

John Dickson

I love that ad. In fact, Aussies will know that every year there's an Australian lamb campaign. It's conducted by the Meat and Livestock Australia organisation. And they try and encourage Aussies to eat more lamb. The campaigns themselves usually get a lot of media coverage and always upset someone. In 2017, the lamb industry called on the gods for help and I'm pretty sure they annoyed everyone.

Jesus Cracking Jokes, uh, L. Ron Hubbard is there. Scientology, he says he um, gave up dinner with Tom to be there at the banquet. But the whole thing is, all the gods disagree on loads of different things, but they can all agree on eating lamb. Lamb is quote, the only meat they all can eat. And in that particular clip, we saw, uh, Jesus and Zeus and Aphrodite chatting to one another, telling jokes and loads of the other gods listening on.

It's not a bad picture of how ancient people viewed reality, a kind of. banquet of the deities, Zeus, Aphrodite, Asclepius, and so on, all around the table feasting. But here's the thing, does Jesus belong at that particular table. Uh, when the early Christians said that

Jesus is God, what did they mean? Did they mean Jesus is just a celestial superhero like Zeus or Aphrodite, or maybe a deified emperor like Julius Caesar or Augustus? Well, some scholars think that's exactly all that Christians meant. Our guest today, however, has studied and published on this very question. He is, if it's not a blasphemy to say, I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

THEME

John Dickson

This special episode of Undeceptions is brought to you by our Undeceptions team. This conference sponsors CLR Travel and Moreland College. You may know that each episode of Undeceptions, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, science, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten.

And with the help of people who know what they're talking about, we're trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

READING

*The Wrath Sing, goddess of Palis, sun, Achilles, the Accursed Wrath, which brought countless sorrows upon the kinan and sent down to Hades many valiant souls of warriors and made the men themselves to be the spoil for dogs and birds of every kind. And thus, The will of Zeus was brought to completion of this thing from the time when first there parted in strife Atreus son, lord of men and noble Achilles - **Homer's Iliad.***

John Dickson

That's voice actor and cellist for the conference, Dakota Love, reading the opening lines of Homer's Iliad, one of the oldest and most important pieces of literature ever, at least. two and a half thousand years old and Homer's treatment of the deities set the stage for how most Greeks and later Romans thought about the great play that is this world of gods and humans.

But my guest can describe this much better than I can. Dr. Michael F. Byrd is a friend of This is actually his third episode. He's, uh, now the most episode ed Underception's guest. Yes, he was on Canon Fodder,

where we talked about the making of the New Testament, and Just War. Uh, so this is three times. No other guest has been on here that much.

Mike's first career? Was as a paratrooper and intelligence officer. And so it was a short hop skip and a jump to his current job, which is deputy principal of Ridley Theological College, where he's in charge of postgraduate studies. Uh, Mike is probably Australia's most published New Testament expert. His most recent book, though he might've had a couple since last Thursday, you never know with this guy is titled, *Jesus Among the Gods*, and it examines precisely the question that we want to explore today. What did the first Christians mean when they said, Jesus is God? Please welcome, Michael Bird.

Sorry to leave you hanging there awkwardly for all that introduction, but I think it was worth it. They seem to like that introduction and I

Mike Bird

I liked it myself. Yes.

John Dickson

So, um, Mike, tell us, uh, how did people in the Greco Roman world think of the divine and maybe help us think of the differences with the way moderns think of divinity. Yeah,

Mike Bird

Well, modern people, we tend to think of gods as something like up in the heavens and far away, sort of the, you know, that comic cartoon of you know, gods up in heaven, you know, he's got the voice like Morgan Freeman, possibly the body of Liam Neeson, something like that, looking down and, you know, with worry or consternation at human beings.

But in the ancient world that was not the case. The gods were everywhere. Like if you, if you walked through a city, it would be a city saturated with gods. You would see, you know, uh, statues, idols, minarets to gods in someone's house, uh, in, in, in, you know, images in the window. You would go through the main street and there would be... There would be shops, there would be altars, there would be temples. And they had gods for all sorts of things. They had, you had gods of the mountains, gods for areas of life, whether it's

beekeeping or gods of war, gods of love, fertility and everything. It was a world saturated with gods and it wasn't compartmentalized as we may think about divinity or religion in our own time.

John Dickson

Um, is it true that humans could actually become gods? Could you tell us maybe a little about that?

Mike Bird

Yeah, in antiquity there was a thought that some people are so powerful or so endowed with a divine spirit or might even be descended from gods themselves somehow that they carry with them either a divine genius or else if they have acted with such greatness and achieve such austere heights that they could be elevated or promoted to a pantheon of divine beings.

So, in both sense, there were those who thought that, you know, maybe someone was born of a god, so maybe Zeus kind of got rather intimate with your mother at some point. Or something like that, and you were a god in that way. Or, if you had such great accomplishments, and you were an emperor or a king,

you were somewhere between the greatest of men and the least of gods.

John Dickson

We actually have a reading that illustrates this, because if any human could become a god, it'd have to be Julius Caesar.

READING

Julius Caesar died in the 56th year of his age and was numbered among the gods, not only by a formal decree, but also in the conviction of the common people. For at the first of the games, which his heir, Augustus, gave in honour of his apotheosis, a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour.

*and was believed to be the soul of Caesar, who had been taken to heaven. And this is why a star is set upon the crown of his head in his statue - **Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars.***

John Dickson

Thanks, Dakota. That is indeed Suetonius talking about the apotheosis or deification of, uh, of Julius Caesar. Um, Mike, what did they mean when they said an emperor can become God?

[00:11:24] What was it? Sort of, you know, polite flattery, or did they really have a spiritual view and sing hymns and prayers and stuff to the emperors?

Mike Bird

Well, it could be a bit of both. I mean, a long time ago, when... You know, moderns read this with our protestant skeptic, skepticism towards all things about visible or the ancient world.

We thought, well, I mean, they didn't really believe this stuff. This was just a kind of political fiction. You know, they didn't really believe it, but no, they actually did. They actually believed that this was a, the ritual, in Greek, apotheosis, consecratio in Greek, kind of made someone a god. I mean, you could be declared a god by...But then this ritual whereby you'd be made a god and they would, they would like burn a, a wax effigy of the person perhaps. And there would be these fire and, uh, fireworks to symbolize the ascension of the soul up

to the heavens. And people would say, oh yeah, I saw three crows flying backwards or something.

There would be some sort of portent or a comet as we described. And this person became a god, but most importantly they were gods of the Roman state. And there were different ways you could express this. Sometimes you just give them a declaration, and that'd be it. Other times you would build a temple, you would assign a priesthood, and you would have a whole bunch of sacrifices that would be conducted towards them or for them.

And it was premised on the idea that doing these sacrifices... to them or praying to them would somehow confer benefits on the recipients. So, there was a political element to it because, you know, if your father has been, uh, declared a god and ascended to heaven, that means you get to call yourself... a son of God.

If Julius Caesar, uh, is declared a God, then his adopted son Augustus gets to declare himself as the son of the divine Julius. So there's a political rhetoric in there, but it's not just a political ruse. They really did believe that these were gods of the Roman state and gods of the Roman people.

John Dickson

Uh, earlier in the day, I mentioned my Silver Denarius, Tiberian Denarius, and it precisely calls him Divi Filius, son of, son of God, we might even translate it.

Um, so, is that the sense in which, uh, Christians said Jesus was God? He was a man who was... in a Roman sense, deified. Um, I asked you this because, um, the very famous New Testament expert, Bart Ehrman in the, in the, in America has argued precisely this, that, uh, quote, Christians were calling Jesus God directly on the heels of the Romans calling the emperor God.

And he calls it competition. Uh, do you think that's, do you think that's right? Historically?

Mike Bird

I mean, not in the absolute sense. You could argue there are some similarities between Jesus as a divine being and the way a Roman emperor was regarded or, you know, transformed into a divine being. I mean, if you read, you know, Acts chapter 1 About the ascension of Jesus you could imagine how a Greco Roman reader coming across this for the first time I think oh, yeah, that sounds a little bit like the the

consecratio of Julius Caesar or Augustus or Claudius or something like that, but again There's also a lot of differences as well.

Uh, Christians didn't just see Jesus becoming divine at some point, whether it's his resurrection. Uh, they could also argue that he always was divine from the very beginning. Uh, perhaps he was even a pre existent being in the eternal word of God, the Logos, who had become human, who had become incarnate, that what we call the Trinity.

And also, when they thought of Jesus as being divine, He wasn't simply a human being elevated to somewhere within a divine period, as if, well, he's divine, but you know, not as divine as Zeus or Jupiter or anything like that. Uh, Christians didn't see him merely as elevated to a heavenly position with a massive hierarchy of a populated heaven.

They said, no, he is elevated and he sits at the right hand of the Father and he shares in the same divinity. as God the Father, which Christians would eventually, uh, confess in their creeds that Jesus is true man and true God. That true God phrase is a way of saying he participates in the absolute divinity of God the Father.

John Dickson

Here's another reading, uh, from a Roman who encountered, uh, early Christians talking about Jesus as God.

READING

I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense. to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose, along with the images of the gods, and furthermore, had reviled the name of Christ, none of which things I understand any genuine Christian can be induced to do.

They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this. They had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honour of Christ as, if to a god - **Governor Pliny to Emperor Trajan**

John Dickson

That's one of the many letters we have, uh, from Pliny the Younger, who was the governor of Bithynia in the year 112, and we have loads of his letters, which are really great fun, I'm sure you'll agree, Mike. He was the quintessential Roman gentleman, highly educated, very wealthy, loved hunting, but loved reading books more. In fact, he tells us in one letter how he used to take his books on hunting trips, because he often got bored waiting for the animal to come along.

Mike Bird

I think he also read books while Mount Vesuvius exploded. And his, um, I think his uncle was out investigating it.

John Dickson

Pliny the Elder, yeah, who actually died in the Vesuvius eruption, yeah. Um, but in this famous letter, he's writing to Trajan, the emperor, saying, I don't know why I'm killing the Christians, but I'm doing it, you know, good Roman and all. He describes Christians singing hymns to Jesus as God. But he, um, seems to describe their, their faith in Jesus as, um, disloyalty to the gods of

Rome and indeed disloyalty to the emperor himself. What do you make of that passage?

Mike Bird

Yeah, well, I mean, it's, it's an amazing passage because here you have a Roman governor kind of befuddled what to do with these Christians.

And he's basically told, you know, take a don't ask, don't tell policy. You know, don't go around looking for them. Don't believe, you know, everything someone says when someone's accused of being a Christian. But if you find someone who professes to be one, you know, give them a chance to recant. And if that doesn't work, then cut their head off.

That's basically Trajan's reply, right? That's basically Trajan's reply. Okay, don't go looking for them. So that's kind of what he does, so they're singing hymns to Christ as to a God.

So, clearly Pliny recognizes the religious dimension of what they're doing. Jesus is a recognized, um, praised as a deity. Now we could go deeper into the question, you know, what did they mean by that? I mean, simply calling Jesus as God tells us a lot, but it also raises a lot

of questions because there's a whole bunch of different ways of being divine in antiquity.

But one of the reasons why it came to the attention of the Roman officials is that people were supposed to be offering their devotion to the gods of the Roman state. Uh, that would be the local deities. It could mean also ones that were, you know, pan empire or ones recognized by the Romans themselves.

Uh, but Christians would not do that. They would not worship. And that's why they were called, of all things, atheists. Because they would not pay homage to the local deities. And for some, that was not just bad religion. It was an act of treason, disloyalty. Because if you don't respect the gods, then you're disrespecting our customs, our heritage, our values.

And we need the favor of the gods. Because if we don't worship them, there could be famine. There could be, uh, earthquakes. There could be all sorts of disasters. We need to maintain the pax duorum, the peace with the gods, and we get that by rendering to them the rituals which they require. So the Christians were not doing their part and they were kind of letting the team

down, which is why they were considered enemies of the state.

John Dickson

There's a tantalizing reference in that Pliny passage to... Them singing hymns to Christ as God. Uh, do we have any idea at this very early stage, just the dawn of the second century, uh, what sort of hymns Christians. in praise of Jesus as God?

Mike Bird

Yeah, well we have a little bit of evidence if we look at the New Testament.

If we look at some of the passages where there's very rich prose I think here of um, Philippians 2 verses 6 to 11, often called the Christ hymn or That's filled with a rich rhythmic language that may well have, uh, been a hymn of some kind or certainly inform the type of hymnody that would soon develop, or somewhere like Colossians 1, 15 to 20. You can see people offering praise to Christ. in a very poetic, rich way, describing various aspects of his being, his character, his relationship to God, and the benefits he confers on his church.

John Dickson

We're going to pause here, and after the break, we're going to do a rapid fire round with Mike about the various gods, the chief gods, and then he's going to explain in what sense was Jesus really God.

That's after the break.

*****BREAK*****

MOVIE AD

In an ancient age, before recorded time, men were measured by their courage, and women by their beauty.

Mighty gods ruled the universe, and fear and destruction covered the world. It was a time of darkness, when only the force of love could bring back the light. Now, Metro Goldwyn Mayer

presents Clash of the Titans. A sweeping legend of a golden age. Soon, the motion picture epic of our time.

John Dickson

That of course, uh, is the trailer of the 1981 film, uh, *Clash of the Titans* starring Lawrence Olivia, uh, as Zeus. Uh, you may have picked up, if you listen to the show that I don't watch all of the films, uh, that I'm forced to talk about, they're, they're basically just director Mark's favorite films, including that one.

Um, He adds a note in my script that the 2010 remake of the *Clash of the Titans*, if you knew there was one, uh, has groundbreaking stop motion animation, and he expected me to say that with sincerity. We're going to have our own *Clash of the Titans* in a moment, um, Mike, let's do a rapid fire round because I want to know a little about some of the Uh, cool gods.

Uh, can you just in a sentence maybe, tell us about the following? Zeus?

Mike Bird

King of the gods, uh, very good with lightning bolts.

John Dickson

Hercules?

Mike Bird

He was the god, he was um, born, uh, of a god, he was a demigod, who then gets made a god, he then has his own apotheosis. Also, uh, very good problem solver.

John Dickson

Dionysius?

Mike Bird

The god you definitely want to go on a wine tour of the Yarra Valley with. May get a little bit debauched, but if you can avoid that, the guy will know how to pick a good drop of wine.

John Dickson

Okay. What similarities do you see between said gods and Jesus? I mean, did they all have, you know, virgin births, disciples, they're all born on the 25th of December, I understand, uh, and died and rose again?

Mike Bird

Oh, well, look, if you look at a god like Osiris who, um, who dies and is kind of brought back to life, that's done as a seasonal way. I mean, the problem is you can find a lot of deities.

In antiquity, where they have like One aspect or one feature that is similar to way, the way Christians talked about, uh, Jesus, okay? So you can look at, you know, a bit of stoic philosophy in the way they talked about the Logos. I mean, and that's somewhat similar to the way, uh, John talks about. Or you can even talk about, um, Christ.

I mean, there are some similarities between, like, a deified emperor and Jesus. But they're always something. But what Christianity has in its narration of Jesus is what I call this charismatic uniqueness. Now, that's a fancy phrase that means the whole narrative of proclamation. That itself kind of stands out in the ancient world.

Because you have the God of Israel, sends his son, you know, born of woman, born under law, you know, grows up in a, you know, backwater Roman province of Judea. proclaims the kingdom of God, does many miracles, is crucified, comes back to life and is then seated at the right hand of the Father and is regarded as the definitive expression of the God of Israel, who is also not just a tribal deity, but is one whom all the nations of the earth, men and women, can have a relationship through faith.

That total package... isn't really replicated everywhere. Even if you can find the odd bit and piece here and there, like, okay, that reminds me of Zeus, or Jesus can heal, that reminds me of Asclepius. Or, you know, sometimes there are people who prophesy in Jesus name, and that can remind me of other things.

There's little bits and pieces that are similar, but this major narrative, the one I've just described, there's no real parallel to the whole thing in the ancient world.

John Dickson

Around the year 50, the Apostle Paul, one of the authors of the New Testament, walks into Athens, which is a kind of center of Greek and Roman philosophy and religion. And Paul preaches a very different conception of God.

READING

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. For

in him we live and move and have our being, as some of your own poets have said 'We are his offspring'. -

The book of Acts chapter 17

John Dickson

There's Paul preaching a very different idea of God that comes from the Jewish heritage. So give us a quick rundown of how Jews in the first century thought about God.

Mike Bird

Well, when the Jewish people thought about God, they thought about, first of all, as the god of creation. This is the god who made heaven and earth and all that is in them. And this god was the uncreated creator. Now, you can get other gods in the ancient world who also made the world, like Marduk, or even in some times Zeus, but they made the world but they themselves God made or they were born. So although they were creating deities of some kind they were themselves Created but the Jewish God was the uncreated Creator.

Okay, so that's immediately one thing that's kind of a little bit different. And, although there might be other,

you might call them like little g gods, we don't call them angels or spiritual beings or powers in the heavenly realm, which is why God can be called the, you know, Yahweh can be called the God of gods, you know, that kind of language.

Uh, they are not in the same league. Okay, so Yahweh, that's the covenant name of the God of Israel, is simply species unique. Okay, may not necessarily be the only divine entity there is, because you've got angels and the like floating around, but he's simply in a class of his own. Uh, and the next thing I would say, they also believe that this God had covenanted with Israel, and he interacts with them.

And the Jewish people were very... keen to avoid too much anthropomorphism, you know, depicting God as a human like thing. Uh, so God had, had mediators between himself and the world, that's where you get angels, or that mysterious character called the Angel of the Lord you get in the Old Testament, or he would send them prophets, or sages, or he would, he would anoint a king of Israel to kind of, you know, uh, guard and... and curate his own covenant people. So in, those were the senses in which the Jewish deity stood out. And the type of worship that was offered to him was anti iconic.

So there would be no statues, images or anything like this. And there was going to be an exclusive devotion to him. So the God of the Jews, the God of, you know, the Hebrew Bible that we, that is kind of carried over into the New Testament is not simply...

one among many, not even simply the chief of a tribe of gods. He is species unique, the uncreated creator who covenants with this special people and promises through them he will reach the nations of the world.

John Dickson

In the passage we just heard, um, Paul says to this uh, pagan environment as some of your own poets have said and that, those lines about in him we live and move and have our being and And we are his offspring speak of, um, uncreated creator. So obviously some Pagans had cottoned on to this. Uh, idea of a god, a source beyond the gods.

Mike Bird

Yeah, I mean, you can find different groups talking about the most high god, okay, in a kind of mysterious way. Or in Acts 17, there's the altar to the unknown god.

And you do have varieties of what we would call, in a very flexible sense, monotheism in antiquity.

I mean, you get that in ancient Egypt. There were pagan views that were kind of similar to monotheism. Eventually, in the third century Rome, you get the sun god becoming, you know, your sole invictus becoming a dominant type of monotheistic deity. But it wasn't monotheism as we know it. It's not like they're saying, well, there's only one god.

And there's nothing else. They would simply say there is one God who is supreme, or else they would say there is one God and all other deities are just an expression of some reality of that one God. So there are kind of types of monotheism, and you could argue that maybe that's a feature of general revelation.

How, because God has imprinted something of himself, his greatness, majesty, and beauty in how he's made the world. And people respond that, to that in different ways, and sometimes it's towards a monotheistic... But that phrase, in whom we live and move, have our being, uh, I mean, that's interesting because, I mean, if you talk that out of context, it would sound somewhat pantheistic.

And this is that the tension we find, uh, I think both in, in, uh, what, you know, I call biblical monotheism and in pagan monotheism, is how is God both transcendent from creation, differentiated from it, set apart from it, and how does he, uh, remain active within it. There's both transcendence and immanence.

Um, what we call pagan religion would normally, uh, air towards the immanent side and see God or the gods as the strongest and mightiest forces within the room. Whereas the Jewish tradition, followed by the Christians, tended to focus on God's otherness, his set apartness. But the two aspects both go together, transcendence and immanence.

Wrestling with that is something pagans, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all share.

John Dickson

The first Christians were all Jews and the New Testament writings really all grew out of a Jewish context. So in what sense were they saying Jesus is God?

Mike Bird

Yeah, I mean, this is the thing people wonder.

They say, well, you know, if Jesus is God, why doesn't he just walk around with a magical halo, saying, hi, I'm God. I'm going to die in your sins very soon. After that, I'll teach you some Trinitarian theology. The math is a bit weird, but trust me, we're going to run with it. Uh, that's not what he does. Um, what you have is Jesus going around Galilee, declaring that the kingdom of God is coming because in him is embodied and enacted the very kingly power of God.

He doesn't simply claim to be a rabbi, saying, you know, Rabbi Herschel says this, Rabbi Moshe says this, but I've got a pretty cool and funky opinion myself. He doesn't just say, uh, like a prophet does, you know, the word of the Lord came to me, Yeshua ben Yosef, and this is what God wants. He speaks with a sense of unmediated divine authority, that is confronting and Distinguishes him from the scribes and added to that with his miracles and the early Christians became convinced, particularly by their resurrection experience of the exalted Lord, that that Jesus of Nazareth was to be identified with not completely as but identified with the guard of Israel.

John Dickson

So do you see this in the gospels leaving? John's gospel aside because John's gospel quite explicitly describes Jesus as, uh, divine. Um, but do you see it in Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Because a lot of scholars for many, many decades have said no, there's no divine Jesus in the gospels.

Mike Bird

Yeah, and there is a kind of fallacy I found in biblical scholarship, even among some learned scholars who say John's gospel is high Christology. Gospel of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. They are not John. Therefore they are low Christology. Okay, it's not a convincing argument. There's different ways of articulating Jesus divinity. Let me give you a couple of examples. Let's say, uh, in the Gospel of Mark, okay?

You've got that very famous scene where Jesus is being interviewed by Caiaphas. Caiaphas says, Are you the Messiah, the son of the blessed one? And Jesus says, I am, and you will see the son of man sit at the right hand of the power, coming on the clouds with much, with much glory and with the angels. Then Caiaphas

instantly rips his tunic, says, You know, this is blasphemy, what evidence do we need?

Now what is really interesting is Jesus response is kind of obliquely affirmative. He's affirming, I think he is the Messiah. But he does it by combining together two very specific Jewish texts. He combines together Daniel 7. 13 Which is a passage about this mysterious figure called one like the son of man one like a son of man Who comes before the ancient of days and he's given?

Dominion power and glory and he's kind of co enthroned with the ancient of days And it's also similar to another important text, which is Psalm 110 verse 1, where it says, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Those two texts have one thing in common.

They both refer... to someone being co enthroned beside God. And this is a sense of co regency, which implies a sense of equality with God. And that is why Caiaphas kind of, you know, tears his tunic and says, this is a horrible thing to say. Because they recognize Jesus is claiming that he belongs within the orbit of divine sovereignty.

Uh, he's not merely the spokesman of that, he shares in the divine reign of the God of Israel. Now that is a very Jewish way of saying, uh, that I am, I am divine in the sense of God the Father. Let me give one more example from the Gospel of Luke. Uh, when Jesus is weeping over Jerusalem, knowing what's about to happen to him, knowing that this city is destined, it's on a crash course for a horrible and futile rebellious war against Rome. And he weeps over the city and he says, you know, all these things are going to happen because you did not recognize your day of visitation. Okay, now that language of visitation, you can look in the prophets, you can look in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

This is the language of the visitation of God. God coming to you. And what Jesus, I think, is saying, that great hope for the return of Yahweh to Zion. That great hope that God was going to come and liberate His people. You know, speak truth to them and love. He's saying that is coming in and through Himself.

He is the one bringing that day of visitation again. This is a very Jewish way, embedded in Scripture, the language and hopes of the prophets, of Jesus saying he's the one who brings the presence and promises of God to his people.

John Dickson

This could come across as all, uh, pretty historical and theological. So, um, can I ask finally, uh, more practically or personally, what does it mean for you to say Jesus is God beyond the history of ideas that we've talked about?

Mike Bird

Well, I'd say at one level, you know, I want to know what it means to say God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Because I know from my own life I need to be reconciled. I need to be reconciled to people around me. But I, I know I need to be reconciled to God.

And it is in. Jesus. It is Jesus as God in whom we find reconciliation by putting our faith in his cross and resurrection. But I want to say it's more than that as well. Because I think what it means is we get a whole new conception of God. Uh, someone you, you, uh, know well, we both know, uh, N. T. Wright. Uh, a bit of the, the, um, the Taylor Swift of biblical studies, as I like to call him.

Um, he, he tells a story when he was a chaplain. He used to, at a college, he'd interview all the new

students, and the students would often say, look, you know, nice to meet you, chaplain, but I'm not particularly religious, I don't really, uh, believe in God, so you won't be seeing much of me. And, and Tom would always say, I mean, tell me about this God you don't believe in.

And the students would say, well, you know, kind of lives in heaven, you know, does miracles, sends sin to the hell. And Tom would say, well, that's fascinating, because I don't believe in that God either. Uh, and he would say, the God I believe in is different. The God I believe in is the one revealed in Jesus.

And this is the thing we should take away. Most people start off as if we know what the word God means, and we need to figure out who Jesus is. But I think we should flip that. I think we've got to look at who Jesus is, and then by looking at Jesus, then we know who God is. In other words, if you want to know what God is like, It's not a matter of staring up at the clouds and thinking very heavenly thoughts.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. That I think is the lesson that we take away. That is what I think makes the Christian tradition distinct. It's not a philosophical, uh, theism with a few kind of nice notes

about Jesus. The very thing. The definition of who God is now has to be defined by the story, the testimony pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth.