

## **“The Substance of the Matter” – Pr Sprengle – Transfiguration Sunday February 19, 2023**

- I. **Matthew 17:2** – <sup>2</sup> And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.
- II. **The future of Christianity was at stake...**
  - a. Christians and Christianity had gone from an underground, persecuted group to being the main religion of the Roman Empire when Constantine became a Christian as the Roman Emperor.
    - i. It seemed that all was going great for Christianity...
  - b. However, a little more than 300 years after Jesus was born, a priest from Alexandria in North Africa began teaching that Jesus was not equal to God the Father, but a created being... That Jesus was subordinate to the Father.
    - i. He cited several Scripture references to back up his teachings, and soon, Arius the priest had started what's known as the Arian Controversy.
    - ii. In the year 318 AD, Arius was reprimanded by the Bishop of Alexandria for false teaching about Jesus, but it had already spread to much of the Roman Empire by that time.
  - c. It all seemed like a small detail to some... was Jesus God who came in the flesh, or was He a creation of God the Father and not the one true God?
    - i. For over 50 years, theologians from all over the modern world gathered in meetings, studied, and wrote to defend the deity of Christ... or take the side of Arius and see Christ as a created being.
  - d. The Council of Nicaea was assembled in 325 AD to write up a statement or a creed of the Christian understanding of God, but it wasn't confirmed until 381 AD – what we still profess today, the Nicene Creed.
    - i. A major component of that creed is saying that Jesus is the “same substance as the Father” – a way of saying that yes, the Father sent Jesus, begetting Him through Mary, but the substance of the Father and of Jesus are the same.... As Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)
    - ii. As the Nicene Creed states that Jesus is “very God of very God, begotten, not made (not created), being of one substance with the Father.”
  - e. Arianism was a false teaching, or a heresy, that led many people astray from the one true God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... and thank God for the leaders of that day who stood firm in the Word and its truth.
    - i. Some would say that the Arian Controversy ended at that point –
    - ii. However, we still see the effects of Arianism in modern religions as people who follow the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormonism do not

profess that Jesus is God, but is subordinate to the Father and a type of divine being... much like an angel.

- iii. They like to play on words and say that Jesus is divine, but not equal to the Father.... That Jesus is the Son of God, so He must be less than or created.
- f. I read a survey in Christianity Today that asked evangelical Christians to agree or disagree with some questions about Jesus...
  - i. "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God."
    - 1. 73% agreed
  - ii. "Jesus is not God, just a great teacher."
    - 1. 43% agreed
  - iii. Remember, these are supposedly evangelical Christians who believe the Bible and have a strong faith in God – and 73% are Arians! <sup>1</sup>
- g. This is the question for all of us – and all people in our world today – “Who is Jesus?”
  - i. I hope that each of you can clearly say that He is God who came to us in the flesh – He is God equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit... and most of all, my Savior who died and rose for me.

- III. **Jesus has taken a hike with Peter, James, and John** in our Gospel lesson.
- a. They climbed to up a high mountain, and it reminds us of Mt. Sinai centuries before – as God came down in power and glory through a cloud.
  - b. As a cloud descends on this mountain, Jesus transfigures... changes dramatically... and becomes bright white.
    - i. Perhaps Peter or the others wondered whether Jesus’ actions and claims were true – but this was a miraculous display of Jesus’ divine nature – along with the presence of Moses, Elijah, and the words from the Father as well.
    - ii. Moses the one who brought the Law from Mt Sinai, and Elijah the great prophet were representing the Law and Prophets – while God the Father says (like at Jesus’ baptism) “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased...” but then adds... “listen to Him.” (vs 5)
  - c. Listen carefully to the Word, or as the Gospel of John chapter 1 verses 1 and 14 say, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**... 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.”
    - i. Do you think that John might have been referring to the time he was up on the mountain with Jesus, and he’s an eyewitness to this glory?
    - ii. But let’s just say that John gets it right by saying that Jesus, the Word, is God – just as He shows Peter, James and John in our reading today.

IV. **What's the big deal whether we get everything right anyway?**

- a. Sure, some people will wonder why we spend so much time talking about substance and glory and deity and all these theological words...
- b. I try to explain this to our Confirmation kids regularly... if you don't know who God is, then you may be tricked into believing what He is not.
  - i. Not long ago, my daughter was commenting on a thread about some Christian topic when a commentor started to twist Scripture and who Jesus is – fortunately she had me to help her get it straightened out.
    - 1. This man happened to be a Jehovah's Witness, and I suppose he hangs out in these places and tries to get people to believe their teachings – which are a different form of the old heresy of Arianism.
    - 2. I sent my daughter 2-3 pages of Bible verses and explanations of where the Bible says Jesus is God – along with why He looked to the Father throughout His earthly life...
      - a. I'm happy to provide you all with them – just ask me.

c. So, as we stand here today, can you confidently explain who Jesus is?

V. **Jesus is God... and man... sent by the Father to redeem all people.**

- a. Unfortunately, all people don't come to believe in Jesus, which is the only way we receive the gifts of grace and forgiveness won by Him.
- b. As we were brought to faith by the Holy Spirit – all the gifts of God become ours... including how we see Jesus as our Savior.
- c. You see, Jesus did all these things that might seem He was less than God – praying to the Father, being baptized, suffering, and dying... not because He needed it... it was because WE needed it... Christ took on our humanity, and Christ needed to live a perfect human life for our sake.
  - i. Again, Jesus had to be the perfect man that Adam failed to be so that He could die as the Lamb without any defects – as a sacrifice
  - ii. But no human being could ever pay for the sins of all humanity... past, present, and future.... For that, Jesus had to be God.
- d. You are saved by God's grace through faith in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.
  - i. It's a mystery to be sure, but our God is one... one substance in three Persons.
  - ii. The mystery is good though – because if we could figure it all out He wouldn't be God anymore...
- e. I want to leave you with the image of Jesus shining brightly in a white robe...
  - i. That is your destiny as a baptized child of God – with His righteousness draped over you and all your sins forgiven.
  - ii. God became one of us, conceived, born, suffered, crucified, died and was buried – to gather up our sins pay our debt.

- iii. Yet, death and grave was not the end, because our God rose again – ascended, and reigns over heaven and earth, awaiting to come again in glory.
- iv. All this is yours – believe it... listen to the Word... listen to the substance of the matter. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/september-web-only/state-of-theology-evangelical-heresy-report-ligonier-survey.html>