

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 27**

**CHRIST'S WITNESS TO HIS INCARNATION**

*And the Word became flesh*

*John 1.14*

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven...  
And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*

*John 6.51*

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, we have two accounts of the virgin birth of Jesus. In these Gospels, however, we do not read of Jesus speaking of his unique birth. Rather than explaining his birth, he presented himself through his mission by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and engaging people with him through the miracles he performed. We find the same in the Gospel of John. John begins his Gospel with the eternal deity of the Word and his incarnation. Jesus, however, did not talk about the mysterious event of incarnation. Rather, he simply spoke of his mission: he was sent by the Father and came down from heaven. Rather than explaining how he came into the world, he presented his role as both the divine Son and the human being. The apostles continued along this line. They did not explain the incarnation in their proclamation of the gospel. They proclaimed how God's work in salvation was carried out by Jesus. Later, when they opened this message up, they pointed out the fact and reality of the incarnation of the Son of God. The apostles moved from the saving mission of Christ to what lay behind it—the incarnation. In our study of the doctrine of the incarnation, we must follow this order.

**A. PRESENTING THE TWO SIDES OF THE INCARNATION**

Each of the four Gospels presents the reality of this incarnate person. Matthew introduces him as Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1.23). Mark states the subject of his Gospel as "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1.1), and traces the path by which people discovered that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the divine Son of God. Luke introduces the mystery of his person through Gabriel's word to Mary that the child conceived by the Spirit in the virgin's womb will be called holy and be the Son of God (Lk 1.35). In each of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is introduced to his public ministry by God's declaration at his baptism that he is the Son of God, and in each we read that Jesus ended his public ministry by pressing the paradox of the Messiah—that David's son is David's Lord and, by implication, the Son of God (Matt 22.41-45; Mk 12.35-37; Lk 20.41-44). In each of these Gospels, Jesus was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin for testifying that he was the Son of God, which was seen as blasphemy. The joint testimony of Matthew, Mark and Luke is that the whole life of Jesus presented the incarnate person of Christ.

The Synoptic Gospels present the public ministry of Jesus Christ in Galilee and his passion and resurrection in Jerusalem. In these accounts, the facts of his incarnate person are acted out and presented on the public stage. The Gospel of John stands apart in that it does not present an overview of Jesus' public career. Rather, it presents a selection of episodes in which Jesus engaged the Jews. In this Gospel, we have the stormy dialogues between Jesus and the Jews on the subject of who Jesus was. John 5 and 6 present the two sides of his incarnate person: his deity and humanity.

**1. Sign and word**

John 5 and 6 follow the same pattern of sign and dialogue. In John 5 Jesus heals a lame man, and in chapter 6 he feeds the multitude. The narrative of the sign is followed up with a discourse in which Jesus discloses who he is. In chapter 5, Jesus presents himself in his deity, and in chapter 6 he presents himself in his humanity.

In the Gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus are called signs. We are not to take the word, sign, as a synonym for miracle. By using the word, sign, John is pointing out the function of the miracle. The miracle did not simply have a value in itself for the good done to human beings. It was a temporal event in the visible and physical realm that pointed to the great and eternal realities in the invisible and spiritual realm. The miracles that Jesus performed pointed to his person and work in giving eternal life. John sums up the point of his Gospel at the close of his account when he says that the signs were written down "...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20.31).

In the discourses of John 5 and 6, Jesus takes up the theme of the sign he performed and moved to the theme of who he is and his work in giving eternal life. This movement from the deed to the word of Christ is significant for our study of the incarnation. Jesus never attempted to teach or explain his person abstractly. In fact, such an attempt would be wholly futile and even misleading. Words need a context in which they are understood and the world as we know it does not provide the context for the person of Christ. The Jews insisted on understanding Jesus within the parameters of this world, and they only misunderstood Jesus.

Jesus performed his signs to present before the Jews something they could see. The miracle was a real event in the world, but it did not fit into the normal order of the world. In one sense, all miracles are out of the normal order, but Jesus' miracles were different. In the OT, God was in heaven and the miracle worker was a man on earth. He was a prophet. The Jews followed in this way of looking at things. They accepted the fact of Jesus' miracles and concluded that he was a prophet. They even went slightly further. They saw that Jesus' miracles were extraordinary and so concluded that he was one of the prophets come back to earth. The extraordinary status they ascribed to Jesus, however, was within the parameters of creation: Jesus was a mere man, though a special case. Jesus, however, never let the Jews have it their way. He built into his miracles the indicators that he was not acting as a mere man but as God. In certain miracles, he put the issue up front, but in all of his miracles his deity is implicit in that he did not call people to have faith in God in heaven but focused faith on himself. The Jews were blind to this and just assumed that the faith was in God and not in the man, Jesus.

The miracle in John 5 was one of those signs which pressed the issue of Christ's deity. Jesus did not work this miracle under the Law given to man. When challenged for transgressing the bounds imposed on human labour, he announced that he worked alongside God. The miracle was a sign to present in concrete reality the unique person of Christ. The normal order of creation could not provide the context in which Jesus' deity was seen. It could only be a backdrop against which the sign could be seen pointing above and beyond the created order.

The point we are pressing is important for our study. We are not to present the person of Christ within the universal and natural order of this world. This would be an attempt at philosophical theology. Philosophy attempts to understand all things in light of what is universally true in this world—what is true for all, at all times and in all places. The "light" of philosophy is universal human reason and experience, but Jesus cannot be grasped this way. Jesus is the Light of the world. We see all things by light, but light is only seen by itself. We see light by light. While we see all things by the light of Christ, Christ himself cannot be seen by anything other than himself. We must see Christ by Christ. By his works, Jesus created the context in which we must understand him.

Jesus pointed his disciples to the path of faith in John 14.11 when he said, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." If a person cannot comprehend what Jesus said about himself, he only has one stepping stone by which he can come to faith—the works of Christ. John wrote down a selection of these works, the signs, to enable us to step up to faith in Christ (John 20.30-31).

The process of disclosure does not simply move from the sign to the self-disclosure by the word of Christ. We must also move the other way and understand the sign by the word. This fact is built into the miracle stories in John 5 and 6. In each story, Jesus performed the miracle and slipped away, and then he reconnected with the Jews to disclose himself. After healing the lame man, he disappeared in the crowd so that when the Jews asked the healed man who had told him to take up his bed and walk the man could not tell them (4.12-13). Then Jesus disclosed himself to the man and through this engaged the Jews with who he was as the Son of God. In John 6, Jesus withdrew from the crowd after he performed the miracle to elude their grasp, and then when they found him he disclosed himself to them. This feature of withdrawal is significant. Jesus' miracles aroused the Jews to

react and respond, but by the miracle itself the Jews did not know who he was. Jesus had to disclose himself by his word.

The Jews did not read the miracle as a sign and so misunderstood it. Jesus had to clarify the sign by the word, and through this self-disclosure the Jews were left confused and enraged. The only thing that was proven to them was that the evident demonstration of the divine working in the miracle contradicted their ideas of what it meant for God to be God and what it meant for Jesus to be a man. Jesus left the Jews with this frustration. This breaking of the human grasp is the setting for the deep work of God in disclosing Christ to people. The first thing we learn of Christ is that he is not what we thought we knew him to be. He dashes all our highest ideas of God and mankind. Jesus engages us in the world with that which is not of this world.

## **2. The sign presenting his deity**

To the Jews the miracle of John 5 was obviously the work of God. Jesus, however, built a twist into this miracle that caught the Jews off guard. He not only healed on the Sabbath but healed by giving the lame man a command to work. He said to the lame man, “Get up, take up your bed and walk” (v 8). The man obeyed and was left carrying his bed in the environs of the temple that were crowded with Jews who were zealous for the Law of Moses. The Jews confronted the man for his transgression of the law, and when they learned that Jesus told him to do so, they lost sight of the marvellous fact that Jesus healed him and that God worked through the command that went against the Sabbath law and they persecuted Jesus. Jesus did not try to soften the blow by explaining his act of healing in a way that would fit into the Sabbath law. Rather, he strengthened the blow against Jewish religious sensitivities by explaining his work with the words, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (v 17). They immediately understood that he was claiming equality with God (v 18).

Jesus did not simply say that God works but that he “works until now.” To understand this we have to keep in mind the concern with the Sabbath. Creation was God’s work, and when he had finished creating all things he rested. By saying that God works till now, Jesus was pointing out that God was no longer in his Sabbath rest, and this point was confirmed by the fact that God had worked on the Sabbath day by healing the man with a command to work. The point Jesus was making about God and the Sabbath undermined the Jewish view of the Sabbath. Man was to keep the Sabbath in imitation of God, and Jesus was suggesting that while the work of creation was completed there is an ongoing work of God that does not come under the Sabbath law. This ongoing work is the labour of God as a result of sin. Due to sin, suffering came into the world, and God’s Sabbath rest was broken by the need for the divine work of salvation. What we have observed so far would only limit the application of the Sabbath law to normal work and leave the work of dealing with effects of sin in the world outside of the range of this command, but Jesus does not leave the matter here. He called God, “My Father,” and the Jews immediately grasped his point.

In the Biblical world, there was a clear difference between the relationship of a servant (or slave) to a master and a son to a father. The slave simply carried out the will of the master. He was not equal to the master, did not share his authority and did not work as the master. The adult son who was the heir of the father, however, was owner of the estate along with the father. He acted with the full authority of the owner. The estate and the authority were not divided between the father and son. Rather, the two equally shared the whole estate and authority. The difference between them was in the order of the relationship. The ownership and authority went from the father to the son, and the son would fulfill the executive role by carrying out the work. So, when Jesus said that his Father worked and he worked, he made it clear that he was working with God’s prerogative and authority. Thus he was claiming equality with God.

We must, at least, appreciate the Jews’ struggle. They saw an obvious work of God in the miracle. They also saw Jesus as a man, and they knew that a man was under the law and that he was not God. They were willing to leave the miracle as a work of God. But, Jesus’ words contradicted what they saw. Contrary to the obvious fact that he was a man, he was speaking as if he was equal with God. In this conflict, a decision had to be made. Should one begin with the fact that God was at work and follow this through consistently and acknowledge that God indeed was working through a man who was working in equality with him? This would mean that God was the Father of Jesus the Son. Or, should one accept what one sees with his eyes and begin with the fact that Jesus is a man, and then keep Jesus within the confines of a human being, which are established in creation? The Jews

took the latter view. They could not accept that a man might be more than a man and that God might work in a relationship of equality with a man. This approach, brought them up against God's actual working in the miracle, but the Jews were so narrowly focused that they did not realize this. They were quite ready to divorce the working of God from the instrument through which he worked. The mentality involved here is stated explicitly in Jn 9.24. They told the man who was healed on the Sabbath to give glory to God for the healing, and in the same breath they declared Jesus to be a sinner.

The Jews saw the situation from the bottom up. They saw Jesus making himself equal with God (Jn 5.18). Jesus, however, presented the view he had from within the divine working. The movement here was not bottom up but top down. He was not taking the initiative and making himself equal with God. Rather, he could do nothing of his own accord. What he saw the Father doing, this he did, and the Father showed him all that he was doing for the Son to do likewise (vv 19-20).

Jesus and the Jews represent different points of view, and we must understand this difference if we are to understand the incarnation. The union between deity and humanity is an utter impossibility from the human side. The first truth of God established in the Bible is that there is a difference between God and man and that man is not to make himself equal with God. This was the concern of the first law given in the Garden of Eden, and Satan introduced sin as the act by which human beings could become like God by their own will and act. This sin will reach its full ripeness in the beast that arises from the abyss. This is the antichrist, the very antithesis of Jesus Christ.

The Law of Moses established the holy divide between the creature and God, and the Jews zealously stood for this. In this they were right: it is an ultimate sin for a man to make himself equal with God. But, in their zeal the Jews were blinded. They made the limit placed on man an absolute rule and precluded the possibility that God could bring about a union of deity and humanity from the divine side of the relationship. This is the mental trap that all who resist the incarnation fall into. They take the created limitations placed on man as absolute and will not allow God to be more than what the creator is in relation to the creature. This means that they take the knowledge of God given through creation and the law as the final revelation of God. But, the fact that sin has entered the world and brought in evil and death shows that God must be revealed in a way that he is not revealed in creation. There must be a work of God beyond creation and the law if there is to be redemption. Since God is revealed through his works, the further work of God involves a greater revelation of God. But, the human mind that sets itself up as the measure of truth, even of the revelation of God, is not open to this greater revelation.

The issue at stake is not simply the understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus pointed out to the Jews that they have never heard the Father's voice or seen his form (i.e., his defining features, Jn 5.37). To not see Jesus as the Son of God is to show that one has never known who God is. It is not just that Jesus is the Son of God but that God is the Father of the Son. Father and Son define each other. To not see God as the Father is to not see the Son, and to not see the Son is not to see the Father. This identity of God as Father in relation to the Son is essential to deity, and it is eternal (Jn 17.5). The nature of God as a trinity makes the incarnation possible.

### **3. The sign presenting his incarnation**

The miracle of feeding the multitude was also a work of God. The Jews would have assumed that, and from John 5 we learn that the Son only did what the Father did. But, there is a significant difference between the miracles of John 5 and 6. When it comes to raising a lame man, no human being is expected to provide the power. The miracle must be the work of God. But, when it comes to feeding people, human beings are responsible. They are expected to take the produce of the earth and provide the food. So, when Jesus fed the multitude miraculously, he performed a human task. This feature is built into the sign. Jesus presented the need to Philip in terms of normal human means: "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip turned to the normal means of buying bread, but pointed out the inadequacy. Andrew pointed out what food was at hand, the boy's five loaves and two fish, but again noted the inadequacy of the means. Jesus took what was at hand to meet the need and proceeded in the normal manner of giving thanks and distributed the food. The power of God was now taking up the normal but inadequate means of human life on earth and worked through this to meet the needs of human life.

The discourse that follows the sign makes clear that this miracle was designed to focus attention on the incarnation. God did not create a new body for the Son to take. Rather, the Son took up our humanity through Mary just like Jesus took up the food that was at hand from the boy. The boy's provisions were inadequate to meet the need of the multitude, and our humanity is insufficient to meet our need for eternal life. But, as the Lord took up the boy's provision to be the means for meeting the need by his divine power, so the Son of God took up our humanity and made that humanity the means to meet our need.

The response to the miracle of feeding the multitude was very different from the response in the previous chapter. The Jews reacted violently to the deity of Christ. In the miracle of John 6, Jesus did not put forward his deity but his humanity and met the common human needs of life, and the Galileans responded favourably to. Jesus, however, struggled against them to turn attention from the material bread to himself in his humanity as the means of eternal life.

The difference in responses in John 5 and 6 is significant. People do not see the deity of Christ, and the truth of the trinity is beyond people's field of vision and mental grasp. In fact, the deity of Christ contradicts and offends their idea of God. What people can see and grasp is Jesus the human being meeting the felt needs of mankind. But, this does not mean that the incarnate Son is within the immediate grasp of people. In fact, as they engage with the truth of Christ, he will elude their grasp, for he is not a man in the way they think of him.

The struggle in John 6 between Jesus and the Jews over his humanity does not end in the kind of violence we see in John 5. It rather ends in anger and frustration over the fact that this man's words do not make sense. The world likes what they see in Jesus—that Jesus meets human needs. But, Jesus will not fit into their grasp. He encounters us and meets a need only to step outside of the natural sphere of human life, but people naturally refuse to step beyond their own nature. Both sides of Christ's person engage people in a deep struggle. His humanity is as frustrating to people as his deity is maddening to them.

## **B. JESUS' SELF-DISCLOSURE**

The miracles of Jesus presented an extraordinary event in the world, but his words presented his person which was beyond the parameters of the world. Even after two millennia of Christian history and for all of the influence of Christianity on the thought of the world, the person of Christ remains beyond the natural grasp of people. The person of Christ is not just beyond Judaism. It is beyond the world. So, the discourses of John 5 and 6 still present us with deep challenges to the way we normally think and see things.

The discourses are stormy and initially strike the reader as rather convoluted. Every statement Jesus makes goes against the natural grain of our thought, and Jesus gives statement upon statement. For those who see his glory, the succession of Jesus statements about himself are like the endless wave action of grace upon grace, each statement communicating something of his fullness. But, for the natural mind in its insistence that Jesus fit into the world the discourses are like a chaotic stormy sea. We will not work through the details (or ride the waves). Rather, we will bring together the total presentation of the person and work of Christ in John 5 and 6.

### **1. The person and work of Christ**

The incarnation is one event within the larger movement of the Son of God, and this larger movement is presented in the Gospel of John. The Son began in his deity, which he had eternally as the Son with the Father. Then he came into the world and became flesh, and this was the first step toward the cross. In John's Gospel the death of Jesus on the cross was the beginning of his exaltation, glorification and return to the Father. Having returned to the Father, the Son sent the Holy Spirit who imparts the things of Christ to the disciples.

When we take the two discourses of John 5 and 6 together, we see the full scope of Christ's person and work outlined. In John 5 Jesus is presented as the Son who carries out the divine work along with the Father. This divine role is stated in Jn 5.26: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." To have life in oneself, in this verse, means to be the source of life. This theme is represented in the

prologue of the Gospel in Jn 1.4 where it says of the pre-incarnate Word, “In him was life.” When the Word became flesh, he continued to be the Word with God who was God and so continued to be source of life. In John 5 Jesus is speaking as a man, but he is presenting his role by virtue of his deity, and just as his deity is eternal so is his role of being the life-source along with the Father.

Jesus introduces his humanity in Jn 5.26. The theme here is not his divine role of being the source of life but his role as the judge. In giving life, the Father and Son both work, but while the Father gives the authority to judge he judges no one (v 22). The Father has given all judgment to the Son, and the Son executes judgment because he is the Son of Man. The theme of the Son of Man’s role has its root in the vision of the heavenly court in Daniel 7. In this vision, the Ancient of Days (the Father) gives the authority over the whole world to the Son of Man (Dan 7.13-14). How Jesus Christ carries out this role in the world is presented in Jn 3.16-21. God gave his Son so that those who believe might have eternal life (v 16). He sent his Son into the world to save and not to judge (v 17). The Father works with the Son in the positive purpose of giving life and saving, but judgment is not directly linked to the Father. Rather, it happens through the Son coming into the world as the light that exposes the works of people as evil (vv 18-21). In the relationship between the Father and the Son, life is given, but in the encounter between the incarnate Son and the world judgment is carried out.

In John 5, the Son in his deity gives life along with the Father who sent him, but in his humanity he does what the Father does not do. He is in the world, personally interacts with those who do not believe and carries out judgment. The world does not know the Father and does not stand in a direct relationship with him as the source of life. The world only has a direct encounter with the Son. Only those who believe in the Son come to know the Father as the source of life for them. Those who do not believe in the Son do not recognize his deity and so do not know the Father. They encounter the Son as the Son of Man who exposes their sin and carries out the role of judgment.

The humanity of Christ is not confined to the role of judgment. It also plays a positive role in the impartation of eternal life, and this is presented in John 6. In this chapter, Jesus presents himself as the bread of life. Here we must notice a shift from John 5. We saw that in the earlier discourse, Jesus presented himself as working along with the Father as the source of life. In the discourse of John 6, Jesus is presented in a role that is not shared with the Father.

Jesus is the bread of life because he has come down from heaven, and in this he is different from the Father. Bread is not the divine source that gives life. It is, rather, the means of life which people must take in to receive. Jesus takes this up to present himself in his humanity. In his deity he is the source of life along with the Father, but in his humanity he is the means of life which people must receive.

The shift in focus from John 5 to John 6 which we are noticing is reflected in the prologue of the Gospel. Of the pre-incarnate Word it is said, “In him was life.” But, more is needed. The Word came into the world, and only in this personal encounter within the world can he be received so that people can become the children of God. Life always has its source in deity, but it must be received in humanity. Jesus moves from speaking of himself as the one who came down into the world to speaking about his flesh. In this too, the prologue follows the same order. First Christ’s coming into the world to be received by people is presented, and then the fact of his flesh is mentioned (Jn 1.14).

Christ’s words on the theme of his flesh in Jn 6.51-56 imply his death. He says that he will give his life for (*hyper*) the life of the world. The preposition, *hyper*, is used for his sacrificial death in Jn 10.15 where he says that he lays down his life for the sheep and in Jn 15.13 when he says that he lays down his life for his friends (so also Jn 11.50). The very notion of eating flesh suggests that the victim has given up its life. Also, the fact that he speaks of this flesh and blood in separation points to his death. The observation we are making is important for the development of the theme of the person and work of Christ in John 5 and 6. Christ’s self-disclosure moves from his coming into the world to his sacrificial act of giving his life for us.

When Jesus spoke of giving his flesh for people to eat, he stood before the Jews in his body. It is not surprising that the Jews as well as Jesus’ disciples had no idea of how this giving of his flesh as food would look. They could only imagine a repulsive act of cannibalism. Jesus’ word about eating his flesh and drinking his blood was too hard for many of his disciples to listen to (Jn 6.60). In response to this crisis, he pointed them to his ascent

to heaven from where he came (v 61). This return to heaven would show the meaning of his word about his flesh being given for the life of the world. Finally, Jesus points away from flesh to the Spirit and to his words (Jn 6.63). Here he returns to the themes of John 5. Deity is the life source. In John 5 he presented the Father and the Son as having life in themselves, and now he says that it is the Spirit that gives life. But, the Spirit does not act on his own. In John 5.24f., the Son communicates life through his word, and this is the word of his self-disclosure. This is taken up in Jn 6.63 when Jesus says that his words are life and spirit. The life of the Son incarnate is imparted by the Spirit and the word.

The gift of the Spirit which was given after Jesus was glorified is explicitly announced in Jn 7.37-39. Jesus opens up to the disciples the role of the Spirit in John 14 to 16. Here he says that the Spirit will only come after he has departed and returned to the Father, and the Spirit will disclose to the disciples the things of Christ.

In his self-disclosure in John 5 and 6, Jesus presents his incarnation within its total context, moving from his deity with the Father, to his coming into the world, to his being flesh and giving his flesh in death, to his return to heaven and finally to the gift of the Spirit who gives life. The incarnation is not isolated as an event or even as a subject in and of itself. Rather, it is presented within the totality of the person and work of Christ.

## **2. Life as the common theme**

The discourses in John 5 and 6 are bound together in the theme of life.

### **a. From temporal to eternal**

In John 5, Jesus begins his discourse by moving from the works he is doing in his earthly ministry to the greater works he will do. It is important to notice that in vv 19-20 he uses the present tense for his miracles and the future tense for the greater works. Within the Gospel of John, the greater works are those that Jesus does after his return to heaven. There are two greater works: giving eternal life in the present age and raising the dead from their graves in the final hour (Jn 5.24-29). In John 6, we see the same pattern. Jesus begins by redirecting the Jews' focus from physical bread to the bread of life (Jn 6.25-40). Then he points out the two things he will do to those who come to him. He will give them eternal life and will raise them up on the last day (v 40).

### **b. The theme of life**

Jesus begins both discourses with the theme of work but with a clear difference. In John 5 he speaks of the divine work of the Father and the Son in giving life. In John 6 he addresses the human work in obtaining food. This difference in the theme of work shows up the difference in the approach to the theme of eternal life in John 5 and 6.

The different perspectives from which life is seen are brought out by a comparison of Jn 5.26 and 6.57. The former passage says, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." There is a clear difference between the Father and the Son in the order of the relationship. The Father is the absolute source of life, and he has granted the Son to have life in himself. In the trinity, everything moves from the Father to the Son. But, in this order, the Father and the Son are one. Both are the source of life. In the divide between God and mankind, the Son is on the divine side.

The second passage in our comparison reads, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me" (Jn 6.57). One can discern the truth of Jn 5.26 in the background of this verse. We live because of the Son, and this makes him the source of our life. But, the relationship of life is not seen from the giving but from the receiving end. From this end, the Son is in a position that is parallel to ours. As he lives because of the Father so we live because of him. In both cases, one's life is due to another.

John 5.26 and 6.57 look at life from two sides, the divine and the human. Jesus participates in both. On the divine side, he is the source of life along with the Father. On the human side, he is the recipient of life and so

stands in a relationship that is analogous with our position. It is in this relation to the Father that he is the bread of life or the means of life which we must receive.

Life must be given and received. Jesus functions in both the giving and receiving.

### **c. The view of life**

In John 5 and 6, Jesus presents a view of life. First we should take note of what life is not. Life is not something that is created. It is not a force emanating from God that is infused into us and is active in us as some kind of energy. The vitality of life we have that makes us living creatures is not life as Jesus understands it. People living in this world are seen as dead (5.24-25). No doubt, we are dead due to sin, but this is only half the truth and the latter half at that. In John 6 Jesus locates our deadness in our physical nature. The physical bread we eat perishes and does not endure to eternal life (Jn 6.27). This is not due to sin. Even in the Garden of Eden, Adam had to eat, and the food he ate perished. The tree of life brings out the mortal nature of human flesh. Adam needed access to this tree to keep living, and God passed the sentence of death over Adam and Eve, not by changing their nature, but simply by cutting off access to this tree. God's final word to Adam, after he sinned, was not that he was living and would have to return to dust. Rather he said, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3.19). Our nature in Adam is dust. Genesis 2 and 3 make clear that human nature does not have life within itself and that it is ever dependent on the means of life from without itself. Jesus clinched this point when he said in Jn 6.53, "...you have no life in you." That is a fact of nature.

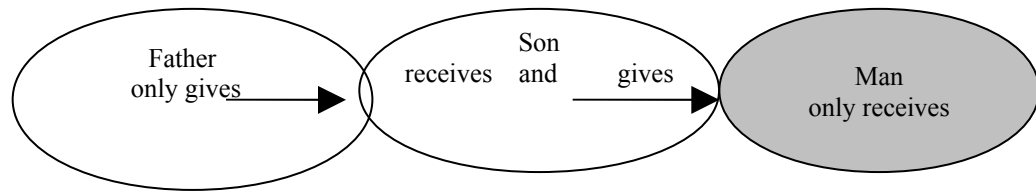
Jesus presents life as being in the divine persons. God the Father is the absolute source of life. He does not give life to the Son in the way God breathed the breath of life into Adam to make him a living being. Rather, he gives to the Son to have life in himself so that like the Father he is the life source. Only in the Son does the Father give life to us. The Son makes us alive by speaking his word (Jn 5.24-25), and in the Gospel of John, the word of Christ is his self-disclosure by which he imparts himself. This communication of the Son's person must be heard and believed and in this way consciously received. Through this reception of the Son's word the Son himself is received, and in the reception we become God's children who are born of God (Jn 1.12-13).

The fact that in John 5 the Son gives life by his self-disclosing word and that this word must be heard and believed shows that life involves a conscious relationship. Eternal life is not imparted as a force that can be unconsciously received. It is imparted in a relationship that is given and entered. John 17.3 clinches this: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." To have eternal life is to know the Father and the Son.

The receptive side of the relationship of life is opened up in John 6, and here the incarnation pays its role. Eternal life for us is in the Son, and to have this life we must have the Son. This point is stated emphatically in 1Jn 5.11-12, "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." But, we cannot receive the Son in his deity alone, for we are not deity. We are flesh, and we can only receive the Son to be our life in his flesh. Only through his incarnation can we receive the Son in our human nature. This makes the humanity of Christ the means of eternal life that we must receive. In his humanity he is the bread of life.

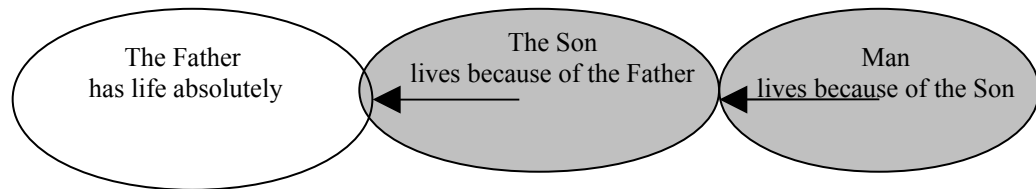
### **3. The relationships of life**

Life is in the divine persons. They are alive and have life in themselves by their very divine nature. But, while life is in their own persons, it is not in them as isolated persons. The persons of the Godhead are essentially relational. They only have their individual being and identity within their essential and eternal relationship with one another. The Father does not have life in himself as something he holds in himself and for himself. No, life in him is ever life as the source of life, and he has this life as the Father of the Son. Likewise, the Son does not have life as an isolated being. He has life as the Son of the Father and as the life source like the Father. The difference is in the order of the relationship of life. The Father does not receive life. He is the absolute source who has life in himself only to give. The Son both receives and gives. Mankind is wholly different. Man has no life in himself. He can only receive. We can lay it out as follows.



There can be no direct sharing of life between the Father and man because the Father has life that is not received and man needs life as it is received. The Son can give life as the Father does for he is deity, but man can have life in the way the Son has it for the Son has life received. John 5 takes the theme of life this far.

As deity, the Son has the life to give life to man. But, since man is flesh, he cannot receive the pre-incarnate Son as his life. Man must have life in flesh since he is essentially flesh. So, for man to be able to receive the Son as the source of his life, the Son had to become flesh. This is the theme of John 6.



In Jn 6.41-51, Jesus presents himself as the bread of life that has come down from heaven. This is Christ in his incarnate life on earth. He came down and we must come to him in order to live. To get the point, we have to keep the analogy of the manna in mind. The manna did not fall into people's stomachs or even into their tents. It fell around the camp and the Israelites had to go to the manna to gather it. Similarly, the incarnate Son did not automatically give life. In a real and profound sense, he was in the world but not of it, and the Jews had a real spiritual distance to cross to come to him. They had to move out of their own horizon of thinking to come to faith in him.

Once the Israelites came to the manna, they had to take one further step. They had to eat it. The bread was only effective in sustaining their bodies if it was taken in. This is the subject of Jn 6.52-59.

To make the bread of life available for eating, the Lord had to take a step beyond his incarnation. He was the divine source of life with the Father. He came into the world to be received. But, he had to give his flesh for people to receive him.

The Jews contended over his saying that the bread he would give was his flesh (6.51). They asked the question, "How?" "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v 52). Jesus answered them by asserting the necessity of eating his flesh for life (vv 53-58). In this, Jesus was true to the analogy of food. We do not need to know *how* food works. All we need to know is that we need it. We need food, and hunger will make us eat it.

The final discussion in John 6 is between Jesus and his disciples (Jn 6.60-71). Many of his disciples found the word about eating his flesh difficult. Jesus' reply was that they must wait to see his return to heaven. Then it will be seen that receiving eternal life is not a matter of eating his flesh in a physical sense. Rather, his death would be seen as his return to the Father, and through this he would bring his humanity into his divine relationship with the Father. Eternal life has its absolute source in the Father, and it can only be had within the divine relationship between the Father and the Son. Christ had to bring human nature fully into this relationship, and then the Spirit could impart the divine reality to us.

## **C. A TOTAL VIEW OF THE INCARNATION**

Jesus never opened up a view into the incarnation by itself. Rather, he presented the reality of the incarnation within his mission. In doctrinal terms, this means that we must approach the subject of the incarnation from within the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. And when we do this, what do we see?

### **1. Parallel with the Prologue**

Jesus' self-disclosure in John 5 and 6 can be correlated with the presentation of Christ in the prologue of the Gospel of John.

The discourse in John 5 answers to the first part of the prologue in which John presents the pre-incarnate Word. Jesus presents himself as the Son working with the Father and working as God. This answers to Jn 1.1 which says that the Word was with God and was God. There is a clear order in the equality in John 5. All that is of the Father is through the Son, and this answers to the second point of the prologue that all things were made through the Word (Jn 1.3). Jesus presents the Son in his divine role as having life in himself, and this answers to Jn 1.4 which says that in him was life. The Son does not simply relate to people as the life. He is also the Son of Man who carries out all judgment in the world, and this answers to the fact that the life was the light of men, and as the light of men he relates to darkness (Jn 1.5). In John 3.18-21, this light carries out the judgment.

John 6 takes up the themes of the second part of the prologue. Jesus first presents himself as the bread that came down from heaven, and this answers to the light coming into the world (Jn 1.9). Jesus said that the Jews have seen him and yet did not believe (Jn 6.36) and this answers to the fact that he was in the world and the world did not know him and that he came to his own and his own did not receive him (Jn 1.10-11). Against the backdrop of Jewish unbelief, Jesus presses the need to come to him as the bread that came down from heaven and points out the Father's work in drawing people to him. This answers to Jn 1.12-13. Against the background of the Jews not receiving him it is said that as many as received him he gave the right to become the children of God and these were born of God.

John 1.14 introduces the specific idea of the incarnation in the context of the actual reception of Christ. John 6 moves in parallel with this. First Jesus presents his coming into the world and the need to come to him and believe, and then he goes a step further and speaks of his flesh (6.51). The announcement in Jn 1.14 that the world became flesh is tied to the disciples receiving of his fullness. John 6 adds to this that the actual reception of the life of the incarnate Son is carried out through the eating of his flesh in Jn 6.52-58. It is by eating his flesh and drinking his blood that we abide in him and he in us (v 56).

### **2. Focus on his death**

Jesus' witness to his incarnation moves along the themes presented in the prologue. Jesus, however, adds the role of his death, which is not mentioned in the prologue. The connection that Jesus makes here is important for our understanding of the incarnation. In Jn 1.14, the incarnation is tied to the actual reception of Christ's divine fullness, and in John 6 the flesh of the incarnate Son is the means of taking him in so that we abide in him and have his life in us. John 6 adds to the prologue that this reception of the divine fullness and life in the incarnate Son could only take place through his death. We cannot receive the Son in his deity. He had to become incarnate to be received. But, we cannot receive his fullness and life in his incarnate state on earth. We must receive him in his death, and in his death he is received in his full deity.

The role of Christ's death is built into the very structure of the Gospel of John. In this Gospel, Christ's coming into the world had its goal in his return to the Father, and this took place through his death. Jesus was introduced to the first disciples by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, and John presents Jesus' death as happening when the Passover lamb was slain.

The self-disclosure of Jesus in John 5 and 6 is overshadowed by the theme of his death. In Jn 5.18, the Jews were seeking to kill him for claiming to be equal with God. Jesus did not back down or mitigate the claim but

strengthened it. We learn in Jn 7.1 that Jesus stayed in Galilee and would not go to Judea because of the Jews' determination to kill him. This means that the cloud of the death sentence hung over the events in John 6. John brings this note into his narrative of the feeding of the multitude by noticing that the Passover, the feast of the Jews was at hand (Jn 6.4). We learn from John 7 that Jesus did not go to this Passover feast. Instead, he stayed in Galilee, and by the way John tells the story it looks like Jesus drew the Jews into what looked like a replaying of the exodus in which the Jews crossed the sea and were fed miraculously in the wilderness.

This miracle of the feeding of the multitude is the only miracle recorded in all 4 Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels confirm that Jesus performed this miracle at the end of his Galilean ministry with a view to going to Jerusalem for his last Passover to be crucified. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, we read that Jesus took the disciples aside at the end of his Galilean ministry, shortly after the feeding of the multitude, in order to take them through the great issues involved in his death. First, he drew out the confession of his person, which answers to John 5. Then he disclosed his death and resurrection to them, which answers to the announcement in Jn 6.51 that he would give his flesh for the life of the world. Finally, he took three of his disciples up the mountain of transfiguration to see his glory, which answers to seeing his return to heaven in Jn 6.62. All of this confirms that when Jesus gave his witness to his incarnation in John 6, he very much had his death in mind.

The Jews of Jerusalem were determined to kill him for his claims to deity. He ended his Galilean ministry by stepping beyond their view of him, and in this way he evaded their grasp and left them behind. Then he took his disciples to his end in this world.

Jesus brings his incarnation and his death together again in Jn 12.24. When he said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone..." he was making an important point about the incarnation. As the incarnate Son, he was isolated. In the language of John 6, in his incarnate nature he was the bread that came down, but if it was not given for people to eat nothing could be accomplished. Jesus went on to say in Jn 12.24, "...but if it dies it bears much fruit." Only in his death is his incarnation fruitful. In John 12, the focus is not on Jesus taking our place in death but on us joining him and being brought into his incarnate life through his death and in his rising out of death. In Jn 12.25-26 Jesus makes it clear that we must follow him in his death and exit from the world and he will lead us to where he goes, i.e., to be with the Father. This is the focus of John 6. Jesus gave himself for the life of the world, and we must receive him in his death (i.e., his flesh and blood) to live by him.

The incarnation was not a destination. God did not become flesh to affirm human nature in its life on earth. Rather, the incarnation was only the beginning of a journey. The movement initiated by the incarnation had its earthly destination in the cross, and the cross was the step by which the incarnate Son was exalted, was glorified and returned to the Father. The end of the whole movement was not to bring God down into our life but to take us up in the upward movement of the Son; to bring us up to the life of God in heaven. This is eternal life.

The cross is the great pivotal point, and this is the center of the revelation of God. The deity of the Son and his relation to the Father are invisible. In his works on earth, these divine realities were indicated, but they would only be fully seen in his greater works of giving eternal life and raising the dead. These works would only be carried out through the cross and by the Son's returned to the Father.

The incarnation was a hidden and silent event. His incarnate glory was not evident in his physical appearance. His flesh, in fact, veiled his divine glory. Only in his return to the Father through his death did his incarnate nature become fully revealed, for in this we see that indeed his flesh is joined to his deity in the divine role of giving life.

### **3. The union of two natures**

Jesus used two terms for the event of his incarnation: *sent* and *came*. The sending was the Father's act. When he spoke of himself being sent by the Father, he put the focus on the Father's initiative and what the Father was doing in and through him. The coming was his act. When he spoke of his coming into the world, he drew attention to his own role in relation to the world. The Father's sending and the Son's coming were two sides of the same event, which bears witness to the equality and the order of the relationship between the Father and the

Son. The Son's coming is equal to the Father's sending, for the Son carried out the Father's act of sending him by his act of coming. But, the Father and Son have different places in the order of the divine event. As in all of the divine works, the Father's act comes first and it is carried through by the Son.

The way the sending and the coming are correlated answers to the way the deity and humanity of Christ function together in the work of one person. The divine role of being the source of life has the first place. In fact, he had this role eternally with the Father. The human role of the Son was added to this in the incarnation. The two roles are in a real sense as different as deity and humanity. This is the difference of giving and receiving. But, the two are one in Christ. All that he is in his deity as the source of life is received in his humanity, and only in the humanity is the divine role carried out. This is the way Jesus presents the union of the two natures in his person. The NT does not work with the riddle of how the attributes of divine and human natures can be matched and joined together. Rather, in the scriptures the focus is on the relationships of God and the divine work that is carried out through the humanity of Christ so that the humanity is elevated to the full divine glory. All that he is from God in his deity he is to us in his humanity, and in this deity and humanity are one in him.