

How Human was Jesus?

Vintage Jesus, week 2

October 15, 2006

Pastor Mark Driscoll

*“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—
which means, “God with us.”*

— Matthew 1:23

Last week we examined the deity of Jesus by answering the question, “Is Jesus the only God?” This week we will examine the humanity of Jesus by answering the question, “How human was Jesus?”

The issue of Jesus’ divinity and humanity has been one of the most controversial and confusing issues in all of Christian theology. In 451, the Council of Chalcedon issued the Chalcedonian Creed, which cleared up many heresies. In sum, it declared that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures (human and divine) and is both fully God and fully man. Theologically, the term for the union of both natures in Jesus Christ is *hypostatic union*. The common jargon for the second member of the Trinity entering into history as a human being is *the incarnation* (from the Latin meaning “becoming flesh”); it is a biblical concept (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5–6; Colossians 2:9; 1 John 4:2). The Chalcedonian summary of the incarnation is the position of all Christendom, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians.

One of the ways that the Bible speaks of God is in terms of His attributes. The Bible also says that Jesus possesses all of the attributes of God because He is God. For example:

- Jesus is the King who is eternal, immortal, invisible, and the only God (1 Timothy 1:17).
- Only God is all-present (Psalm 139:7–12) and Jesus is that omnipresent God (Matthew 28:20).
- Only God is completely unchanging (Malachi 3:6) and Jesus is that immutable God (Hebrews 13:8).

Yet when we examine the life of Jesus we see a man who does not appear at first glance to be God. Isaiah 53:2 says, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Jesus clearly appears to be a regular human being:

- Born of a woman (Galatians 4:4)
- Had a normal body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39)
- Grew up as a boy (Luke 2:52)
- Had a family (Matthew 13:54–58; 1 Corinthians 9:5)
- Obeyed His parents (Luke 2:51)
- Worshipped God (Luke 4:16) and prayed (Mark 1:35; 6:46)
- Worked as a carpenter (Mark 6:3)
- Got hungry (Matthew 4:2; 21:18) and thirsty (John 4:7; 19:28)
- Asked for information (Mark 9:16–21; John 11:34; 18:34)
- Was stressed (John 13:21)
- Was astonished (Mark 6:6; Luke 7:9)

- Was happy (Luke 10:21–24; John 15:11; 17:13; Hebrews 12:2, 22)
- Told jokes (Matthew 7:3–4, 6; 23:24; Mark 4:21)
- Had compassion (Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13)
- Had male and female friends He loved (John 11:3–5)
- Gave encouraging compliments (Mark 12:41–44)
- Loved children (Matthew 19:13–15)
- Celebrated holidays (Luke 2:41)
- Went to parties (Matthew 11:19)
- Loved His mom (John 19:26–27)

Option 1: Deny the full divinity of Jesus as has been done by heretics such as the Ebionites, liberals, Arians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Functionalists, Adoptionists, Kenotics, Apollinarians, and *The Da Vinci Code*. Perhaps the most famous person holding this position in recent history was President Thomas Jefferson, who sat down in the White House with a razor and edited the Bible into “The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth.” Only about one in ten verses survived. No miracles made it, and Jesus was left as a mere man and sage teacher. Some years later, the Jesus Seminar said that only 18 percent of Jesus’ sayings in the Bible were likely His; not one saying from John was thought to be true because they portrayed Jesus as God. The result is that Jesus cannot be our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) because He is not God.

Option 2: Deny the full humanity of Jesus as has been done by heretics such as Docetists, New Agers, Eutychians, Monophysites, and the Fundamentalists who portray Jesus as a sort of Superman only disguised as a mild-mannered Clark Kent. The result is that Jesus cannot be our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) because He is not human.

Option 3: Retain both the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ by seeing that He did not change His identity as God but rather changed His role in becoming a man. As such, Jesus lived most of His life as a normal human being in relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, although he did occasionally use some of His divine attributes. Philippians 2:5–11 says:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is fully God who became a man and is “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.” (Matthew 1:23). This is the opposite of many religions that teach that men and women can become God. Jesus Christ humbled Himself and entered into human history as a man to identify with us as

our humble servant. As both God and man, Jesus alone can reconcile us to God as our mediator.

Because Jesus' life is the perfect human life and the life that we are supposed to live, it is important that we also examine the human life of Jesus. The Apostles' Creed says that Jesus "was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." Curiously, this creed essentially says nothing about Jesus' life as a man on the earth and quickly moves from His birth to His death. Thankfully, the Bible has much more to say about the life of Jesus, especially the pain of Jesus. Isaiah 53:3 describes that "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."

One of the most astonishing things about Jesus is that, as God, He actually chose to come into our fallen, sick, twisted, unjust, evil, cruel, painful world and be with us, to suffer like us and for us. Many painful examples of this can be found in the Bible. During His life, Jesus was:

- Tempted (Matthew 4:1–10)
- Poor (2 Corinthians 8:9)
- Ripped off (John 12:6)
- Unable to pay taxes (Matthew 17:27)
- Homeless (Matthew 8:20)
- The subject of lies and vicious rumors (Matthew 26:57–60)
- Physically abused (Matthew 26:67–68)
- Mocked and spit on (Matthew 27:27–31)
- Lonely (Mark 14:32–34; 15:34)
- Deeply sorrowed (Matthew 26:37)
- Exhausted (Matthew 8:24)
- Sad to the point of weeping (Luke 19:41; John 11:35)
- Abandoned by friends in times of crisis (Matthew 26:36–46)
- Betrayed by a close friend (Matthew 26:47–50)
- Denied by friends, who turned their backs on Him (Matthew 26:69–75)
- Not supported by his family (John 7:5)

And He:

- Did not have all His prayers answered as He hoped (Matthew 26:42)
- Bled (Luke 22:44; John 19:34)
- Died (Luke 23:46)
- Forgave those who destroyed Him (Luke 23:34)

Amazingly, Jesus Christ left His eternal throne in heaven to descend into the hellish cursed world—the world that He created very good but we sinners have made very bad. As a result, the words of Hebrews 4:14–16 reveal to us a Jesus who truly can embrace us, lead us, and empower us on our darkest days: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without

sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Next week: What did Jesus accomplish on the cross?