

Decoding The DaVinci Code

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Special Sermon

In a few days Sony Pictures is releasing *The DaVinci Code* based on the best selling novel by Dan Brown. Dan Brown's book has already sold over 46 million copies worldwide. It has been translated into 44 languages and has earned Dan Brown over \$400 million dollars so far. The DaVinci Code, directed by Ron Howard, and starring Tom Hanks and Ian McKellen, may end up being one of the highest grossing films in history. Just google "The DaVinci Code" and you will come up with over 6 million hits.

The DaVinci Code has been the subject of numerous TV specials, and thousands of newspapers articles and millions of conversations. There are DaVinci Code travel tours and a full-time employee of Westminster Abbey, who simply handles requests from readers who believe that fictional sites can be found in the Abbey.

The DaVinci Code has also been strongly criticized by many Christians worldwide. A senior official at the Vatican has called for a worldwide boycott of the upcoming film. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, condemned The DaVinci Code as being positively cynical in his Easter message.

For the three or four remaining people on the planet who have not read *The DaVinci Code*, let me share the book's basic plot. If you are planning to read the novel, or see the movie, and you don't want the storyline to be spoiled for you, stick your fingers in your ears for the next 30 seconds.

The DaVinci Code begins with the murder of the Louvre's fictional curator, whose body is found 30 yards from Leonardo DaVinci's painting called the *Mona Lisa*. Clever codes and clues lead a Harvard professor, Robert Langdon played by Tom Hanks, and the curator's granddaughter on a whirlwind adventure of discovery through France and England. We find out that they are searching for the Holy Grail, which has been traditionally thought of as the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper.

It turns out that Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned several times in the gospels, is according to Dan Brown's novel, the true Holy Grail. According to *The DaVinci Code*, Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and she bore Jesus a child, so his bloodline continues today. The novel claims that Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene was known to an ancient group known as the Gnostics, but that their gospels were systematically destroyed by Emperor Constantine. The secret of this bloodline was kept alive by an elite society known as the Priory of Sion, which included over the years such members as Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Isaac

Newton, and Victor Hugo. These men hid clues about the secret bloodline of Jesus in their art and writings.

So, what should we make of this hugely popular book? Lots of people have found it to be a compelling page-turner. Each of its 105 little chapters ends on a cliff-hanger as it drives you ahead to read the next chapter. Tens of thousands of people have come to work bleary-eyed because they stayed up until 4:00 a.m. reading to find out what was coming next.

I've got to be honest and tell you that I didn't personally find the book that riveting or compelling, or, indeed, particularly well-written. I thought the first two-thirds of the book was interesting, but I actually felt that the last third contained so many twists and turns, and improbable leaps in the storyline, that I found myself really exhausted by the end. It felt to me like one of those movies that midway through you just throw up your hands and say, "Oh, come on! How many plot twists are there going to be?"

You know what I'm talking about by one of those movies with a thousand plot twists. "Oh my goodness. The person you thought was his father is not his father; it is his older brother. Wait a minute, his older brother is really his mother. Oh no, it's not his mother, it's his dog." You just want to say: Stop!

I found myself really distracted by the page-long diatribes against the Roman Catholic Church and against traditional Christianity. Again, it felt like one of those movies in which the character suddenly turns to the screen and monologues for five minutes about the importance of gun control, or national health insurance or the evils of big oil. You say: I get it! I'm not stupid! As I read *The DaVinci Code*, I had the same reaction: "okay, I get it. I understand, Dan Brown, you hate the Roman Catholic Church. You hate traditional Christianity. Can we move on?"

So, it is a page-turner. The book is hugely popular. It is bound to be a massively successful movie. What's the bad news?

The bad news is that *The DaVinci Code* asserts that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. Rather, he was deified by the Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea four centuries later in a close vote of the bishops. *The DaVinci Code* further states that Jesus wanted his wife, Mary Magdalene, who bore Jesus' child to lead his church, but she was forced out by power-hungry men who sealed their power grab by producing four male-centered, totally inaccurate gospels.

But what's the big deal? After all, *The DaVinci Code* is a novel. When Dan Brown is challenged about the claims of *The DaVinci Code*, or Tom Hanks is challenged for choosing to play the lead character in the film, they say: "Lighten up! It is a novel. It is a story. There are lots of novels and stories in movies that

have way more bizarre storylines than *The DaVinci Code*. Why are Christians making such a fuss about this novel?"

Part of the problem is that *The DaVinci Code* has an opening page titled "FACT"

"FACT: All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

Dan Brown on his own website commits a little verbal slight of hand when he says, "All I claimed was all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel exist." He changes the opening words in his novel that have been repeated 46 million times around the world that all of his descriptions are accurate to all of these things *exist*. And on his television special, while defending himself against the critics, and urging people to lighten up because it is just a novel, Dan Brown in response to a reporter's question said that he "became a believer" in the theories of his book after he tried to disprove them.

- This is fact; this is accurate. I believe in the theories in my book.
- Lighten up. This is just a novel.

Numerous book reviews note how smart, how intelligent, how well-researched the novel seems to be. *The New York Daily News* said that

"Dan Brown's research is impeccable."

Movie advertisements urge us to:

"Seek the truth."

So, you have all the ingredients of mass confusion between fact and fiction. Many people believe the basic claims that *The DaVinci Code* makes regarding history and Christianity. They believe it. A survey was done in Canada and it showed that one of three Canadians who read the book believed that there are descendents of Jesus alive today.

Read the comments by readers of *The DaVinci Code* on Amazon.com.

- One reader said: "*The DaVinci Code* is one of the best books I've ever read. It makes you see the world a little differently after reading it."
- Another reader said: "The idea behind the story may seem controversial, but once you think about it, it really does become quite real and even natural to believe it."

You see, we live in a time when the line between fact and fiction is constantly blurred.

NT Wright, who is one of the world's foremost New Testament scholars, wrote a piece for Seattle Pacific University titled "Decoding The DaVinci Code." (You can find it online.) NT Wright said that it is a well-known feature of today's culture that some people can't tell fact from fiction. Stories abound of people who believe the characters in soap operas to be real, including tales of thousands of baby clothes sent to TV stations after a fictitious character has given birth, and of actors being attacked in the street by people angry with the bad behavior of their screen character.

It is not surprising that many people reading *The DaVinci Code* would find Dan Brown's theories about the origin of Christianity to be convincing. After all, most people in the Western world are thoroughly biblically illiterate.

John Stackhouse, in a wonderful book that we have in our bookstore called *Humble Apologetics*, one of the best books I've read recently regarding how to explain your Christian faith to someone else, talks about a conversation that he had with a recent college grad on an airplane as they were flying to Chicago. This young woman had graduated from Dartmouth College. She was flying to meet her boyfriend, who had just gotten his MBA from the University of Chicago. From there she was going to take a job as an executive in a company in Napa Valley in California. She was a very sharp, very well-educated young woman, who had gone to one of America's very best universities.

She asked John Stackhouse what he did. He told her that he teaches World Religions. He went to say that it was hard teaching freshmen these days because a lot of college freshmen don't even know that the apostle Paul followed after Jesus. The woman looked at him and with a very straight face, "Who are you talking about? Who is this apostle Paul?"

John Stackhouse thought she was making a very clever little joke about people's ignorance, but then he realized that she was serious. She had never heard of the apostle Paul. A graduate of one of America's premier Ivy League institutions had never heard of the apostle Paul.

A journalist recently wrote an article recording some of the Bible bloopers committed in major publications. These are well-respected magazines. For example:

- A writer for *Harper's Magazine* said: "The Bible ranks hope, along with faith and love, in Psalm 23." Well, you aren't going to find faith, hope and love in Psalm 23. It is found in 1 Cor. 13.
- *The Washington Post* urged its readers at Christmas time to read the infancy narrative about Jesus in the gospel of Mark. The problem is there is no infancy story of Jesus in the gospel of Mark. You can find it in Matthew and Luke though.

- But the all-time favorite Bible blooper is a line from the 1980's anthem, "We Are The World." Here is the line: "As God has shown us by turning stones to bread..."

You can just picture the songwriters, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie, thinking to themselves: Here we are raising money for hunger relief. Wasn't there something in the Bible about bread and stones? Cool. The only small problem was that the Bible describes Jesus as being tempted, but refusing to turn stones into the bread. But nobody – no record producer, no one who worked on the album, said: Maybe we should find a Bible and see if that is the way the bread and the stones story goes.

Not only are people biblically illiterate, but how many people are experts in 1st century Judaism, or in early Christian history, or in religious art, or the architecture of churches? So when an expert character in a book like *The DaVinci Code* starts quoting ancient documents that most people have never heard of, or begins spouting off about scholarly theories regarding how there were more than 80 gospels used in the early church, or declaring that Christ's marriage to Mary Magdalene is a matter of historical record and virtually all experts know that, or they tell you that there is no evidence in the first three centuries of Christians believing that Jesus is God, most average readers will say: Well, what do I know? Maybe Dan Brown is right especially since the book backs up its claims by continually saying throughout that historians and educated Christians have always known all of this stuff.

I would love to be optimistic and say that the book and movie are divine opportunities for Christians to intelligently share their faith with those who are reading the book or going to the movie. I know I'm supposed to say things like that because I am a pastor. I do believe there are opportunities. There are some great openings provided for advancing the conversation about Christianity. I do believe that the book and the movie will encourage dialogue. But frankly, I'm not all that sanguine about the overall impact of this book and movie on most people. I do think that for those who have some grudge against Christianity, and particularly for those who bear some grudge against the Roman Catholic Church, which is the primary focus of Dan Brown's attack, I think for those who already have a grudge, *The DaVinci Code* is further ammunition to justify their opposition to Christianity and to the portrayal of Jesus in the gospels.

And to those who are sitting on the fence, for those who may be children of Christian parents, or spouses, or siblings of Christians, who have been around Christianity but who have never made a commitment, I think the book provides at least an excuse for why a person doesn't need to follow Christ unreservedly. After all there are so many different views of Jesus, who can know the truth? Therefore, many will say I don't actually have to live out the implications of following Christ.

And even for those who are committed Christians, but who are not deeply grounded in their faith and who do not know how the Christian faith came to be, many Christians have reported after reading the book that their faith was shaken. They say that some of the ideas in the book planted seeds in their minds that were quite unsettling: Maybe this is all a big hoax. Maybe the church really has invented all of the things we read in the Bible.

Now, why has this book become so incredibly popular? There are lots of great page-turners. Dan Brown is a good writer, but he is by no means the best mystery writer on the planet. How do you account for a book that has sold 46 million copies already, or a blockbuster movie that is coming out with a \$125 million budget? How do you account for this extraordinary popularity?

In our bookstore we have a book on the Gnostic gospels written by a Penn State University professor of history and religious studies named Philip Jenkins. The book is called *The Hidden Gospels*. We'll be referring more to this book next week, but we have copies of it in the bookstore. If you are interested in finding out about the Gnostic gospels, or what you've been hearing about the Gospel of Judas, you may want to pick up *The Hidden Gospels*. It is a very readable book.

The Hidden Gospels was written before *The DaVinci Code* was published. It is almost prophetic in describing our 21st century society and why it is so hospitable to a message like *The DaVinci Code* message.

1. You see, we live in a culture that loves and believes in conspiracy theories. Many of us grew up in the age of Viet Nam and the Watergate cover-up. We've become accustomed to grand conspiracy theories. There are lots of movies suggesting conspiracies for everything from the Kennedy Assassination to the crash of UFO's at the Roswell AFB in New Mexico back in 1947.

So people are conditioned to believe in conspiracy theories.

2. And secondly, people are especially conditioned to believe in conspiracy theories when they involve the Roman Catholic Church or a secret sect like Opus Dei. After all, there have tragically been so many stories of the abuse of teenage boys by Roman Catholic priests, or the recent story of the priest who ritualistically killed the nun in the church chapel. And even more unfortunately, there have been cover ups by the Church of these crimes. So in the popular mind, it becomes plausible that the Roman Catholic Church may be involved in a gigantic conspiracy regarding the origins of Christianity.

3. And the third ingredient that we read about in *The Hidden Gospels* is a radical feminist agenda among many scholars today. For many, if a book makes claims that are supportive of women, then no matter how outlandish the factual basis is for the book, the book will be warmly received.

4. For the last 30 years the popular press has plowed the ground for a book like *The DaVinci Code* by hyping the most eccentric theories of Christianity's origins. So, for example, over the last several months there has been this media blitz regarding the Gospel of Judas. I've had 7-8 of you email me asking: What do you think of the Gospel of Judas? It has been all over the Discovery Channel. *National Geographic* just put out a magazine about the Gospel of Judas as if this is a very recent discovery. I mean it's not as if they just dug the Gospel of Judas out of the ground last week with Judas' boney hand clutching this newly discovered document.

In fact, the church has known about the gospel of Judas going back to the 2nd century. The early church father, Irenaeus, mentions it in his writings. We know it was written a century to a century and a half after Jesus. It is one of the so-called Gnostic gospels. We'll be talking about the Gnostic gospels next week. But suffice it to say now, neither the Gospel of Judas nor the other Gnostic gospels written between the 2nd century and the 4th century, provide any authentic information about Jesus of Nazareth. These gospels all include a massive shift away from the Jewish context of Jesus' ministry in Palestine toward some kind of Greek Platonic worldview. These gospels including the Gospel of Judas are utterly implausible as the authentic sayings or deeds of a Jewish prophet named Jesus, who lived in a 1st century Jewish world.

The point is, the media has plowed the ground for some of the most eccentric theories regarding the origins of Christianity. Add to this mix of our love of conspiracy, anti-Roman Catholicism, radical feminism, and the plowing of the ground by the media, a desire in our postmodern culture of do-it-yourself spirituality and you have a perfect recipe for a massive embracing of a novel like *The DaVinci Code*.

Let's examine some of the claims that the book *The DaVinci Code* asserts. On its opening page we read:

SLIDE

"FACT: All the descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

Well, let's consider whether Dan Brown's description of documents is accurate. In *The DaVinci Code* Dan Brown claims that the Emperor Constantine, along with the Roman Catholic Church, conspired to distort the historical record regarding the origins of Christianity by burning and suppressing all of the earliest records of Christianity, the so-called Gnostic Gospels. Dan Brown has the Tom Hanks character saying this,

SLIDE

"Fortunately, for historians...some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950's

hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean Desert. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain the 'earliest Christian records that we have.'" [Keep this slide on the screen as I speak.]

SLIDE - The Dead Sea Scrolls

First of all, the Dead Sea Scrolls were not discovered in the 1950's. They were discovered in 1947. And there are no gospels among them. In fact, they have no reference whatsoever to Christianity, to Jesus, or to the origins of the Christian faith. The Dead Sea Scrolls are not Christian records at all. They are Jewish ones. They are a collection of about 850 manuscripts from a group of early Jews known as the Essenes. While the Dead Sea Scrolls have nothing directly to say about Jesus or Christianity, they do indirectly support the Jewish milieu and the ideas that we read about in the New Testament. So far from disproving the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls actually support the New Testament view of the 1st century Jewish world of Jesus.

There are dozens of careless mistakes about geography and architecture in *The DaVinci Code*. A couple in our church who were missionaries in France for two decades said that they just laughed themselves silly as they read Dan Brown's description of Paris.

SLIDE – Paris, France

They said they could go on and on pointing out the absurdities of his description. For example, there is no "wooded section" of the street that serves as the "northern entrance" to the Tuileries Gardens.

SLIDE – Tuileries Gardens

Besides the fact that the Garden is closed to all traffic and the fact that police are on horseback, not in vehicles, to go through the traffic light as Brown describes would mean jumping a curb, crashing through a metal fence, and driving down several flights of stairs. And at night, when this scene takes place, the entire Garden is closed off with massive iron gates.

Likewise, NT Wright in his article titled "Decoding The DaVinci Code," said,

SLIDE – Westminster Abbey

SLIDE

"Dan Brown claims the architectural details of the places he describes are correct...I only know well one of the buildings which features in the book, namely Westminster Abbey. All right, Brown knows where the Sir Isaac Newton monument is. But he still makes gaffe after gaffe which could have been corrected by ten minutes of walking around with his eyes open. The Abbey has towers, not spires. You cannot see Parliament from St. James Park. College

Garden is an extremely private place, and not a “very public place” outside the Abbey walls. You cannot look out into it from the Chapter House; nor is there a “long hallway” leading to the latter, with a “heavy wooden door” at the end. Ten minutes observation by a junior research assistant could have put all this right. If Brown is so careless, and carelessly inventive, in details as easy to check as those, why should we trust him in anything else?”

What about Brown’s claim about artwork and, specifically, the artwork of DaVinci. First of all, calling the painter who painted the *Mona Lisa*, “DaVinci” is more than a little silly. It would be like calling Jesus, the founder of Christianity, “of Nazareth.” DaVinci simply means “from the city of Vinci.” Leonardo was not known as DaVinci anymore than Jesus was known as “of Nazareth.”

SLIDE – Mona Lisa

More substantially, Dan Brown claims that Leonardo hid a clue in the painting *Mona Lisa* by making it an anagram of the pagan God Amon and his female consort Isis. A simple check of almost any encyclopedia would have pointed out to Dan Brown that this is an embarrassingly ignorant claim, because Leonardo never called the painting the *Mona Lisa*. He called it *La Gioconda*. The title *Mona Lisa* comes from a biography of Leonardo published 31 years after his death. The woman identified in the painting as Lisa is the wealthy wife of a Florentine businessman Francesco del Giocondo. Mona, by the way, is a contraction of the word “Madonna,” which means “my lady.” So this later author called her “My lady Lisa.” But that is not Leonardo’s name for his painting and he certainly didn’t hide some clue in the title.

SLIDE – The Last Supper

Dan Brown further claims that in the painting of the Last Supper, the figure sitting on Jesus’ right is actually a woman, Mary Magdalene. This is supported by virtually no art historian. The figure does look very feminine, but that was an enormously popular way to portray young men in the Renaissance. There are many, many paintings of male youth in the Renaissance that are portrayed with very feminine looking faces and hair and male bodies. John was seated by Leonardo to Jesus’ right because in the Gospel of John he is described as “the beloved disciple” and is therefore seated in the traditional place of honor at the right hand of the guest.

But if Mary Magdalene is not the true Grail, then why does Leonardo paint Jesus without a cup at the Last Supper? Dan Brown claims in his book that Leonardo is leaving a code for us by deliberately portraying Jesus without a cup in front of him in order to reveal the hidden truth that Mary Magdalene is the true Holy Grail, the vessel containing the “blood” of Jesus in the form of a child. He is hoping that readers won’t do the obvious – go back and actually look at the painting. Because if you actually look at the painting and count the cups on the table there

are not 12 cups as Dan Brown says. There are 13 – corresponding to Jesus and the 12 Disciples. There is no missing cup. And one of the cups is sitting right in front of Jesus!

There are so many careless mistakes regarding art, architecture, geography, and documents. You can check out some of the books we have in the bookstore that catalog some of these. We have a tiny little book titled *Exploring The DaVinci Code* by Lee Strobel. We have *Breaking the DaVinci Code* by Darrell Bock, and *The Gospel Code* by Ben Witherington, III. We also have some excellent CDs on Dan Brown's book put out by Mark Stibbe.

The bottom line is as Jesus said in Luke 16:10:

Luke 16:10

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Dan Brown has been dishonest with numerous little details. He is massively dishonest concerning the book's central claims.

Let's consider, finally, the central claims of *The DaVinci Code*. Next week we'll tackle how the Bible came to be and all the issues regarding the Gnostic Gospels. But in finishing up today I want to consider one of the central claims regarding *The DaVinci Code*.

The first concerns the divinity of Christ. There is a scene in *The DaVinci Code* when Lee Teabing, explains to Sophie Neveu that at the Council of Nicea,

"Many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon, including the divinity of Jesus. Until that moment, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless."

"Neveu is shocked: 'Not the Son of God?'"

"Teabing explains: 'Jesus' establishment as the Son of God was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.'"

"Hold on. You are saying that Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?"

'A relatively close one at that,' Teabing says."

A little later Teabing says this:

[It was Constantine] that upgraded Jesus' status to God almost four centuries after Jesus' death...

Now, first of all, it is a matter of historical record that the Council of Nicea was not about whether Jesus was the Son of God. There was a priest named Arius, who like all Christians in the first three centuries of the church, referred to Jesus as “the Son of God.” The problem with Arius was that he didn’t believe that Jesus was always the Son and that got him in trouble. Arius taught that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist. And Arius further taught that God created the Son and then adopted him. Therefore in Arius’ view Jesus was not fully equal with God the Father.

The Council of Nicea came together to address Arius’ teaching because Arius’ teaching was denying the long-held Christian belief in Jesus Christ’s divinity. As for the closeness of the vote, the vote was 300-2. Jesus’ divinity was not established by a close vote. Arius’ teaching against the divinity of Christ was rejected by an overwhelming vote.

If you went to a basketball game and the score was 300-2, you would not say that the game was close. You wouldn’t come away saying, “that was a real nail-biter! It was hanging in the balance up until the last few seconds.” Talk about a skewing of the facts by Dan Brown!

Perhaps the most important scholar of the Early Church, a man by the name of J.N.D. Kelly writes,

“There was a universal Christian conviction in the centuries prior to the Council of Nicea that Jesus Christ was divine as well as human. The most primitive confession had been “Jesus is Lord” and its import had been elaborated and deepened in the apostolic age.”

All a person needs to do is read the gospel accounts or New Testament letters about Jesus which are almost universally heralded to have been written between 20-60 years after the death and resurrection of Christ and you will find this consistent testimony to the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. We read passages like these:

Matthew 1:23

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John 20:28

Thomas said to him [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!"

Colossians 2:9

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

Titus 2:13

while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

It is not just the direct claims that Jesus is God, but the indirect claims that point to Jesus' full divinity. Let me just list some of the indirect claims for you in which Jesus is saying and doing all the things that only God in the Old Testament can say or do.

- Jesus claimed equality with God.
- Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins.
- Jesus claimed to be the one who gives eternal life.
- Jesus claimed the right to judge all of humanity.
- Jesus claimed to be the one who grants all spiritual blessings.
- Jesus claimed to be the one who establishes God's Kingdom.
- Jesus claimed the authority of God including the authority to change the Old Testament.
- Jesus claimed power over all life, all space and all time.
- Jesus claimed to be people's Savior.
- Jesus claimed that he was the one who made God known.
- Jesus received prayer, praise and worship.

Constantine did not upgrade Jesus status as God four centuries after Christ. Jesus claimed the status of God for himself, and the status is plainly recorded in the earliest records that we have of Jesus Christ.

It is not just in the New Testament that we have this belief in the deity of Christ. Anyone who does the least bit of reading regarding the Early Church will find the same claims concerning Jesus. So, for example, in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, who was born about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, who lived between 50 A.D. and 117 A.D., here is what Ignatius says about Jesus nearly 2½ centuries before the Council of Nicea:

"There is one Physician who has possessed both a flesh and spirit...God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord."

In the same letter he tells his readers that:

“We must do everything as if Jesus were dwelling in us. Thus we shall be his temples and he will be within us as our God – as he actually is.”

You can find the same kinds of statements in Justin Martyr and Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria centuries before Nicea.

Why does it matter if we call Jesus God? Does it matter if we view him merely, as one of Dan Brown’s characters puts it in *The DaVinci Code*, “Jesus was a good man who walked the earth and inspired millions to live better lives”? Isn’t all of this debate about whether Jesus was or was not God simply a matter of abstract theology? Is the debate about who Jesus was simply a debate about some ancient dogma of the church that has no practical relevance for today?

Friends, I tell you that everything hinges on whether or not you believe Jesus is fully God, or just an influential good man. If Jesus is not God, then the billions of people in the world who have knelt before Jesus and worshipped him as God are committing the grossest form of idolatry. What is idolatry other than giving to the creature what belongs to the Creator alone? If Jesus is not God, then we do not have a revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. We may have a man talking about God. We may have a prophet claiming to speak on behalf of God, but we cannot say that in Jesus we know what God is like. If Jesus is not God, we have no full revelation of God in this person Jesus of Nazareth.

If Jesus is not God, then we have never seen the love of God revealed. What is love other than self-sacrifice? The reason we Christians can say that we believe in the love of God is that we have experienced God’s love at the cross. It was at the cross that we believe God gave up himself for you and me. But if Jesus is not God, then the cross is not an act of self-sacrifice. The nails that went into the hands of Jesus did not go into the hands of God. God simply created some other creature and put that other creature to death. We don’t have the pouring out of the life of God *himself*. If Christ is not God we have no revelation of God’s love.

And if Christ is not God, we have no confidence in the security of our salvation. It is because Christ is Almighty God that we can be convinced that the devil is defeated; that sin has been taken care of; and that we have an eternal Priest who is right now making intercession for us before the throne of the Father. It is because Christ our Savior is God Almighty, because he has all authority in heaven and earth that we know that when we turn to Christ for salvation, we will be certainly saved. It is Jesus Christ and not some other being that you and I will stand before on the Day of Judgment.

The deity of Christ is not some abstract theological doctrine that we can do away with, some ancient dogma that people used to debate about but has no pragmatic value. The deity of Christ goes to the very heart of the Christian faith. If Christ is not God, there is no Christianity.

Here's the bottom line. The reason why I'm doing these messages on *The DaVinci Code* is because honesty and truth matter. Truth matters. It matters in the little daily routines of our own homes. Truth and honesty matter. It matters to you married people if your husband or wife is where they say they are, at a business meeting, or if they are lying to you and are having an affair. Truth matters. It matters to you business people if a theft from your office or store was from an outside break-in, or if instead the theft was by one of your most trusted colleagues.

Truth and honesty matter. It matters to us Americans what the President knew before he decided to declare war on Iraq and when he knew it. Truth matters to us. It always matters.

And truth particularly matters to us regarding Jesus Christ. See, truth is not just some socially constructed thing. And whatever postmodern America teaches we cannot simply create our own spirituality. What we have in Dan Brown's book, however interesting, is a well-crafted set of lies.

But you know, friends, the truth is way more exciting than *The DaVinci Code*. The truth that God in love decided to personally engage in a rescue operation of Planet Earth. That God actually took on human flesh and walked in this world. God, the Creator of everything is right now engaged in this enormous rescue effort to transform the world, to heal people of our addictions, to feed the hungry, to bring about justice, and to set the world aright. That God is inviting you and me into this gigantic adventure – we get to participate in this rescue operation.

Truth matters regarding Christ. To miss the truth about him means to miss him altogether and to miss the adventure of partnering with Christ in world restoration. And to believe the truth means to not only begin to really live, but to get to be involved in changing this world by following Christ. By following Christ you find truth. By following Christ you find adventure. By following Christ, you get to find ultimate meaning and purpose in this world. Let's pray.

I. The DaVinci Code: What's It About?

II. The DaVinci Code: Why So Much Fuss?

- A. Fact And Fiction – Are They Different?
- B. Biblical Illiteracy – What's In This Book?

III. The DaVinci Code: Why So Popular?

IV. The DaVinci Code: Are Its Facts Accurate?

- A. The Dead Sea Scrolls
- B. Geography And Architecture
- C. The Art Of Leonardo

V. The DaVinci Code: What About Its Really Big Claims?

- A. The Direct Claims Of The Divinity Of Christ
- B. The Indirect Statements About The Divinity Of Christ
- C. The Early Church Claims About The Divinity Of Christ
- D. Divinity Matters!