

Was Jesus Intelligent?

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

Join me in prayer please. Father thank you for the time of worship where we can place ourselves in your hands. Because there is no one like you. You are our God. And as we come before you now we come before you. Not just placing our own lives in your hands but we place this university in your hands. And we pray that we would be the kind of people who are equipped to make a difference in this world. Because there is no one like you. And this world is lost and dying without a savior. And we pray that we would be so well equipped that we would go with a message that transforms this world. And offers hope and healing. We pray this in the name of the Savior. Amen. We've come to the end of a great week of celebration. It's been just a marvelous time of thinking back.

And now we come to what really is the culmination of this week and the culmination causes us to look to the future as we look at the Christian university in the next millennium. This afternoon we'll begin a conference with that title and it will begin with the first plenary speaker who is Dr. J.I. Packer author of the modern classic knowing God. The most highly visible evangelical theologian in the world today. So at Sutherland Hall 115 will begin the conference and at that time you'll be able to find out where all the rest of the activities will be carried out. We have seven of her own faculty who will be considering and strategizing our own future. And those are John Bloom from the sciences. Roger Feldman in fine arts. Richard Flory from sociology. Good line up. Doug Geivett philosophy. Sherwood Lingenfelter, Missiology Robert

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

Saucy Theology and Edward Wilshire history so a great lineup. And then this evening we will have Dr. George Marsden the most perceptive historical analyst of education both secular and Christian on the modern scene today not just a nerd but he is. Quite a perceptive Christian as well.

We also have with us Dr. Dallas Willard and his wife Jane. We'd like to welcome them with us today. Without doubt Dr. Willard is the most influential evangelical philosopher today. Now tomorrow afternoon promises to have plenty of sun. There should be excellent surf at most of the local spots but you need to start your day tomorrow morning at eight thirty as you're going to hear Dr. Willard deal with the philosophical issues of what it means for us to interface reason and revelation in our quest. Remember the conference is free all the plenary sessions will be held in Sutherland auditorium and then the faculty papers presented around the campus. Not only will Dallas Willard be plenary speaker tomorrow morning but he is also our chapel speaker this morning. Dr. Willard is Professor of Philosophy in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and he has been teaching as a professor of philosophy at USC since 1965 an incredible feat in and of itself a widely known influential philosopher. But he is also a leading evangelical scholar and he has also had a profound profound influence not only through his philosophy but in the training of a host of other scholars.

On this campus Dr. Willard will be known best as being the mentor of Dr. J.P. Moreland not to your shame Dallas in any way. But Dr. Willard not only does philosophy he but he is involved with helping us all understand what it means to be transformed into the image of Christ in his book In Search of guidance. His book The Spirit of the disciplines which has also become a classic and in his recent book that will be released this year. The divine conspiracy have been

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

leading the influences in that direction. A former board member of Biola and often used visiting professor on our campus Dr. Willard will be reflecting on the interface of reason and revelation for the conference but will start us out this morning with the message entitled. Was Jesus intelligent? Please welcome Dr. Willard. [Applause]

Dallas Willard:

Uh there for a while I was beginning to wonder who he was introducing but thank you Mike for those very generous and kind words. I do want to talk to you on the topic was Jesus intelligent and how intelligent was he. I presume in this context the answer is yes but it's important to talk about this because it's easy to lose sight of the fullness of Jesus and especially where he stands in the university today Charles Malik some years ago wrote a book in which he said the greatest question that the university faces today is what does Jesus Christ think of it. And there's never been a more profound statement made and since Dr. Malik went on and is with the Lord I'm sure that Jesus has become more concerned about the university than he ever was before. Now actually I uh on some of the earlier announcements that was indicated that I will be talking about developing the spiritual life of the scholar and in taking the topic I've taken I am precisely talking about developing the spiritual life of the scholar because the most important question for the scholar as such to answer is What am I doing in relationship to Jesus Christ and where is Jesus Christ in relationship to what I am doing?

Very often in our culture now after many years of development Jesus is intellectually marginalized. He is not thought of as a person of great ability. And it's something for us to soberly consider and it is something that, something for us to think about in relationship to our

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

work as scholars. Who is Jesus in the field of French literature who is Jesus in the field of algebra? Do you suppose he knows as much about algebra as your teachers do? Or French literature or Hebrew. You get him in the biblical stuff we normally say oh he must be an expert on that. But he is at home in any field he is the master of all of them and that's what we need to say loudly and clearly and I'd like you to just consider one verse out of the New Testament and that's Colossians 2:3 and now I'll pause for a moment and ask you to mark that down. Think about it. I want you to consider this verse because this expresses the New Testament vision of Jesus. And it says here referring to Jesus in whom are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge in whom are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now just if you will for a moment uh marinate your mind in that verse Jane and I were having a discussion over breakfast as to whether the verb was marinate or marinade and I thought that coming to a center of learning such as this someone could help us out. But I'll say marinate. Just marinate your mind and soak it in all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now how much does how much does that leave out. But if you ask Christian people who is the smartest person in the world very few of them will say immediately Jesus Christ. You will get that response sometimes from children who are just fresh from Sunday school where they've been told that Jesus is the greatest and they will draw the logical conclusion. But it is not on our mental horizon. Sometime back I was asked to lead a retreat at a Christian college for the faculty in the fall and as I usually do in a situation like that I will just sit before I get up for the first time and say no. Lord Jesus Christ I'm here on your behalf. What would you have me say to these people? And of course I've been working my bejeebers off to get up something to say to them you know how we do that. But there's always a chance that you might have cooked something up that isn't what needs to be said.

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

And the thought that came to me I believe from the spirit of Christ was Why don't you say to them. Why don't you honor me in your fields of expertise? Why don't you honor me in your fields of expertise? And we had a very fruitful discussion after a number of them fainted. Because you see we are trained in graduate schools. We're trained along a certain line in our fields of expertise. And you can say without any question at all that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ does not show up in our expertise. No one is asked a question on their doctoral oral about whether or not the Apostles Creed is true. And would they be willing to defend it. I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth and so on. As a matter of simple fact all of the content of the Christian faith is judged to be irrelevant to fields of knowledge and the fields of knowledge are judged to be irrelevant to the Christian faith. This has not been true for very long. People are often surprised at how short a while it was where that was not thought true. But it is true now.

And I'd like to just try to give you a few thoughts to help you correct that. This is the lecture and we'll have a test at the end. [Laughter] But when you look at Jesus and you think about him you began to see right away that he was a brilliant man indeed. And if you look at the scriptures you see the story that Luke picks up on I think because of the special interest that he would have about how Jesus when he was a boy of 12 went into the discussions in the temple. And that's like the leading think tank in the country. It isn't like your local church. Unless you have a very unusual local church. And Jesus went into the temple and therefore two perhaps a little more than two days he held the leading thinkers of his country locked in discussion discourse asking and answering. Let me tell you these kind of people don't hang around to watch freaks. Maybe for 15 minutes. But not for two days and a half. And Jesus was at that early age at the level where he made things interesting for the best minds among his people. And then watch

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

how he grows. It's very easy to miss the point of Jesus's work because too often we think of him as sort of I think walking in a in a sort of divine inspiration that possibly blots out the mind.

But when you observe Jesus at work in the Gospel you see that he constantly utilizes what we today would call the Socratic method of teaching and for the student or adversary it's the Socratic method of inquiry. This depends upon the power of logical inference that is passing from one belief to another usually initiated by a question or designed to make an assumption problematic. No passage more clearly illustrates this than Jesus's comments. His encounters with people in the 22nd chapter of Matthew if you want to just look at that for a few moments I'll be referring to some of the verses there. In the 22nd of Matthew both the Sadducees and the Pharisees take a turn at him and are reduced to silence by his power as a logician. The Pharisees with Herodians go at him in verses 15 through 22 the Sadducees. They have their turn in 23 through 34 and then the Pharisees come back again.

Well he more or less elicits a question from them in verses 34 through 46 the last encounter with the Pharisees. In this passage verses 34 through 36. Is one where Jesus Himself poses the question as they are huddled together nearby. They had asked the question earlier. Now it was clear they didn't know quite what to do. And Jesus asked a question. Which you always does with the intent of teaching. And he never just seems to beat people to a pulp logically because he has the power. But he's trying to teach them and he asked the question to teach them about the nature of Christ the Anointed One The Messiah a lesson which by the way deeply impressed his own students and which they later utilized from the same old Testament texts Psalm 110 on the day of Pentecost as you will see in Acts 2:34-35. And of course one must imagine on many other occasions because his lessons were not lost on his disciples. Now here's how Jesus asked them. He says whose son is the Messiah. Whose son is the Messiah? The

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

answer they give is the only right answer for anyone who is brought up in that context. The son of David Verse 42.

He then asked how could it be that David under him under inspiration and. That's important because. We want it clear here that when David says this he's not making a mistake. How could David call him Lord if he's his son? If David calls him Lord how is he his son, verse 45 now like all lively reasoning and discourse. The passage here and the discussion is inthemic, that is there are suppressed premises and indeed suppressed conclusions. Suppressed premise is that no son is the lord of his father no son is the lord of his father and the main conclusion left unstated is that the Messiah is not just the son of David. He's not the son of David alone but someone much greater than David. And of course the great messianic Psalm quoted Psalm 110. Later locates the Lord Christ entirely outside the Jewish tradition by proclaiming him an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek. And that of course was the fact also that was made much of by Christians later on.

Now the Jewish style of intellectual discourse was precisely to leave much unstated that was perfectly obvious. This is one of the things that keeps us from appreciating the kind of work Jesus does. Undoubtedly under the inspiration of the spirit but with the tools of reasoning and of logic. The effect of this is extremely powerful because it allows people to draw their own conclusions to do their own thinking and they're not exactly worrying about what someone else is thinking. That's why we use this mode of discourse. Ordinarily in speaking we don't say everything we could say we say just enough to get the point over. Now then the response look at verse 43 I'm sorry. Verse 46. No one was able to answer him nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask him another question. They're going to kill him but they wouldn't try to ask him another

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

question. Verse 34 says he had put the Sadducees to silence verse 22. Hearing this they marveled. And leaving him went away.

Now what am I talking about here. Some of you may be wondering at this point I'm talking about Jesus' power in reasoning and in understanding at a human level. Once you get the idea you see it everywhere you begin to understand that the great power of Jesus's mind was brought to bear simply and clearly in his teaching and it's brought to bear there today. And then finally. It is there today for us as we do our work. We look at other things in the scripture like his power over reality. Jesus was able to turn water into wine. I used to have a friend in the chemistry department who said to me if he did that there would be so much heat generated that it would melt the pots. As if that would pose a problem. It's like people who get worried about what happened to the rest of the universe when God stopped the sun and the answer to the prayers of the people who wanted the day to be longer. You know. If you can stop the sun you can probably deal with the rest of it. Jesus could produce fish and bread out of thin air. He could calm the waters.

More importantly he could change ungodly people into godly people Jesus is the master of reality. And when you think about it you might ask well if he were divine would he be dumb. You might imagine just on the basis of your thinking that he is the Logos that he upholds all things by the word of his power. I have a colleague at USC who recently got the Nobel Prize for making molecules a little slicker. You know Jesus must. Be amused at what we give Nobel Prizes for. I mean. He made the molecules so of course. So. We wanted to just understand that Jesus is the most brilliant man that ever lived on earth and we need to carry that over to our work as scholars because as scholars we are working in the area that is most important for human life. We're working in the area of ideas and ideas control our lives. We live at the mercy or blessing

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

of our ideas. The gospel is an idea thing. And it comes with the power of the Holy Spirit on it but it remains a matter of ideas and of truth. And we need to take Christ with us into every one of our disciplines. We need to understand that he is the master of that discipline and we as students and scholars in those areas must keep our eyes on him as our leader. It is most important to say that we as Christians must no longer leave it to the world to define what counts as knowledge. They have been doing it now for some time and they have thoroughly messed it up. And knowledge has just about disappeared with truth from the horizon of the schools themselves generally in our culture and there is a very deep reason why that is true.

We have lost the sense of moral knowledge in our culture. There isn't a single thing that you can teach in our schools as to what is right and wrong and Grade a student on it. There isn't. And I've said that in many college campuses and elsewhere across the country I've never got a single person to say oh yes I can do that. You could never grade someone for agreeing or disagreeing with one of the Ten Commandments. Why. Because. In the field of scholarship and thought we have come to the assumed position. That such matters do not constitute knowledge. They do not constitute knowledge. Now you can grade someone on when Columbus discovered America. But you can't grade someone on whether or not it's right or wrong to tell a lie. And that is because. It isn't regarded as a field of knowledge. I'm going over it very slowly because I want you to take in as fully as possible the import of what I'm saying. Now let me just add to that that if you cannot maintain moral standards on the basis of knowledge and reality you will not be able to maintain any standards. Because to Maine standards requires that people themselves stand for what is good for what is right in the classroom in public and private everywhere they go. And that is why knowledge has been politicized in our time and truth has been relativized.

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

And you hear all of the surveys about people who are Christians as well as those who aren't. What percentage of Christians believe that truth is relative. Why's that. That's because we are formed in an educational system that has set God aside as a source of truth and knowledge and regards Jesus as an interesting political figure or possibly a sacrificial lamb. But not any one to be thought of. As highly competent in the areas of knowledge. So that's why I come to you this morning with this question and with this challenge is Jesus intelligent. And the answer to the question is what. Way down here in your heart. Way down deep in your mind. What do you believe about Jesus Christ in the context of your scholarship? What do you believe about it in the context of this university that has stepped forward into American life and into the world? And stands poised to go forward on behalf of Christ. We can only perform this task. If we understand where Jesus stands in relationship to the intellect to research and to knowledge. We must regard him as the lord of our fields. And as we work in them we must stand for truth as we stand for him in the knowledge that he alone. Is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures. Of Wisdom and knowledge. So that's the lecture. Here is the test. Who knows more about algebra than anyone else?

Audience:

Jesus.

Dallas Willard:

Can we try that again? Who knows more about algebra than anyone else?

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

Audience:

Jesus!

Dallas Willard:

Much better. How many. Who knows more about Slavic history than anyone else?

Audience

Jesus!

Dallas Willard:

Who knows who knows more about physiology than anyone else?

Audience:

Jesus!

Dallas Willard:

All right good. I think you're beginning to get the idea. Take him with you in your studies. Expect God to do miraculous things with you in your fields of study because the dark is

Willard: Was Jesus Intelligent?

growing deeper. And the early church as has been said won the World because they out lived, and out died, and out loved, and out thought everyone else. Thank you very much.

[Audience Applause]

Announcer:

Please stand and join me for prayer. Father we ask ourselves the question what does it take to be a truly Christian University. Father. Do we accept the challenge? Do we honor Jesus Christ as a lord of our fields of expertise? Do we honor him as our Lord in all of our studies Father I thank you for this servant one who has proven for more than 30 years that in the midst of a secular oftentimes hostile environment. He stands for Jesus Christ. As the lord of his field of expertise. Father may we be courageous men and women. May we accept that challenge and in so doing. Be the future of Biola University. In the next millennium. We pray this in the name of the exalted savior Jesus Christ amen.