

God Was One of Us

We've been to late 60s, to the early 2020s, and back to the 70s. This morning we jump forward to the mid-90s and a song that was huge for this one-hit wonder. Both the song and her album were nominated for multiple Grammys including album and song of the year.

But to fully appreciate the origins of this song, you have to go back to the early 80's to a team of studio musicians, named Eric, Rob, and Rick who were writing and performing on Cindy Lauper's debut album, *She's So Unusual*. Led by her catchy anthem *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*, the album was such a big hit that Eric and Rob were able to parlay that success to score a record deal for their own band, The Hooters, where they continued to collaborate with their friend, Rick. The Hooters had a couple hits of their own in the mid-80s.

The Eric of that team was multi-instrumentalist Eric Bazillian. Eric came from a Jewish heritage and was raised in the Jewish faith, but left that faith behind. However, he could never escape the ideas of faith. They haunted his imagination and continually crept into his songwriting.

I even remember being a teenager and hearing these rumors at church camp about The Hooters being a Christian band. However, Eric Bazillian didn't have faith. What he had was questions, and the faith of his youth became the vocabulary he used to ask those questions.

Fast forward to 1995, and Eric, Rob, and Rick are working with another talented young singer on her major label debut. They were writing, playing and, producing her songs. One evening, Eric had a date over to his place to watch a documentary on the recording of the Beatles *Sergeant Peppers* album. His date was fascinated by the recording process and seeing that Eric had a home recording studio she asked him to record a song for her.

This threw Eric for a loop because he and Rob were known to take a loooong time to record songs, but he also wanted to impress the girl. So he sat down at his keyboard, turned on his 4-track recorder and began to play. He wrote this song in one night. Since he was doing all this off the top of his head, he drew on ideas from the bottom of his heart. It must have worked because Eric married her and they have two children together.

The next day, he played the song for Rob and Rick as they were in the studio working on the album. Rick immediately saw the potential and asked their young singer, Joan Osborne, if she could sing it. He didn't ask her if she wanted to, because he feared she would say no, so he presented it as a challenge.

Of course, she COULD sing it, and she proceeded to record a live demo with Eric playing guitar. Eric says when he popped the cassette into his car stereo, he immediately "started practicing the Grammy speech."

It was released as the first single off Joan Osborne's album and it became a worldwide smash, hitting number one around the world and number 4 here in the US. VH1 ranked it as #54 in their "100 Greatest Songs of the 90s."

This song asks what may be the greatest of all spiritual questions ever asked; a question that gets to the very heart of the gospel -- "What if God was one of us." Check it out.

(Play song snippet)

What if God was just an ordinary person? What if God had to experience all the things in life we have to experience. If we knew that person was God, what would that mean for us? How would it change our lives? What difference would it make? How would we be different?

What really sticks out to me is that these lyrics, these questions come from the heart and mind of a man who descended from the Jewish faith, a faith he rejected, a faith that teaches that one day God would indeed become one of us, and yet a faith that ultimately has refused to accept that God did indeed become one of us through Jesus.

This brings us to the heart of the gospel, and the very heart of Christianity- that God has in fact become one of us. The theological word for this is the incarnation. It comes from a Latin term *en carne* that means into flesh. God put Himself into flesh. There is no gospel –no good news- without the incarnation. God was one of us.

I. Jesus was God

Let me build the idea of the incarnation a piece at a time. The first piece is this. Jesus was God. Jesus was not just a man who found God, who was found by God, or who became like God. He was in his very nature – divine, of the same essence as God. He wasn't just a good teacher. He wasn't merely a moral person. He was more than enlightened. Jesus was God.

Jesus could not have gone around doing the sorts of things He did, and claiming the things He claimed and merely been just a good teacher or a moral philosopher or a man who achieved a higher state of being. He had to be either the Lord, a liar of the worst kind, or a lunatic. This is a classic logical defense of the Christian faith. It's what C.S. Lewis called the trilemma, like a dilemma, but it's a choice between three things. Jesus had to be either Lord, liar, or lunatic. But since we're doing a rock and roll series, I'll let another rock star explain it. Here's Bono of U2,

(Play Bono Interview Quote)

It is with this essential truth that the Apostle John begins his historical account of the life of Christ in one of the most theologically and philosophically profound statements ever put to paper. John 1:1-5 says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him

nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **Word. In the Greek it's Logos.** John tells us volumes in just a few sentences here. In talking about the *Logos*, John is unloading barrels of truth about who this Word is and their relationship to God. *Logos* was such a deep, rich and loaded term. Anyone reading this fresh in the 1st Century would have connected this with several really big ideas.

In English, we translate it as *Word*, but it's SOOO MUCH MORE. *Logos* was a concept, an idea. There is no word in English sufficient to express the weight and fullness of *Logos*. Whole books have been written to express the meaning of this one word.

At its most basic level *Logos* meant reasoned or intelligent speech. **It is the ability to articulate with clarity and with reason. It is the orderly linking and knitting of the thoughts and feelings of the mind and to express them.**

For Jews, Logos meant God in action. God's word is powerful and effective. What God says in word is as good as done. The word of God is the same as the work of God. Psalm 33:6 captures this perfectly, "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth...for he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.*" God's word is money in the bank.

The *logos* of God was so closely associated with God that Jewish scholars began using it as a title for God. Centuries of war and oppression had scattered much of the Jewish population out among the larger Greek and Roman world. No longer speaking Hebrew as their native language, they began using *Logos* as a name for God instead of Yahweh. The word of God was God.

Among the Greeks, the idea of *logos* took a more philosophical bent. *Logos* was the guiding force that made sure history was flowing in the right direction. History wasn't random chance or chaos, but rather something guided it along. The *logos* formed a pattern that guided everything. The *logos* was the eternal principle of order in the universe.

What John is doing in his introduction is to say, "I know who the *logos* is." The *logos* is with God. The *logos* is God. The *logos* is eternal. The *logos* is creator. John is setting up the essential truth that Jesus is the *logos*. Jesus is divine. Jesus is eternally one with his Father. Jesus was integral in creating the cosmos and reigns over creation. Jesus was already there in the beginning. Jesus was with God. Jesus was God.

Jesus became Human

The Apostle John then introduces John the Baptist, and the themes of light and darkness which will play prominently in his account. But in verse 14, he returns to this idea of the *logos* where he makes the most astounding claim, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among**

us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

"*The Word became flesh.*" This is the incarnation. The *Logos* puts on skin, takes on human flesh, a human heart pumping in his chest, blood flowing through his veins, infinite wisdom confined to the folds of a human brain, and he became one of us. And this wasn't like a star cameo in a movie that passes in a couple of seconds. He completely entered into our world and experienced it in all ways as one us.

John 1:14 literally says, "*The word became flesh and set up his tent among us.*" Jesus moved in next door. He became our neighbor. Jesus goes from living in a heavenly palace with all the royal privilege and honor, the worship of innumerable angels to living in a tent with the peasants. He goes from having the entire cosmos as His backyard to a small bit of flesh and bone stuck on this rock floating in space and calling home.

Jesus got hungry. In Matthew 21, Jesus was hungry and went to a fig tree to get something to eat, and there were no figs on it. He turns it into an object lesson. Jesus got thirsty. In John 4, Jesus has been journeying all morning, and he sits down next to a well under the heat of the mid-day sun. He asks her for a drink. He ends up giving her the water of life. He got tired and took a nap in the bottom of a fishing boat even as a storm had the disciples scared for their lives.

He knew anxiety to the point of sweating great drops of blood as he wrestled in prayer over his coming death. He knew loss. His earthly father Joseph died before Jesus reached adulthood. He knew grief as he wept at the grave of a friend, even before raising him from the dead. He knew rejection, experiencing both betrayal and abandonment by those that were his friends. Whatever you're going through, Jesus understands that. He's been there. He gets you.

You've probably seen ads from an organization called "He Gets Us." They present Jesus as one who gets us, who understands us no matter who we are and what we're going through. The biblical book of Hebrews makes that very point. In Hebrews 2:11 it says that Jesus and us are of the same family, that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Later, in verse 14, it explains why, "*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity.*"

The incarnation- God becoming one of us- is the most incredible event in all of human history. Greater than the discovery of fire, the invention of the wheel, the steam engine, manned flight, radio, the transistor, and the microprocessor all put together. The eternal, all-powerful, ever-present, infinitely holy Son of God put on human flesh and lived among humanity, as the song says, He became one of us.

Jesus Came for Us

The significant thing here though is WHY Jesus did this- why God became one of us. The reason is this— Jesus came for us. He put on our skin and lived your life because he wants to be with you.

Think of the lengths we will go to be with someone we love.

I slept on a too short couch to see my daughter Alyssa. Teresa and I once stayed up all night to see each other and I had to preach the next morning. I was dragging tail that day. We'll drive for hours. Stay up way past our bedtime. Stay all night with them keeping watch in the hospital. Fly to the other side of the world to see your kid on a couple days of leave. By sending His Son, God went to the greatest length possible to be with us.

Peter Scazzero in his book *The Emotionally Healthy Church* tells about a time he and his wife were serving as missionaries in Costa Rica working with university students.

A part of being a missionary is totally immersing yourself in the culture to which you are showing God's love. It's not enough to physically enter their world. You have to become a part of their world. In Costa Rica, the couple ate rice and beans three times a day and only had meat once a week. They celebrated their customs and lived like the poor people of their community.

Peter writes that his wife would frequently say, "This is hard and all I did was leave the United States. Jesus left heaven for earth."

The message of Scripture, the good news of the gospel is that God loves us and wants us to be with him, so He sent Jesus for us. John 3:16, "For God so **loved** the world that he gave his one and only Son..." (New Slide) Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own **love** for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

That means that God loves you. He sent Jesus for you. Jesus died for you. So that He could be with you and you could be with Him. The incarnation was driven by love.

(New Slide) Max Lucado tells a remarkable story involving the pioneering plastic surgeon Dr. Maxwell Maltz. A man had gone into a burning house to save his parents from the fire. Though he tried, he could not get to them. They perished in the flames, and this man nearly lost his own life.

He was severely burned and his face was horribly disfigured. In his anguish, he blamed himself for his parent's loss. He isolated himself in depression and despondency. He wouldn't let anyone see him— not even his wife. He refused any help or to consult any plastic surgeon. He believed his pain and disfigurement was God's punishment.

Desperate to reach her husband, the wife went to Dr. Maltz. After hearing her story, the surgeon assured her, "I can restore his face." However, she remained unmoved. She explained that he didn't want help, and had refused all offers of help. She knew he would only refuse

again. She explained why she had come, “I want you to disfigure my face so I can be like him! If I can share his pain, maybe he’ll let me back into his life.”

Dr. Maltz was, of course, heartbroken by her plea. His medical ethics would not allow him to grant such a request, but he was so deeply moved by her love, that he went to speak with her husband.

Knocking on his door, he called, “I’m a plastic surgeon, and I can restore your face.”

No response.

“Please come out.”

Again there was no answer.

With his face pressed up to the door, he explained his wife’s proposal. “She wants me to disfigure her face to make her face like yours in the hope that you let her back into your life. That’s how much she loves you.”

There was a brief moment of silence, and then, ever so slowly, the door began to open.

The way that woman felt about her husband is the way God feels about you.

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- 6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 7 rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 8 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross!

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the most incredible event in all of human history. Greater than the discovery of fire, the invention of the wheel, the steam engine, manned flight, radio, the transistor, and the microprocessor all put together. The eternal, all-power, ever present, infinitely holy Son of God put on human flesh and life among humanity, as the song says, as one of us.

