



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Who Was Jesus Christ?

"Humanity and Conclusion"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This is the final study on our general theme "Who Was Jesus Christ?" We completed our study of the deity of Christ, and we have seen that the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate. And if Christians are asked, "Why do you Christians assert that Jesus alone is the Redeemer?" There is no need for us to stutter in our reply. Christians affirm that Jesus Christ is their Savior from the penalty of sin and the judgment of eternal death. That in itself demands a conviction that Jesus Christ be God, for only God can save from sins.

In fact, one might say simply that the doctrine of the deity of Christ is the theological expression of the evangelical experience of Redemption. The Council of Chalcedon convoked in 451 AD. The measure of orthodoxy concerning the two natures of Christ affirmed our Lord's true humanity. And further, that the deity in humanity exists without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. The two natures coalesced in one person and one substance. As to his deity our Lord was of the same nature as the Father, but as to his humanity of the same nature with us. He is like us in all respects apart from sin.

It might seem strange to 20th century religious men and women to hear that the true humanity of Christ has been denied. In the earlier periods of the history of the

church, however, at times there was little doubt of the deity of Christ, but serious questions existed concerning the humanity of Christ. It has been necessary for the church therefore to defend his humanity also. Some errorists have denied his true humanity altogether, such as the Docetics of the first two centuries of the Christian era. They conceived of the incarnation as something of an illusion. In one form of the heresy it was said that the divine Christ descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at his baptism and left him at the cross. The real Son of God simply used the human Jesus for his purposes. This denial of the incarnation and true humanity of our Lord is reflected in the New Testament in such passages as 1 John chapter 4, verse 2 and verse 3 where the apostle writes, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." One might also look at 2 John 7, some of the Docetics denied the real flesh of our Lord's body thinking of it as made of psychic substance as something of a phantom. Our Lord then would be similar to a divine being walking the earth in disguise.

Others denied the humanity of Christ in part, such as the Aryans, they denied his soul. Apollinarus denied that he possessed a rational human soul or spirit. And the Minotholites who said also that he had no human will, denied the humanity of Christ, too. In the light of these views of the humanity of our Lord, let us now turn to the Bible for its view of the matter. For after all what the Bible says is authoritative for believing Christians. And we look first at the testimony of the biblical texts themselves. First, John 1:14 where in his prologue to his gospel the apostle writes, "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." Here is one of the great texts on the incarnation of the divine Son. In one short shattering expression Leon Morris says, "John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity that the very word of God took flesh for man's salvation, the one who had been with God is now with us." It's no wonder that Martin

Luther said that we need new tongues to set the even forth properly. I think it was Dorothy Sayers who said also, "If this is not exciting then what in heaven's name is exciting?"

In the important clause, "and the Word became flesh" there are some significant things to note. First the word in verse 1 was said to be God, called the word because he was destined to speak to men. Here this divine Word has taken on human form, an effective way to express himself to men. In becoming flesh however, the word does not cease to be the divine word. In fact he will now exercise his function as word to the full. The term flesh in "he became flesh" is very strong, almost a crude way of referring to human nature. The immutability of the Son as well as his deity is not compromised by the text, however. The being of the word does not have a new existence. But he does, with the assumption of a human nature in addition to his divine nature, enter into a new form of existence. There is a remarkable contrast between verse 1 and verse 14 in John's prologue that we should not miss. Will you notice in verse 1 that we read, "The word was," which contrasts with verse 14's "The word became."

Second, in verse 1 we read that "The word was with God" while in verse 14 the word came to be with us. And finally, in verse 1 we have, "The word was God," while in verse 14 we have "The word became flesh." The eternal being stands in contrast with the temporal becoming of the Son. We conclude then that John 1:14 is a clear statement of the fact that the divine Son became man.

A second text is John 8:40. It's one of the Lord's plain statements of his true humanity. There we read that he said to the men of Jerusalem, "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." And third the Apostle Paul's opening words to the Romans contain a text about our Lord's humanity. He wrote to the Romans and stated that we was an apostle separated unto the gospel of God and then he added, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with

power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead," Romans 1:3-4. And fourth, in Romans 9:5 there is another reference to his humanity. This text has been hotly debated with respect to its statement of our Lord's deity. And I believe that it plainly does affirm his deity. But there is no debate over its substantiation of his humanity. Occasionally this text is debated with reference to the statement that it says that Jesus Christ is God blessed forever. And in objecting to its plain statement of deity New Testament scholars often say, "But nowhere else is Jesus Christ called God." But then when one turns to another passage like Titus 2:13 where he is, there the same objection is raised. And finally after a series of text such as we looked at in our earliest study, the same objection comes, but nowhere else is he said to be truly God.

Then I think of Irving Crystal's well known statement, "When we lack the will to see things as they really are, then there is nothing so mysterious as the obvious." But one thing we can say about Romans 9:5 is this, that there is no debate over its teaching of the humanity of our Lord. Paul is speaking of the people of the Messiah and the text reads, "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." A fifth passage is found in Philippians 2:6-8 and there again the apostle confesses the full and complete humanity of our Lord. Listen to the passage. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Sixth, in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews there are two texts that suitably form a conclusion to this section of the paper. The reality of the human nature of our Lord is emphasized in the first passage, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14. Two verbs represent the concept of sharing in the verse. The first rendered by

the words "are partakers" suggests the idea of sharing in common and yields and emphasis upon the sharing in a common nature that human beings possess. The tense of the verb suggests that they have always shared this common lot. The second verb, rendered by "took part" referring to our Lord's incarnation suggests that the nature he took was an additional nature for him; something with which by nature he had nothing in common until the incarnation for he was the eternal Son. The tense underlines the historicity of the assumption of the nature. However while the connection with humanity remains, the connection with humanity under the condition of transitoriness, that is under the form of blood and flesh was historical. Marvelous is it to reflect upon the fact that he betrothed himself to the human race for better, for worse, forever. There is no place here for a Docetic phantom Son of God.

Seventh, a few lines on in the same chapter is the final text. The author writes, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," Hebrews 2:17. The phrase "in all things" puts the capstone on the edifice of his genuine humanity. Chalcedon was right; he is truly God and truly man. And the Afincian creed, likely composed after Chalcedon, is also correct in adding, "Yet he is not two but one Christ, one not by conversion of the God-head into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God."

Now, we look for a moment at the indirect scriptural evidence of Christ's humanity. And first, a human name is given to our Lord. In the opening of Matthew's Gospel, the author in setting out his genealogy writes, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." A few verses later on in the account the angel in the Lord instructs Joseph to give the Son the name Jesus, a human name, the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Joshua. And in 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul writes, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," clearly linking his name and title, Messiah, with humanity.

And second, the Scripture presents him as having a human decent. In the Matthean genealogy to which we have just referred in Matthew chapter 1, the genealogy of Jesus Christ is traced by the author to human persons, David and Abraham. Read Matthew chapter 1 verse 1 through verse 17. At the conclusion of the birth narrative he is described as the "offspring of Mary" in verse 25. Third, the biblical description of his conception and birth describes it as a human through miraculous conception, Luke chapter 1 and verse 35. And fourth, our Lord possessed the constituent parts of a human personality and an anatomy. He is said to have a body and a soul, a spirit, hands, feet, vocal cords, and a will. Many texts might be cited here. Fifth, the Scripture pictures him as exercising human emotions. At times he is angry because of the unrighteousness of those about him. At other times he is sorrowful over the experiences that he must undergo. At still other times he is indignant at the selfishness of some. And sixth he is portrayed as having human physical wants. He may be hungry. He may thirst as he does when hanging upon the cross and crying out, "I thirst." And then after a long days work he may be weary as he is pictured in John 4:6. Or in fact may fall asleep on a boat on the Galilean Sea. And seventh, and to climax it all, he is most fully portrayed as suffering human suffering and death. It's hard to see how his humanity might be described more clearly and definitely.

Now, we ask the question, thirdly, what is this resultant person that is both God and man? Let's think of his make up first. Our preceding studies have shown that the Bible portrays Jesus Christ as both God and man. One might ask at this point, "In what ways was he different from other men, for surely he is seen as different." We might answer it theologically and say that he was different in three ways. Although, the three ways do not in any way contradict his full deity or complete manhood. First, he had a supernatural conception, Luke chapter 1, verse 35. He was conceived of the holy Ghost but born of the Virgin Mary. He was the sinless Son of God. There is a universal saying that no man is a hero to his valet, but in the case of our Lord the situation is unparalleled.

"The Jesus of the gospels," McDonald has pointed out, "knew more about sin than anyone, yet he himself never betrayed the least consciousness of it. Sin in others he saw, he rebuked, he forgave, he grieved over it. He suffered for it. He knew what was in man yet could issue the challenge 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' John 8j:46. With him there was no memory of sin's defeat, no trace of sin's scars, no shame of a bad conscious."

And third, Jesus Christ was different in a final way. He assumed an impersonal human nature. His personality was his divine and eternal personality, his two natures being united in one undivided and indivisible person. That follows from the incarnation, for he did not assume then a human person but only a human nature. The human nature was received into the person of the *logos*. To sum up his make up then, he is not God indwelling, nor man raised to the power of deity or deified, but the God-man. In him, as Paul puts it, "Dwellest all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." To repeat it, he is not God in man, nor God and man, but one person, the God-man.

The thirty-nine articles of the Anglican church has it nicely put. The Son took man's nature in the womb of the blessed virgin of her substance so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood were joined together in one person never to be divided, Article II. Perhaps this seems to admit of not rational explanation. We should not be surprised. This is what we expect of the infinite. In fact, its very insolubility is compatible with its divine source. The human imagination can only rearrange known facts. In our study of mythology we remember reading of such fabled creatures as the Centaur, the fawn and the mermaid. The Centaur was a monster half man and half horse said to have inhabited a part of Thessaly. But such a creation involves an anatomical absurdity. The arms of the man correspond to the four legs of the horse, but a compound like this involves a double set of bones and muscles and organs like those that pertain to the upper part of the trunk. All such inventions are preposterous. So when man tries to create even a fanciful being by combining things that

do not exist together, he blunders into grotesque nonsense his meaning. G. Campbell Morgan, in a book of a generation ago said that man's need was three-fold; he is distanced from God by sin. He is ignorant of God through sin. And he is unlike God in sin. The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the God-man and his atoning mediatorial work is that God finds himself in this person and is with men, for he is man. And man finds himself in this person and he is with God, thus he who was distanced from God by sin is restored to God by the gift of righteousness through the work of Christ. He who was ignorant of God through sin comes to the knowledge of God through Christ and he who was unlike God in sin shall come to be like him in Christ.

Job spoke long ago of the need of a mediator. He, reflecting upon his unworthiness to approach God in his sin cried, "For he is not a man as I am that I may answer him, that we may go to court together. There is no umpire or daysman," or as the New International Version has, someone to arbitrate, "between us who may lay his hand upon us both. Jesus Christ being the God-man qualifies and has accomplished the work of union. He has borne the separating penalty of sin for his people and he as the infinite sin-bearer has satisfied the claims of God the holy one. Through union with him who has represented us in the atoning work we are brought near by Christ, know him through Christ, and shall be like him in Christ. Job's daysman has been found. One thinks of Matthew chapter 20, in verse 28 where the Lord Jesus says that "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." And of Peter's great statement, "There is no other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved."

What is the message to us? We may best illustrate this by looking at our Lord's life and ministry. Who is this at Lazarus' tomb? One moment we read "Jesus wept." This is Jesus the man. At the next moment we read that Jesus "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth." And the man dead for four days came forth from the dead. This is Jesus the God-man. In Jerusalem he had preached, "Therefore doth my Father love me because I

lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down." Any mere man could say that. "And I have power to take it again." Only God could say that. "This commandment have I received from my Father," Jesus adds. John 10:17-18. The leper who came to Jesus at the mountain's foot was convinced of his power, for he worshipped him saying, "Lord if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." This was an expression of confidence in his deity. Jesus then put forth his hand and touched him saying, "I will, be thou clean." Immediately the leprosy left the man. Will you notice that Jesus touched the leper? Lepers were not touched, nor are they easily touched today. They were unclean ritually and the disease was thought to be very infectious. Jesus did not have to touch the man, he often healed with only a word, but to let the man and others know that there is a love back of his power he touched him saying, "I will, be thou clean." That is Jesus the God-man. And in the light of both his deity and humanity we gladly sing, "He saw me ruined in the fall yet loved me not withstanding all."

Now, let me say a few words in conclusion. What shall we say then as we conclude our study of the question "Who was Jesus Christ?" The Scriptures have spoken plainly and clearly. He is the God-man, the divinely promised mediator sent to save the people of God. That is what the angel intimated to Joseph. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins." And this is what those closest to him in his earthly ministry confessed. Said Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." "My Lord and my God," said doubting Thomas. "He is our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," Paul said. When Christ asked his disciples at Caesarea Philippi "Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?" He received some significant answers that revealed quite a bit about the way his contemporaries felt regarding his person. Our Lord, however, was more interested at the moment in what his own apostles thought. And so he followed with the probing question, "But who say ye that I am?" It is then that Peter offered his great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Matthew

16:16. That's the questions we must all face and to which we all must give response. It cannot be dodged, thwarted, shunned, or evaded.

Many years ago I read an account of a well known American scholar, who in his early ministry preached a course of sermons on the resurrection in which he stated and tested the various arguments to the fullest extent of his power. There was present in his audience and imminent lawyer, the head of the legal profession in the city. He listened to the preacher Sunday by Sunday as he marshaled proofs, weighed evidence, considered objection, analyzed the stories of the gospels and stated the case for the resurrection. At length he drew the conclusion that Christianity must be true because God raised Jesus from the dead. At the close of the last sermon the lawyer went to see the minister and said, "I'm a lawyer. I've listened to your statement of the case. I consider it incontrovertible. But this case demands a verdict. This is no mere intellectual conflict. There is life in it. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead his religion is true and we must submit to it."

W.H. Griffith Thomas, to whom I am indebted for the incident said that the lawyer was as good as his word and became a Christian. That's my prayer and hope for those who have heard these studies on the question, "Who was Jesus Christ?" May God in his marvelous grace bring you to the confession that he is truly God, truly man, and my own personal Savior? Bow before him. In your heart of hearts confess your need of him and lean upon the blood that was shed for the redemption of sins. May God give you grace to do that right now.