

This is Jesus: Origins  
*Can a Virgin Conceive?*  
December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

**PRE-SERVICE VIDEO**

**Worship Songs – Rejoice / Good, Good Father**

**Behind the Scenes – Video  
Feature – Noel**

I suppose if you were trying to sum up the meaning and the message of Christmas in just a few words (at least as Christians would describe it) that song would be a great way to go about it.

Come and see what God has done  
The story of amazing love!  
The light of the world, given for us (and to us)  
... as God wraps himself in human flesh and enters our world as a man – Jesus of Nazareth.

And over next several weeks – from now through

the 25<sup>th</sup> of December – almost 2.5B people worldwide who identify themselves as “Christian” will remember and celebrate his birth ... which is pretty amazing if you think about it.

But in spite of the sheer numbers and the almost 2,000 years of remembrance and celebration of this one event, for many people today, especially in our increasingly-secularized and increasingly anti-Christian culture ... there is an incredible dearth of knowledge concerning this man.

By that I don't mean that people aren't aware of “Jesus the Savior.” Pretty much everyone knows about *that* aspect of Jesus, even skeptics and atheists. Even if they don't believe it, pretty much everyone much knows how the story goes:

- Jesus died on a Roman cross
- He rose from the dead on the third day
- If you believe in Him, He'll be your savior and you'll have eternal life.

... though most people are uninformed about *that*, too, as if the ultimate “win” for humanity is a disembodied existence ... floating on a cloud ... with a harp ... attending a church service that never ends. It’s not.

Most people know about “Jesus the Savior” ... so, when I say there is an incredible dearth of knowledge about Jesus, I’m not talking about that aspect of who He was.

Instead, what I mean is that most people don’t know very much about “Jesus the man” ... such as:

- Who was He? And where does He fit in world history?
- What was He trying to accomplish in his time *before* the cross? And how did that make Him different from all the Hebrew prophets who came before Him?
- (Most importantly, at least for us moderns)

What difference does it make today in a world like ours which is so far removed from the first-century Palestinian villages (in a roughly 10-mile square area no less!) in which Jesus spent most of His adult life?

And that's really the point of this mega-series which we're beginning today: what difference does – or can – the *person ... the teaching ... the way* of Jesus of Nazareth make – not just in your life and mine but in our culture at large?

I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that we are now living in “the age of outrage.” It seems that everyone is outraged about this or outraged about that.

But in all these expressions of condemnation and criticism (some of which are valid), no one is offering a comprehensive “better way” to live. Instead, the most consistently offered solution seems to be “just get rid of *them*” (figuratively not literally ... at least not yet) with *them* defined to

be:

- Liberals
- Or conservatives
- Or trigger-happy cops
- Or disrespectful athletes
- Or “the rich”
- Or illegal immigrants
- Or powerful men who sexually exploit innocent women
- Or lying women who accuse innocent men

And the list could go on and on. Just turn on CNN or Fox News to discover who we need to get rid of next.

But the problem with that strategy (besides being unrealistic) is that it only creates more outrage and division. We need a better way.

And there *is* a better way: *the way of Jesus* – the way of thinking and living that was taught and

modeled by Him *before* He went to the Cross. In fact, the very first Christians (before they were called “Christians”) were known as “followers of The Way.”<sup>i</sup> They were people who tried to live like He lived.

So, my goal over the next four months or so (in this “mega-series”) is to discover more about “Jesus the man” so we can better understand and follow the way He lived.

Now, please don’t hear what I’m not saying. *I’m not trying to minimize “Jesus the savior.”* Actually, as we’ll see, that’s impossible to do as the two – Jesus the man and Jesus the savior – are indivisible.

But what we need right now in our culture is more people who know and follow the way of Jesus the man. So that’s our focus.

## **Defeater Beliefs**

However ... having said all of that ...

A group of young adults in our church recently explained to me that, in their world, before you can have a serious conversation about Jesus, you have to address a set of “defeater beliefs” that are gaining strength in our culture, especially among young people. (They’re called “defeater beliefs” because, if true, they defeat whatever case it is you’re trying to make before you even open your mouth).

Here’s how it goes:

**Defeater Belief #1. Science proves that God doesn’t exist. Therefore, belief in God is irrational.**

That doesn’t mean it’s *necessarily* a bad thing. Lots of people believe irrational things with little or no harm to themselves or others. For instance, I believe the Chiefs are going to win out and have at least one home playoff game. 😊

That’s defeater #1: science proves God doesn’t

exist.

**Here's Defeater Belief #2. *History* shows that *Jesus of Nazareth* probably didn't exist. Therefore, anything said about him is speculative.**

After all, there are very few references to such a person in the secular literature of that day. And what we *do* have in the New Testament was probably invented by the early Church Fathers as a way of maintaining their power over the people who were, after all, prone to superstition.

And since both of those are true – since Jesus *didn't* exist and God *doesn't* exist ...

**The idea that a Divine Being became human as some guy in the first century is totally irrelevant!**

In other words the imaginary “Jesus” and his invented “way” is really not worth talking about – at least no more than anyone else’s “way.” The best thing anyone can do these days is to try and



figure out whatever path seems *right for them* and hope it ends well.

And that's the choice that so many are making and promoting to others ... and more and more we are living with the consequences of those choices.

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I'm curious – have you ever heard these defeater beliefs before? I'll bet you've wondered about them yourself. I know that I have.

So, before those of us who are Christians can expect anyone in this culture to take Jesus the man, Jesus the savior, Jesus the way seriously, we need first to address these beliefs. And when I say that, I don't necessarily mean *we personally* have to be able to do it. But we have to at least know there ARE answers and where to go for them – which is one of my goals for this series.

So let's begin.

Today we're going to focus on the very first defeater belief – the existence of God – an issue which immediately pops up when you start reading what the New Testament says about the origins of Jesus.

**For example, in Matthew's Gospel, chapter one, we read:**

*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.  
Matthew 1:18 (NIV)*

*Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of*

*David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because [and here it comes again] what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). Matthew 1:22-23 (NIV)*

Now, if you’ve been a believer in Jesus for a long time, you’ve probably heard this story many times. And you don’t bat an eye. “Yep, that’s what happened.”

But if you’re *not* a believer or you’re a skeptic, your first reaction to that passage is “Oh, come on! *We all know that virgins don’t conceive!* From the very beginning this whole story of Jesus is based on the magic-like intervention of a supernatural

being for whom there is no rational evidence. So, case closed. Move on.”

See what I mean?

In order to even start a conversation, it’s often necessary to deal with the objection that there is no evidence for a supernatural Supreme Being; something or someone with the power to intervene in an outlandish way – like “make a virgin conceive.”

## **Evidence of “God”**

So, let’s talk about that. Is it reasonable to believe a supernatural Supreme Being exists?

And just to be clear for our purposes today, I’m not defining that Being as the God of the Bible (YWHW) or Allah or the Great Spirit or even the Great Pumpkin. The question is ... is there enough objective evidence – not “personal experience” or a subjective feeling; but is there enough objective

evidence to believe that some kind of generic Supreme Being exists?

I think the answer is a resounding “yes” and I want to take the majority of the time we have left today to merely scratch the surface of why. (If we had the time, we could talk about this all day and all week!)

But before we get into that, I want to say something about the nature of faith and evidence. Actually, I’m not the one who is going to say it. J. Warner Wallace, author of *Cold Case Christianity* and *God’s Crime Scene*, is going to say it.

Wallace is a former cold-case homicide detective with the Los Angeles Police Department who, for the first half of his adult life, was an atheist. But at one point, his wife began attending church so he started investigating Christianity from the perspective of a homicide detective. That made sense to him because, in his mind, that was what the story of Jesus is – a cold-case homicide!

But an unexpected thing happened: as Wallace applied the tools of his trade to the story of Jesus, he became a believer.

And because of where he comes from – his professional background and the fact that he didn't grow up as a Christian – I think he has a really fresh way of putting things. So, I'm going to show you several clips from him today, starting with this first one in which he describes the connection between evidence and faith.

Let's watch.<sup>ii</sup>

**Video Clip – 01 Evidence & Faith (1.5 mins)**

(B) Wallace: “Every case you make for a jury has unanswered questions ...”

(E) Wallace: “I don't believe that Christianity is that kind of belief. It's not.”

I think what he said about there being “no perfect evidence set” is very important and that what

jurors need is not blind faith or unreasonable faith but forensic faith: faith that is “grounded in an evidence trail” that leads somewhere even though you might need to take a step at the end.

That’s what we’re talking about this morning when we say it’s reasonable to believe that there is a supernatural Supreme Being. There’s not a perfect and complete “evidence set” but that doesn’t mean faith is blind. Instead, it’s firmly grounded in evidence that strongly points in that direction.

So, let’s get into that evidence.

I’m going to show you another video by Wallace that I like because it lays out the evidence for the existence of God using the metaphor of a crime scene ... hence the title of his latest book, *God’s Crime Scene*. It’s from a presentation he did at a conference called “Why Jesus: Reason for Believing.”<sup>iii</sup>

And at this point in his talk, he's explained a principle that guides how he and his team investigate a potential homicide.

**“If you can explain everything you find in the room by *what's in the room*,” he says, “it's death by natural causes, accident or suicide.”**

**“But if you have to go *outside the room* to find the best explanation of what's in the room (e.g., fingerprints on a gun that are not from the deceased), then you have an intruder and a homicide.”**

I'm oversimplifying that just a bit in the interest of time.

But let's pick up with where he explains how he decided to apply this same technique to the story of Jesus and its supernatural elements (like the virgin who conceives Him).

**Video Clip – 02 Gods' Crime Scene: Overview (4.5 mins)**

(B) Wallace: “I thought to myself as a guy who was



looking at the Gospels ...”

(E) Wallace: “Which is more reasonable?”

And that’s the question.

**(graphic from video) What’s the best explanation for what we find in our world, including ...**

- A universe that has a beginning.
- The fine tuning of the universe
- The origin of life in the universe
- The appearance of design in biology
- The existence of consciousness
- The existence of free will
- The presence of transcendent moral truth
- The presence of evil and injustice

Now, obviously Wallace’s answer to the question is going to be “God” but before we get there, I want us to take a few minutes to dive a little deeper on just one of those “things in the room” of our natural world. And that’s the fact that our

universe had a beginning.

As it turns out, this is a really, really big deal because it supports what's known as the "cosmological argument" for the existence of a Creative Being who exists outside of our universe.

Here's a clip of an interview where Greg Koukl, a noted Christian apologist, explains it.<sup>iv</sup>

**Video Clip – 03 Cosmological Argument (2.6 mins)**

(B) Koukl: "That's an argument for God based on the existence of the universe."

(E) Koukl: "You got more faith (quote unquote) than I got."

Now for those of you who are more visual learners, here's another way to think about the cosmological argument. Some of you may remember seeing this because I've used it before. It's just that good!

Let's watch.

**Video Clip – 04 The Kalam Cosmological Argument (4.2 mins)**

(B) Kid writing on balloon.

(E) “Reasonable Faith” credit with balloon floating

Alright, now let’s go back to J. Warner Wallace for the part his talk where he puts it all together and draws a conclusion.

By the way, I want to encourage you – if this kind of thing interests you or encourages you – to check out his website, [www.coldcasechristianity.com](http://www.coldcasechristianity.com), where there’s all kinds of articles, videos, podcasts as well as his two books.

In addition, you can do a Youtube search on “God’s Crime Scene” and see this entire talk plus many others.

Ok, here we go.

**Video Clip – 05 God’s Crime Scene: Conclusion (4.3 mins)**

(B) Wallace: “We started off with this analogy ...”

(E) Wallace: “We are more like the intruder if you think about it.”

It’s not just one piece of evidence but eight that all need to be explained by *the same something* (or someone) outside the room of our natural world. Wallace claims that’s God – actually, the God of the Bible because *that* particular vision of a Supreme Being “fits” the evidence that must be explained.

But he went on to say – and I thought this was fascinating – that it’s our desire to *not* have an intruder on our lives that keeps us from looking at the evidence and drawing the most obvious conclusion; a conclusion which, as it turns out, is *actually disallowed by modern science ... in advance*.

Here’s how Koukl explains it.

**Video Clip – 06 Science vs Faith (2.0 mins)**

(B) Koukl: “The reason that science that points to a Designer is not science ...”

(E) Koukl: “Because we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”

Now, that sounds pretty negative towards science and scientists but that’s not my purpose in showing it to you.

My purpose to point out the arbitrary self-limiting aspect of science as it is currently practiced – an arbitrary limit which is, ironically, an article of faith – even *blind* faith – within that community ... which kind of levels the playing field between “theists” – those who believe there is a supernatural creator – and scientists. They’re not as “objective” as they claim to be.

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Now, I realize we’ve gotten pretty technical this morning, so before we conclude, I should mention that there are other pointers to the existence of a

supernatural Supreme Being that are a bit “softer” than these we’ve looked at.

**For instance, theologian N.T. Wright says there are four “voices” found in the human heart which are echoes of God’s voice in creation:<sup>v</sup>**

- The yearning for justice
- The thirst for spirituality
- The craving for relationships
- And the attraction of beauty

17<sup>th</sup> century French scientist Blaise Pascal wrote that these fundamental human characteristics form an “infinite abyss [which] can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”

Others have even referred to these longings as something of a “God-shaped hole” that only He can fill.

## **Conclusion**

Now, again, everything we've just looked at is merely to say that there *is* evidence and that it's rational to believe that there is a God. It's not absolute proof. But, as we heard earlier, that's really not necessary.

And, to be fair, what we've seen doesn't address some of the tough questions as to the *nature* of whatever Divine Being; for instance, "the problem of evil" – if an all-powerful and good God exists, then why does that God put an end to evil and suffering?

And it also doesn't explain why God doesn't do something like, *right now*, to show Himself to us; something like writing a message in the sky to prove He really is there.

Of course, if the evidence really does point to an all-powerful Creator, then it's a little presumptive of *me* to demand that *He* do something. If such a Being exists it would make more sense for *Him* to

make demands of *me*; that *I* do something to seek *Him*. But that's a topic for another day.

As for *this* day, if you're already a believer, I hope you are encouraged that your faith isn't blind. It's rational and reasonable. Even if we ourselves don't know all the answers, someone way smarter than us does and their knowledge is readily available.

And if you're a skeptic, I hope what we've done encourages you at least to be open to the *possibility* that a God exists ... who *might* have done something miraculous 2,000 years ago that fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah wrote centuries beforehand: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son" ... Jesus of Nazareth.

... which, of course, brings us to the second defeater belief. Even if a Supreme Being does exist, that doesn't necessarily mean we can say anything about *Jesus* until we address the question of *his* existence as a real person in a real



place at a real time.

And that's what we'll talk about next week.

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Now, in just a minute on this final song, our ushers are going to come and receive the offering.

Let's pray together.

<Pray>

**Feature – God-Shaped Hole / Offering**

**CLOSING COMMENTS – Rick**

1. “Celebration of Christmas” right around the corner. “Christmas Through the Decades” show. Sign up to help or attend. Invite others.
2. Give a gift this Christmas to help those in need – NHCC Christmas Blessing. (We

decided years ago to spend on others what we spend on ourselves).

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22

<sup>ii</sup> This clip is from Patrick Gentempo's Christ Revealed Episode 2.

<sup>iii</sup> This clip can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNuhIBwnQs0>

<sup>iv</sup> From Christ Revealed Episode 7.

<sup>v</sup> N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*