

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>7</sup> In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And having been perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:7-10 (ESV)

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1995 the Canadian singer Joan Osborne had a big hit with the song “What if God was one of us?” Osborne herself, at the time of the release of this song, did not profess a faith in the Triune God. Although of Catholic background, she described her faith along the line of Buddhism. Since that time she has admitted to attending Christian churches (particularly since the birth of her daughter).

Part of Osborne’s song says, “If God had a name, what would it be? And would you call it to his face if you were faced with him in all his glory? What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus, trying to make his way home? And if God had a face what would it look like? And would you want to see if seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?”

Very often in sermons we like to speak about how God *is* one of us, and what that means for us. But, what if God was not one of us? What would that mean?

There are those who say that any belief in a ‘God’ is a ‘human construct’. It is something a ‘primitive person’ with ‘simplistic beliefs’ hangs on to. What if such people are right, and this life is all there is? I have a question then, why bother to be ‘good’ then? Why go to work? Why care for others? What’s our purpose for living?

Furthermore, in the face of the suffering we see in this world, is there any ‘answer’? Is there any hope? Is it all part of some ‘evolutionary process? And, if so, why can a person not participate in some form of ‘self-advancement’ at the expense of others?

Yes, we people may try to ‘do good’ to help make a ‘better world’, but why? And what would be a moral reference point for ‘doing good’ anyway? And, is this universe, this ‘reality’, all there is?

Previously I have shown a diagram comparing a belief in evolution to a belief in creation. Leaving aside the whole flow chart, the bottom line is this: if you believe there is not ‘God, and that creation was an ‘accident’, then humankind’s purpose is ‘none, there is no hope for eternity, you may as well live for today, because life is ultimately meaningless. If, however, there is a ‘God’, then life

has divine purpose, life has meaning, we ought to prepare for eternity, and seek God's communication.

What if God was one of us? This is the heart of the Christian Faith

In the Book of Hebrews we have a letter written to a group of people struggling to stick to a certain set of values and truth. The plight of the hearers is that they are having great difficulty holding to their convictions. And the convictions they are struggling to hold on to has not to do with God's Law (not that there weren't struggles here. Some were struggling with issues of morality. Others were struggling with the old ritual 'laws'.) But the real issue was simply holding on to the truth of Jesus – who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for all people. This is the conflict that exists in our world today.

To some people the person of Jesus seems to be a 'far off' character. He is the person of story and myth and legend. He's the great 'hero' for some people. But He is seen as not being really 'real'. It may be OK for some to 'believe in Him', but this 'belief' is relegated to the sphere of private experience. Therefore, Jesus is seen as having no real 'value' in any understanding what is really 'valuable' and 'true'.

In this context various strands of Christianity have essentially conformed to this underlying philosophy. Jesus becomes real when you believe in Him, it is said. But if it is your *experience* of Jesus that makes Jesus 'real', then whether Jesus is 'real' or not is really quite irrelevant. The end result of all this is that we will end up with a privatised form of Christianity that has nothing to say that is of 'value' to the world.

There are people today who stay away from 'church'. And they say that the whole issue of 'faith is a 'private' thing. But that is rubbish. Faith may be personal, but it's never 'private'.

Your faith will determine the way you vote. Your faith will determine what stories you tell your children. Your faith will shape this world. And by your words and deeds you point to what is really 'true' in your life.

On Dietrich Bonhoeffer's altar in his prison concentration camp there was a single word *hapax* (once). This word was used to assert the absolute significance of Jesus. In the midst of a concentration camp this word staked a claim. It said that all of reality was changed in the moment of Christ's death. The absolute occurred in time and space. All the rest of human history is made relative to that event. This world is God's, and the cross has now brought a new 'reality' to all of life.

The writer to the Hebrews says this: that God has been at work in our world in the person of Jesus. The writer to Hebrew people says this '*that in the days of His flesh* Jesus offered up prayers and supplications'. The writer to the Hebrews also says, "Although He was a Son, he learned obedience through what He suffered." (5:8). In other words, Jesus is God at work in this world, and

He is one with humanity in all its suffering, sickness, sin and death. And this is a claim that no other religion or philosophy will make...

Significant in this text from Hebrews is the phrase, "Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

What does it mean 'to obey Him'. Sometimes we may think of 'obedience' like a caring father or mother who disciplines their children. The aim is to teach (and follow a path) of 'right' (not 'wrong') in life, motivated by love from the heart (of both parent and child). Some, however, think of 'the Law' and think of the obedience of some army sergeant who requires absolute obedience (from 'duty' and 'law').

But the 'obedience' here of Christ was not only to the 'moral law' (thereby fulfilling its demands). Nor was His 'obedience' to the sacrificial law (thereby doing away with our need to offer any animal sacrifices). The 'obedience' of Christ was simply to trust in the Father as our God who is real, and the God who truly cares.

Christian faith is never a subjective thing of 'hope and pray'. Instead, it is about a real hope in a real person. And our 'obedience of faith' is our unwavering trust in Him who has been, and is, 'priest' for us all.

What if God was one of us? There reference to Melchizedek (whose name means 'The righteous king' or 'The King of Righteousness') indicates something 'new' has come to us in Jesus.

All other priests in Jesus' time were born into the priesthood. They belonged to the tribe of Levi. But Melchizedek was divinely appointed. He was the one who brought bread and wine to Abram and blessed him on his journey. A 'priest' was someone who interceded between people and 'God'. Jesus is our great 'High Priest' because He was a flesh and blood person. For us today this point is very important. Because Jesus was here on this earth in a human body He understands everything we go through. Jesus experienced feelings, hurts, weaknesses and temptations. He knows what it is to suffer, to hurt, to be rejected, ridiculed and mocked. And He is the kind of high priest we need because He is holy, unstained by sin.

What if God was one of us...?

Knowing Jesus as The great High Priest has an incredible impact on your relationship with people who share life with you. Jesus suffered on the cross to bring the *gift of forgiveness*. Isn't free forgiveness something everyone needs?

Knowing Jesus also has an incredible impact on your relationship with yourself. We have forgiveness in Jesus and so can be honest within ourselves.

Knowing Jesus means we know there is a gift of eternal life. We also need life in death. Jesus went through death to give the gift of life.

And, of course, knowing Jesus has an incredible impact on your relationship with God. We can actually know God. And in this case, you're not the one upon whom the responsibility lies for 'knowing' God. Rather, it is through Jesus that you and I can have a relationship with God.

"Having been perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him". Who is Jesus? To many, the story of Jesus might seem quite sad, and quite trivial.: a travelling Jewish teacher, unpopular with the religious establishment, who is put to death by the government. He taught the world to be nice, and to this day, we are all trying to be nice. But there is much more!

When you realize to what extent Jesus submitted to the Heavenly Father, when you realize that He is the source of eternal salvation – that changes everything. It changed the lives of 11 men – His disciples, from doubting cowards to courageous witnesses. May His life and death and resurrection – all these things that happened for you – change your life as well. Amen