

## I. Intro

A. In 1983, right around the time that Alan Bloom came out with his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, E.D. Hirsch, a professor at the University of Virginia, published a book titled, *Cultural Literacy*. The premise was that our ability to communicate was being compromised by the decline of a shared understanding of life and history. The premise was that we need a common pool of knowledge because, we make allusions to things and if people do not share this common knowledge base, people miss the allusions and communication breaks down.

B. If you remember this discussion it may be because it depressed you. Either you heard – only 17% of high school seniors know that Canada is the country to our north.” And you think, “Oh no. We’re sunk.” And you got depressed.”

C. Or you heard, “Only 82 percent of 11-year-olds know who the 3<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister of Malaysia was.” And you think, “Eighty-two percent of third graders know who the third Prime Minister was? I don’t know that. Oh no. I’m sunk.” And you got depressed.

D. Hirsch argued that we need to share a base-line understanding about life and history or things start to break down. I agree. I’ve been in vocational ministry for over three decades, and throughout that time there has been a consistent decline in biblical literacy – and it has led to loss.

E. When I started as a college pastor, we used to train people in how to study the Bible and how to lead small groups, and send them out to lead them in the dorms. Then we realized that we needed to monitor what they were teaching more closely. Then a few years later we made sure everyone was studying the same passage so we could help them prepare. They we started to prepare the studies for them and give them questions to ask. They we realized that we needed to also give them answers to the questions. I remember sharing this with the leader of a major Christian book publishing house and he said, “we have had to dumb down and idiot proof everything we are publishing.”

F. And as I have said before, I could not get away with preaching sermons from the 1700s that were preached in this country because, as a rule, those “uneducated farmers” knew their Bibles much better than we do today.”

G. And that causes problems with things like Lessons and Carols, which was crafted 100 years ago and assumes people see the connections. In fact, I suspect that most people do not even know enough to realize that they are missing things.

## II. This series – And He Shall Be Called – is designed to unpack some of the names and titles of Jesus so that we more fully appreciate the Christmas story.

A. In the first week I noted that there were names and titles that everyone knew for Jesus – i.e., Jesus, the Christ, Son of God, Savior; a middle level of titles, such as: Son of Man, Logos, Lion of Judah and Lamb of God; and then a number of obscure titles, such as: first born from the dead, the second Adam or the Seed of Woman – and that in their own way each of them helps pull things together. I then gave an overview of the Christmas, drilling down on t Philippians 2 and the Incarnation, which is captured in the title Immanuel – which means God with us.

B. Last week we were in John 6 with the idea that Jesus was the Bread of Life.

C. This week I want to comment on three uncommon references to Jesus that go largely unappreciated.

III. My hope – the prayer, the goal – is that a greater understanding of the titles and the story will do two things.

A. First, it will lead to wonder that will in turn lead to worship.

1. For some time, I have been suggesting that a starting point for following Christ is 10 & 10 – ten minutes of Bible reading every day and ten minutes of prayer. That is a concession. I want more, but I have said, God’s Word will change you, but not if it sits on the shelf. You can spare twenty minutes.

2. We need to get to some sort of tipping point. Either our inner world is shaping our outer world, or the opposite is happening. My hope has been that the word of God will pull you in and as it does you do more. I’ve seen it happen.

3. A few years ago some parents came to me and said their son had just left his corporate job to head to Africa to lead a hospital in the bush as part of a mission outpost. And they said, “this all started when he started reading the Bible for ten minutes a day.”

a) At that point I was a bit worried that I was going to be implicated, which reminds me of a Will Willimon story from years ago. “Can you leave me out of this?”

4. But that is the hope. Ten minutes will pull you in and lead to more. A greater awareness of the story will lead to more wonder and wonder leads to more worship – which isn’t supposed to be something we manufacture, but that happens, and more worship leads to greater transformation.

5. But all of that hinges on seeing things that are there.

B. The second hope for this series is that it will provide greater confidence in the Bible. During the Explore God series coming up, we’ll take a look at the question: can I really trust this Book? The answer is yes, and we’ll look directly at that question. There are historical and bibliographic reasons to say yes. But as an aside, one of the ways we come to trust it is to read it and we see how well it holds together and we realize, “I’m not just reading this book, it’s reading me.” It’s unlike any other book.

C. So the goal in this series is that by looking at some of the names and titles of Jesus – and today we will look at three – we grow in our awe (which leads to worship) and we gain confidence in the Book.

IV. Title One: The Seed of Woman

A. Genesis 3 records the fall of man and subsequent curse.

1. In Genesis 1 & 2 everything is good. In Genesis three the wheels fall off. Sin, evil, death and chaos are introduced. It is here where the punishment is given and explained.

2. Thankfully it’s not all bad news – because God makes a promise to send help. And in Genesis 3:15 that help is called, “the seed of woman.” Or, in some modern translations, it simply comes out as a statement to Eve, “your offspring.”

3. In the Hebrew, the term is *spermotos*, which is quite odd. I'm not going to turn this into a biology 101 talk, but females have eggs and males have sperm. The phrase "sperm of woman" is odd. And at this point, if this is all you have, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

B. But you file it away and keep reading. And in Isaiah 7:14 it jumps out when the prophet, who is offering reassurance to the Jews that God will win, says, 'this will be a sign, a virgin will conceive.' A virgin will conceive – hmm, that doesn't make any sense. That sounds as odd as sperm of woman. Wait a minute, these must be connected. You still do not guess Virgin Birth, but when you get to Luke 2 and the Angel tells Mary, "Greetings highly favored one. You are going to give birth to the promised Messiah." And she says, "how can this be since I am a virgin?" You realize how everything is tied together.

C. Now in the margin let me note that this prophecy is undermined by some. The Hebrew word used in Isaiah 7:14 is *almah*, and some say: this term doesn't mean virgin it means "young woman." OK, yeah, sometimes that's true. Just as it's sometimes true in English. You might use the term virgin to indicate you are talking about young girls. But not very often. And not very often in Hebrew either.

D. Hey, if you translate the word *almah* as young woman: 1) the prophecy doesn't make any sense. Isaiah says, here is a sign that God is going to come through. You'll know everything is coming together when a young woman has a child. Hmm, it seems like that happens all the time; 2) this misses the obvious point that we have other supernatural births foreshadowing this one (Abraham and Sarah having Isaac when they were way too old for it to happen; Zechariah and Elizabeth having John the Baptist when they were way too old for it to happen); 3) and it misses the whole point of the Virgin birth.

1. There are some who try to dismiss the virgin birth as something that was created because, well, sex is a bit, scandalous. It's not very proper or religious.

2. That argument can only be made by people who have not read the book. Who are not familiar with the fact that there is a lot about sex in here – and the message is that it's good gift from God who thought it up and designed all the parts.

3. Yes, it comes with warnings. It can get out of hand. It's fragile, therefore it needs to be channeled. It needs to be reserved for a context of one man and one woman who are committed to each other for a lifetime.

4. If you read the Bible you find that God is not bashful in talking about sex. In the context of marriage it is not only celebrated, but He makes all of these suggestions that the union between a husband and wife is a metaphor of the union between Christ and his bride – the church. And that marital intimacy has spiritual connotations.

5. He further uses some pretty powerful metaphors to describe how worshipping someone other than him is adultery. This is the point made in the book of Hosea. It's a point driven home by passages like Jeremiah 2.

E. Men and women, the Virgin Birth - which is technically more of a virgin conception - is all about by-passing the curse that has fallen on everyone back in Gen 3. The point is, you and I are broken. We are fallen. We start that way. We're not called sinners because we sin. The point made in Genesis 3 is that from this point on we will sin because we are sinners.

F. It is going to take someone from outside the sin-infected system to save us. Someone whose blood line is not polluted to rescue us.

V. A second term is logos

A. John's Gospel opens "In the beginning was the word (logos), and the Word was with God and the Word (logos) was God."

B. To appreciate the power of what John is saying – his introduction of Christ and the incarnation itself, you need to appreciate the context.

C. John is writing for Greeks. Matthew opens his Gospel with a genealogy because he is writing for Jews. They need to see how Jesus is connected all the way back to Abraham – how he stands in the lineage of David. Each Gospel has a different approach because, although they are telling the same story, they are telling it to different readers.

D. John is writing to Greek philosophers who have given up on ever finding the purpose for human kind. Greek philosophy starts back around 3,000 BC and one of the underlying themes throughout all it's jigs and jogs is trying to figure out mankind's purpose.

E. They argued that when you looked at a bowl its design showed you what it was for. If you looked at a space heater you figure out what it was made for. The Greeks believed that the universe has a purpose, a design – a logos - and a thing needs to line up with its purpose. That's true for a bowl and a space heater and you and me. Our lives must be in alignment with the logos if we want our lives to go well. Figure out the logos and align with it.

F. But people couldn't agree on what it was and so they had largely given up. The stoics believed that you should just accept whatever happens with a stiff upper lip. The Epicureans said "find what makes you happy and do it." The point is, there was no agreement and they had given up on finding one.

G. Then John shakes up all of that by opening his Gospel by saying Jesus is the logos. This means: there is a purpose, and it also means, the logos itself isn't an abstraction or a list of rules but a person.

1. This changes everything. It means there is a plan and our lives can have purpose. The idea that purpose is personal is what is going to lead to the value of human beings and human rights.<sup>1</sup>

2. If you believe that the meaning of life, the reason for life is an abstract principle, you have to be smart or scientific or strong or brilliant or self-controlled, how elitist is that! There is a meaning to life to do so you need to have a relationship with a person. It changed human thought but swept the old Roman empire. Christianity will always have a higher regard for persons.

VI. There are so many more

A. The Second Adam

1. Adam is one of the better-known characters in the Bible. Even those with no religious background know who he is. Along with Jesus and Moses, Adam is one of the few biblical characters familiar to everyone. And apart from God, he is the central character in the opening chapters of Genesis.

2. It is worth noting that he doesn't really factor into the Old Testament. After Genesis 5 he is only mentioned once in the rest of the Old Testament. And he plays no significant part in the history or theology of Israel.

3. The Jews refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the three patriarchs of the Israelites, not the God of Adam.

4. This changes with the letters of Paul in the New Testament. In spite of being a descendent of Abraham himself, Paul builds his theology on Adam. As he argues that Jesus is a savior for everyone – not just the Jews – he starts referring to Jesus as the Second Adam, the new Adam.

5. This title makes it clear that Jesus is a representative for all of humanity. For Paul's Jewish audience this would have been remarkable and even scandalous. For his gentile readers it would have been surprising and dignifying.

6. And for anyone bothering to pay attention, we then understand that Jesus is not just our representative but also that he perfectly fulfills all of the things Adam failed to do.

B. Another title of Jesus is the Temple.

1. We just get allusions to this – such as in Heb. 9 and in his comments to the Jews in John 2, when he says: destroy this temple and in three days I'll rebuild it.

2. They thought he was talking about the Second Temple – which Herod was rebuilding and had had 10,000 builders working on for forty years. Jesus was talking about his body. The Temple was the spot on earth where God and Man met. Well, the Temple building was no longer that place. He was now that place – he was the intersection. He was the God Man.

C. Another title is Son of Man. It sounds humble. We are more taken by the title "Son of God." That sounds like a bigger claim until you read the reference, found in Daniel 7. It reads: In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

D. I could keep going. The story is layered and the more we dig the more amazed we come.

VII. I am going to end by thinking about Christ's claim to be the Good Shepherd.

A. In John 10 we read: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- B. As you might know, there are a number of pastoral themes in the New Testament.
1. Most notably, John calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. All of which dovetails with the Passover
  2. He dies like the Passover lambs are slain. He enters Jerusalem at the time of the Passover and if you look at the instructions the Jews held to about how to kill the Passover lamb, you realize that Jesus is killed in very much the same way.
  3. And of course he plays into all of that when he changes the Passover Meal into Holy Communion by substituting himself for the lamb.
    - a) This bread is my body
    - b) This cup represents the new covenant in my blood.
- C. I believe that if the story was playing out today that Jesus would be contextualized in different ways. But it unfolds as it does because it takes place – not by accident but by design – in a very specific context and setting. And that is among a community with lots of sheep and shepherds.
- D. What did it mean to them that Jesus was claiming to be the Good Shepherd? It means you are cared for! Loved.
1. Centuries before Jesus’ birth, Jeremiah noted that the people of Judah were afraid – that they had no peace, no security, no rest, and no joy. And he said the reason for their despair was Judah’s bad shepherds. Rather than providing peace and protection, the leaders responsible for God’s people had abused their authority by seeking their own welfare rather than the welfare of those under their care.
- E. It’s quite an illustration because:
1. it means we are sheep, and sheep are, well, not who you want to be. They are not very bright and largely defenseless. They are very dependent on their shepherd. Good shepherd – good life. Bad shepherd, bad life;
  2. it means the people were looking for a Good Shepherd and so when Jesus described himself in this way, it was one of his many claims to be who they were waiting for.
  3. It suggests a level of care we can only begin to comprehend. Today everyone wants to be free. Well, sheep want to be free but you don’t describe a sheep that is free as free, you describe it as lost. Or dead. Because that is what will happen.
  4. What sheep need most – what we need most – is not freedom, it’s unconditional love. And that is what we get from the Good Shepherd.
- F. Let me reread John 10 for you. This is Jesus talking to you. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

VIII. Men and women, the story is better than we know. And the more we look the better it becomes.

IX. Jesus is Son of God, Savior of the World, He is the Seed of Woman, the Logos, the Second Adam, the Son of Man, the Temple, The Good Shepherd. He is the way forward.

X. Some of you are running scared. You need to reflect on the goodness and the promises of the Good Shepherd – who laid down his life for you and who goes to prepare a place for us.

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<sup>1</sup> “It is quite clear that, in this Christian re-evaluation of the human person, of the individual as such, the philosophy of human rights to which we subscribe today would never have established itself. It is essential therefore that we have a more or less accurate idea of the chain of reasoning which led Christianity to break so radically with the Stoic past. And to have such an understanding, we must first grasp that in the vernacular translations of the Gospels which narrate the life of Jesus, the term Logos – borrowed directly from the Stoics – is translated by ‘word’. For Greek thought in general, and for Stoicism in particular, the idea that the Logos could designate anything other than the rational (therefore true, therefore beautiful) order of the universe was unthinkable. In their eyes, to claim that a mere mortal could constitute the Logos, or ‘the word incarnate’, as the Gospels express it, was insanity. It was to assign the attribute of divinity to a mere human being, whereas the divine, as you will recall, is interchangeable with the universal cosmic order, and can in no sense be identified with a single puny individual, whatever his credentials.” Ferry, Luc (2011-12-27). *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living* (pp. 60-61). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.