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SPEAKER #1: The Lord be with you. Oh, Lord show thy mercy upon us. (choir sings response) Oh, God may clean our hearts within us. (choir sings response) Oh, lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. (choir sings response) Let us pray.

Eternal God, our father, maker of heaven and earth, thou who art from everlasting to everlasting, Come now during this worship experience and make your presence real to us that we might be still and know thou art the Lord. For father, we come with bowed heads and humbled hearts confessing our unworthiness to be called your children, but father we know that all power in heaven and in earth is at your command. Thou art a God of mercy and a God of grace and a God of love and so we come we come not with excellency of speech or of great wisdom, but we come in the demonstration that you did move and work in our life through your son Jesus Christ. That if we will continue to serve you as best, we can then you will stand by our side. Lord, this is a mean world in which we are living, problems all over the land, but father we pray that we may not add to the problem, but we might sing a great message that God is still on the throne, and we serve one who is able to keep us from falling and will present us _____?? before your throne of grace with power. Remember our sick and our shut-ins, encourage them they might continue to walk in the way. Speak to the messenger of this day and grant him strength, courage, and wisdom to proclaim the gospel. Lord, grant that we as hearers of the word, may not just be hearers us of that word, but doers of that word. Do us by how we live from day to day, whether it be at home or at school or at our place of employment. Teach us Lord, to pray as you did teach your disciples to pray.

(choir sings three songs)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: Here now the reading of the scripture lesson as contained in the Gospel according to John, chapter 1 beginning with verse 1 and ending with verse 5. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." God bless the reading of his sacred and eternal word. Let us turn now in the hymnal to the hymn of consecration, selection 339 "Yield Not To Temptation."

(choir and congregation sings "Yield Not To Temptation")

JONES: Amen. Says Saint John, in verse 14 of chapter 1 of his Gospel, "and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father

full of grace and truth.” I’ve given title to this text, “In Flesh, For Flesh” The Christian faith is often charged with being too esoteric and ethereal. A religion so heavenly minded that it's no earthly good. Certain critics historically and presently, have looked on Christians and accused them of espousing an ethic that is tragically divorced from the problems and pains of this world and we must admit that the charge is not made without some basis in fact. There are many who claim an allegiance to Jesus Christ who have no quarrel with the charge at all. They live under the conviction that God is not overly concerned about this world. They view the world, the flesh, and the devil as the unholy trinity fully operative on the planet earth. They say that the material world is a house of horrors, the locus of inevitable evil, the devil's province, and playground. Such a view eventuates in detachment and isolation from the great struggles of humankind. It has often led to various forms of aestheticism. In a real sense, it hands the world over carte blanche to the devil and his emissaries. That in itself is terrible enough but something more deeply disturbing takes place. If we ascribe ineluctable evil to the material world, we who claim Christ as Lord of all do violence to his incarnation. We devalue the divine entry. We belittle the birth in Bethlehem. We throw a smoke screen over his earthly ministry and that my friends is precisely our perennial problem and it stems almost always from the notion that the material world is inherently evil. So deeply entrenched in history is this attitude that early on in the life of the church they developed a doctrine called Docetism. A doctrine which held in substance that the eternal Christ did not actually become flesh but that he appeared to be a man.

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Recording of cassette tape, side 2 begins.

JONES: Jesus Christ said the docetist was an apparition. The incarnation was an illusion. Since matter is evil, God could not possibly appear in human flesh. The church fathers wisely declared this view heretical, but across the centuries and even now, the heresy has persisted existentially if not officially. Of course, nobody seriously questions the reality of the Jesus of history anymore. All of the world's major religions accept the fact that there did live a man named Jesus. Christians everywhere declare without wavering, that in the fullness of time, beneath the black bosom of a Palestinian sky while the city slumbered in the hush of night, God himself came to see us. In a dirty barn in Bethlehem, on a rocky road somewhere between Hebron and Jerusalem, the word became flesh. He who is the ancient of days, previously hidden from human eyes, remote spirit, detached divinity, unseen reality, the God of the ages, the one true God, divested himself of certain of his prerogatives. He removed his royal role, uncrowned his holy head, departed his throne, forsook the songs of seraphim and the chants of cherubim, and entered our mortality. The word became flesh, dwelt among us. The immortal became mortal. The God who was way off yonder came closer than breathing. God exposed himself to evil and enigma, to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune—and how far he came, how low he stooped, from heaven to earth, from divinity to dust, from royalty to rejection—what condescension, and yet it was as much ascent as it was descent. Jesus is not simply called Bart's holy other, breaking in perpendicularly from above. Though he came from the top down he also came from the bottom up. He broke in on our pilgrimage from beneath. He came as a root out of dry ground up through forty and two generations. Eternal goodness came to see us as a baby in Bethlehem. How human is our Lord? God with us, God among us, in back alleys and on public squares seeking no favors, asking no

privileges, giving no sanction to cast and class—the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now Christians accept his humanity hardly without a question. I say to you it is the implications of his humanity that pose a problem for many people. The real problem is not his coming in flesh, but he is coming for flesh. It's not the divine method that disturbs some, it's the divine motivation. The true testimony is that God sent his son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. That's total liberation. God loves the world. He's never given up on the world which he made. Some of us have given up but God, has never given up. If he had, he long ago would have halted the procreation process. He would have stopped babies from being born and then God has promised to redeem the total creation. He has promised to make all things new. His plan is that of a redeemed materialism. Jesus came in flesh for flesh. If you don't understand this, yours is a low view of the incarnation and you will come to the place where you will remember calvary but forget the significance of Bethlehem. Jesus lived with us for 33 years. He lived with us before he died for us. Calvary was the climax of the incarnation. Calvary was the natural conclusion of coming in flesh for flesh—and I say to you today that the tragic need of the church in our time is a high view of the incarnation. The deep disturbing demand is that of an incarnational theology which lifts up the world with all its problems and perplexities and presents them to God. Without this, we become the custodians of a perpetual irrelevance and the piety which we proclaim becomes insipid. The reverence we show forth becomes sordid irreverence. Cheap grace and easy discipleship become our hallmarks. The church becomes an exclusive soul-saving station and never becomes as terrible as an army with banners. We subscribe to the success myth and become afflicted by the numbers mania. We become concerned primarily with getting names on the roll forgetting that our Lord in terms of numbers, was an outright failure but because he came in flesh for flesh, he is the most successful failure of all time. God has not declared the world off limits to his presence, nor to his church. That's our doing not his. We have divorced faith from ethics, we have separated pulpit and pew from the public square. In a word we have rendered too much to Caesar and our witness has become bifurcated and truncated and the result is that of an uncertain sound. Wherever spirituality is quarantined, the human predicament is placed in the devil's hands I tell you eternal spirit came in flesh for flesh. At the height of the black struggle for justice in this land, many church bodies brought into being new entities which they called, “departments of Christian social concern.” Such a sectionalized approach is an abomination and an affront to the gospel. Will Campbell and James Holloway together wrote a book titled *Up To Our Steeples In Politics*, and they were absolutely on target when they declared, we have been calling it social action when all the time it was evangelism. Authentic evangelism is never separatist, it is holistic in its attitude toward man and the world. This is the father's world. Not some of it, but all of it. Every bit of this world belongs to my father. The psalmist told us a long time ago, “The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein” and God's presence in flesh for flesh says in thunderous tones that the father is concerned about every facet of our finitude. God is concerned about what I eat, what I drink, where I live, how I behave, how I treat others. God is concerned about it all. He's interested in slums and suburbs, preachers and politicians, the needy and the greedy. Gods concerned about alleyways and avenues, jet planes and jails, sinners and saints. God is upset over political corruption, starvation, malnutrition, economic exploitation and racial injustice. He who came in flesh for flesh declared one day did he not, “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.” South Africa with her racist regime is under judgment. The Soviet Union with her demonic tyranny is under judgment. America and the western world with their profit centered ethic are under judgment and the weak spineless church which refuses to be the extension of the

incarnation is also under judgment. In fact, judgment begins at the house of God. The God of righteousness and justice says, “a plague on all your houses.” My brothers and my sisters, I believe with all my heart that God is trying almost desperately tell his church something in these days. Wherever I go I see evidences of the fact that God is trying to remind us that we were not saved to become saints in solitude. Christianity is both meditational and relational. It concerns what I am before God and what I am in relation to others. Contemplation and liberation are connecting links on the gospel chain. Decision and deed go hand in hand. Prayer and performance are twin postures. You remember that Jesus prayed and then performed and then he prayed and then performed. It was from prayer to performance to prayer to performance back and forth again all the way to Calvary. He came in flesh for flesh. If you don't believe it ask the 5,000 men plus the women and children, they'll tell you he fed us totally. He preached to our immortal spirits and then he wouldn't let us go home hungry. Ask Legion, the man possessed of so many devils that he said it's easier for me to tell what I am than who I am. Ask Legion and he'll tell you “when the master met me, he cleans me completely.” Ask the man born blind, he'll tell you “when I met up with the preacher from Galilee, he gave me total vision and when folks asked me what happened, I had to tell them I was blind but now I see.” Ask the guest at Canaan's wedding feast, they'll tell you he turned tragedy into triumph. Ask the seated martyrs and they'll tell you “he fired our courage so completely that our blood became the seed of the church.” Ask our mothers and fathers held in chains of bondage and they'll declare in simple and yet profound terms, “I love the Lord, he heard me cry and pitied every groan. Long as I live and troubles rise, I'll hasten to his throne.” In flesh he came, for flesh. So, then it follows my friends, that unless the word becomes flesh in and through us, we are none of his. He made it plain himself in his parable of the judgment, he told us that the kingdom is spiritually social and socially spiritual. What we do to and for others, we do to Christ. I was hungry and you gave me meat, I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was in prison, and you came to see about me. I tell you it's in flesh for flesh. So why not put flesh on your faith. Why not let your religion live? Why not let your light shine? Live the truth! Do the truth! It won't hurt you; it'll make you free. It's the way of the cross, but that's the way home. In helping others, you may get hurt but the Lord will help you. You may be scorned by others, but he'll send his spirit. You'll suffer for his name's sake, but underneath you'll be supported by the everlasting arms. He won't leave you; he'll never forsake you. Have I got a witness? Remember, he came in flesh for flesh and the Lord will support his own and when the going gets tough as it will sometimes, you'll have some joys to remember and you'll have a song to sing. Somebody wrote, “when waves of affliction sweep over the soul and sunlight is hidden from view if ever you attempted to fret or complain just think of his goodness to you.” The world may forsake you and those whom you trust may prove to be false and untrue but there's one you can trust. Even on to the end, just think of his goodness to you. Think about it, has God been good? Well! Think about it—just think of his goodness to you. Yes, think of his goodness to you. Those storms or these sweets he is able to keep. Just think of his goodness to you. Don't ever forget he came in flesh for flesh. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the father full of grace and full of truth.

The doors of the church are open. Is anybody here today who wants to start singing a new song? Anybody here who's willing to accept this gospel, which originated not in the earth but in the highest reaches of eternity for earth's redemption? Anybody here today willing to say, “I believe on Jesus Christ?” If you're here we bid you to come, and if perchance there are person's present

who have no church home, we invite you to come and unite with us here at Bethany? Let us turn into hymnal to number 341 "thou my everlasting portion." God bless you my dear! Are there others who will come? The doors of the church are open. God help you to come today. God bless you young man! God bless you son! Thanks be to God. Let us stand and sing to the glory of God

(music starts and congregation and choir sing)

JONES: It's not too late to come don't let this harvest pass. The master is calling. You can begin to walk with him right now.

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