

# Episode 181 Ignatius and Jesus with Jonathon Lookadoo

*This transcript was edited for clarity and space.*

## **Jonathan Lookadoo**

My name is Jonathan Lookadoo and I am an Assistant Professor at the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary in Seoul, South Korea.

## **David Capes**

Dr. Jonathon Lookadoo, Jonathan, good to see you. Welcome to *The Stone Chapel Podcasts*.

## **Jonathan Lookadoo**

Thank you very much for having me.

## **David Capes**

It's a delight to see you. Alright, so for folks who don't know who Jonathon Lookadoo is, tell us who is he?

## **Jonathon Lookadoo**

My life divides into two different sections. I grew up in Northwest Arkansas, and I lived there for 18 years. So, I didn't move very much. I love that area. That's still home. It's where my parents and my brother and his family are. I moved to Oklahoma for four years and did my undergraduate at Oklahoma Baptist University and I enjoyed it. And then I moved to Alabama and did my M.Div. at Beeson Divinity School. Afterwards, I moved to New Zealand and finished my PhD at the University of Otago. While I was in New Zealand, I met someone and she's from South Korea. When we finished, neither one of us had jobs straight out of our PhDs. So, we needed to be near somebody's family.

## **David Capes**

Does she have a Ph.D. as well?

## **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Yes, she does. Hers is in linguistics. She's much, much smarter than me.

## **David Capes**

But you both ended up in South Korea?

## **Jonathon Lookadoo**

We did. We ended up in South Korea, in Seoul. We've been here since 2017. This will be our seventh year here.

**David Capes**

Now does she teach at the same school, the Presbyterian University, where you are teaching?

**Jonathon Lookadoo**

She doesn't. She's taught at some different universities. She taught a number of different courses, graduate and undergraduate level linguistics courses.

**David Capes**

You've written a terrific book that we're going to be talking about, *The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch* (Cascade Books). And it's part of a series that I help edit with Scott Harrower and Mike Byrd called *Studies in Early Christology*. And your book, *The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch* is the second or third book in that series. It's one of the early ones.

So first of all, thank you for being a part of the series. We're really grateful. It's a great book, and I would very much commend it if you're interested in studies in early Christology, which includes the first, second, and third centuries. Your book comes out of the early part of the second century. Ignatius of Antioch is not a name that some people have heard and don't know much about him. Tell us a little bit about this person, Ignatius of Antioch.

**Jonathon Lookadoo**

Yes, but before that, thanks very much, not only for the invitation to the podcast, but also to contribute a volume to the series that you're co-editing. I really did enjoy it. And it's been a great series so far. I'm looking forward to the rest of it.

Ignatius was a Syrian church leader. Presumably his ministry centered in Antioch. That is Syrian Antioch, quite a bit north of Jerusalem. There's two Antioch's mentioned in Acts.

**David Capes**

Right. There's one Antioch Pisidia, which is different. Antioch is a pretty common name in those days, because of the Antiochian leaders after Alexander the Great, in Antioch of Syria. So that's where he was a church leader. Was he a bishop?

**Jonathon Lookadoo**

Yes, that's what he calls himself or I suppose he calls himself an *Episcopos*, and then we traditionally translate that word into English as "bishop." Exactly what that word might have meant at that time is disputed. But Ignatius is pretty adamant in his letters that there are three levels of leadership. There are bishops, elders, and deacons as he refers to them or at least the traditional English translations of those words.

But he might be best known for being a martyr. And so actually, his letters that we have are written as he was being transported across the Roman Empire from Antioch to Rome. And he expected to die in Rome. He sounds very expectant. He sees himself as following Jesus in going to death. He does seem aware of the fact that things do happen. And so, he asked his readers to pray for strength that he would continue. But his letters tend to do three different things. They tend to talk, number one, about his

expectation of death. Number two, they talk about different opponents that he thinks exist in and around these churches. And then number three, he urges people to be unified, and particularly to be unified under their leaders, especially their bishop.

### **David Capes**

When does Ignatius live? How does that relate to the New Testament? We know the New Testament comes from the first century, most of it. Some people will argue some books come later. But where does Ignatius fit into that chronology?

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Ignatius would be just after the New Testament. How far after is a matter of dispute at the moment? I tend to date him on the early side. I tend to say sometime in the first three decades of the second century, so 100 to 130. And then, if I get to give my own pet guess, perhaps some time during the reign of Trajan, so perhaps 110 to 118 which was when Trajan died (117-118).

### **David Capes**

What was his offense? Why was he being transported this way across the world, to Rome, in expectation of martyrdom?

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

The traditional story is of an outward persecution. That somebody perhaps from the city of Antioch, or from the Roman Empire, put pressure on believers there. And as a result, Ignatius was arrested and transported to Rome. And so that's a traditional story of Roman persecution of Christians. And that might be right.

There's another story that's been told more recently that sees the believers in Antioch as having been divided. Ignatius is quite adamant in his letters, that believers should be unified. And so perhaps, that emphasis on unity, one might argue, comes from his experience of having had a divided church. And if that division spilled over and caused problems within the city of Antioch, that might have motivated civic leaders to try to quash any division.

### **David Capes**

In a way some of his own turned him in.

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

That's right. There are two stories that tend to circulate in scholarship at the moment, and I really don't know which one is accurate. Ignatius doesn't tell us in the letters exactly why he's being transported.

### **David Capes**

Now we know of Ignatius primarily through these letters. But there are other references to him as well.

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Yes, there are. Polycarp, writing a short time after Ignatius, knows about him and, and writes to the Philippians about him. Irenaeus quotes from one of his letters, he doesn't mention Ignatius by name, but he quotes from one of his letters.

And then Origen, writing in the third century, quotes from his letters and mentions Ignatius by name.

### **David Capes**

So, Ignatius is being marched across what is modern day Turkey. And he's anticipating a number of churches (along the way) that he knows something about, and he's writing letters to those churches, and he's trying to encourage them to watch out for false teachers. To watch out for disunity. To find unity under the bishop. But he's also is also a very rich book, Christologically, which is what you've written about, *The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch*. What are the distinctive features of his Christology compared to other Christologies that come along later? What does he think about the significance of Jesus?

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Ignatius is very adamant that Jesus was a human being. And he says that in all sorts of ways. He calls Jesus a human being, he tells stories about Jesus' death and His suffering. He refers to his connections with David and Mary. And he's very adamant that Jesus was a human being, and that seems to stand against a line of thought about Jesus that was growing in the second century that said Jesus perhaps only appeared to be human. As we might say, today, he was not fully human. And so, Ignatius is very adamant that Jesus was a human being. He is explicit in using the word "God" for Jesus more than any other New Testament writers. Other New Testament writers portray Jesus as divine, plenty of times, but perhaps not as often using the Greek word for "God" (*theos*). And Ignatius really piles that into his letters in comparison with earlier writers.

### **David Capes**

So, he has a clear sense of the humanity of Jesus on the one hand, but also has a non-compromising idea that he's also divine. And he is willing to use the most available Greek word to describe that to his readers.

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Yes, I think that's right. And thank you. That's a nice description, the most available Greek word.

### **David Capes**

I've written about how the *kurios* word is so significant to Paul, for example, writing earlier on. And I do think that these things are not static. In other words, it doesn't develop and then stop, and there's no further development. It seems to me that Ignatius is possibly the next step in the development of Christology. And he's having to argue against these docetic Christians who say, Jesus just appeared to be a man. He wasn't really human in the sense that I'm human, or you're human. He is a different sort of being. Any other feature that comes to mind about Ignatius' Christology?

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

I think so. One of the things I tried to highlight is that Ignatius does tell stories. They're very concise stories, but I think there's a narrative shape to his Christology. And sometimes Ignatian scholars can get caught up with certain words that Ignatius uses, or perhaps with his rhetoric as a letter writer. But I think there's a narrative shape in all of this. And I've tried to outline how I think that might even be a kind of Messianic narrative. Even if I'm not sure what messianic traditions Ignatius knew, I think that he uses words that signal to readers that he knew some messianic traditions, and he places Jesus within that.

### **David Capes**

If you could speak to the kind of factors that fed into his Christology, where did he get this from? Clearly, he's standing within the tradition of the church. But are there particular Gospel writers? Are there particular New Testament writers or post New Testament writers that feed into his thinking about Jesus?

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

It's a good question. If we had to pick a single tradition that framed Ignatius' Christology, I think the Pauline letters, and maybe especially 1 Corinthians, would frame that the most. Ignatius never explicitly quotes from the New Testament texts, he never says, "For it is written" and then follows that with the New Testament quotation, and he doesn't do that very often for the Old Testament, either. But he does allude to Pauline letters, and especially 1 Corinthians. And he uses that language frequently through his letters. And to describe Jesus as well. Arguably, you could say that Ignatius would pull from maybe Jewish tradition or scripture, Old Testament scripture. And I think as well, again, debatably, but in terms of Gospel writers, Matthew and John are the most likely candidates for who framed Ignatius thought.

All of this is disputed in scholarship, because Ignatius just doesn't quote very much. And so, we have to piece things together from what terms and bits of language he's using. But he stands at least in close relationship to those kinds of writers and traditions. We might not know exactly which of those texts he knew or had read. But maybe that's to be expected from somebody who's under arrest and being transported away from books.

### **David Capes**

He's probably not carrying around a lot of books with him. He's being forcibly marched across a vast territory. And later I suppose, he's put on ships and transported that way. He's not going to have those books at the ready to be able to say, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians or, as Paul said to the Ephesians. He doesn't have that. He's having to go off his memory as much as possible. I can understand that. The situation that he's in is not conducive to sitting down with books and writing letters.

You've written a tremendous book, Jonathon. I really appreciate it. We're talking to Jonathon Lookadoo about his book, *The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: Studies in Early Christology* published by Cascade Press. Jonathan, thanks for being with us today.

### **Jonathon Lookadoo**

Thank you very much for the invitation, both to the book series and also to this podcast. It's been wonderful, David.

**A Nugget of Wisdom from Jonathan Lookadoo**

As I was thinking about this nugget of wisdom, I was thinking about younger scholars, people in their masters and PhD programs. And one of the things that I would recommend is to engage deeply in primary sources. Perhaps not only the topic that you're interested in, but also the literature surrounding that and the primary sources surrounding that. It makes for a much deeper understanding of our primary source texts. And it can really help in our scholarship.