, which views Jesus as simply a man indwelt by God—which, as I said, reduces incarnation to the indwelling of the Spirit—(1:01:29) and we have seen that it leaves us with no gospel at all, no gospel, at least, that is recognisable as a gospel by New Testament standards. (1:01:39) We have also suggested that the humanitarian Christology is unreasonable as well as being unevangelical and, in every sense, unchristian. (1:01:53) We are left where the New Testament leaves us with the conviction that in stating the gospel (1:02:02) it is right and necessary to shine the Christology of the epistles as our light, our lamp, to illuminate the man, the figure, (1:02:14) Jesus of Nazareth, who walks through the gospel story. (1:02:19) This Christology—this declaration of the Son of God made man—shows us who that Jesus is, explains everything about him (1:02:29)—he indeed made the claim but the Christology of the whole New Testament spells it out—and, as we see that figure illuminated by this declaration of who and what he is, (1:02:42) so we shall find again and again, as Christians before us have found, that he steps out of the pages of the gospels and becomes the living Christ, the living saviour, (1:02:52) whom we know and whom we love and whom we acknowledge as our friend because he has come to us and made himself known to us, and we worship him and we love him. (1:03:07) He is our God, he is our brother, he is our master, he is our Lord. (1:03:14) The one true Christ of New Testament witness. (1:03:18)

(1:03:21) Well it is for us, if by God's grace we have known this in our own lives and are able with the centurion at the cross—perhaps with more understanding than the centurion at the cross—to say: (1:03:37) "Truly, this man was and is the Son of God." (1:03:44)