

Jesus:
The Divine Claims

Jesus of Nazareth has been the marvel of men for twenty centuries. His friends have loved and worshiped Him as the sinless Son of God and the Savior of men from their sins. His enemies, unbelievers of varying degrees, have made countless vain efforts to discredit Him but have been forced to admit that from every point of view He was more than a man.

He lived as none before or since His day has ever lived. His teaching is superior to that of any other man in any age, both in method and in content. His works were truly the works of God. His influence, in spite of the most persistent and malicious opposition, has been felt by more people and has led to more good than that of any other man before or since His day.

Evil men and unbelievers have tried to account for these facts in various ways, but there is only one satisfactory explanation. At once simple and superb, this explanation is contained in the words of an Israelite in whom was no deceit: "Rabbi, You are the Son of God" (John 1:49a; see v. 47). Jesus of

Nazareth, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, was God—God in flesh, God made flesh, God manifested in the flesh.

THE PROPHETS SAID THAT HE WAS GOD

Isaiah

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, Isaiah said, “Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew said that this prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was born (Matthew 1:22). He interpreted the word “Immanuel” for us as meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Thus, according to Isaiah and Matthew, Jesus was “God with us.”

Again, Isaiah foretold His coming in these words:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

In this statement we learn that the One to be seated upon the throne of David was to be the “Mighty God.” The angel Gabriel undoubtedly alluded to this prophecy when he told Mary that she was to have a Son and call His name Jesus (Luke 1:31). “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:32). Mary’s Son was to be called “the Son of the Most High” because He was the “Mighty God” of Isaiah’s prophecy.

Micah

The prophet Micah said, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). It was to this prophecy that the chief priests and the scribes turned when Herod asked where the Christ was to be born. It was this prophecy that caused Herod to send the wise men to Bethlehem, where they might find Him "who has been born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2–8). This One who was born King of the Jews, according to Micah, is from everlasting to everlasting. This can be said of no creature; only the Creator can be described in such terms. Thus, according to prophecy, He would be recognized as God.

JESUS CLAIMED THAT HE WAS GOD

The Jews' Concept

Before citing the Scriptures to prove that Jesus claimed to be God, we need to be familiar with the Jewish concept of the Messiah. This Jewish notion was expressed by one of their own number, Trypho, in his celebrated dialogue with Justin Martyr (c.110–c.165):

... that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish.¹

¹Justin Martyr *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew* 48. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, rev. and arr. A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957).

Those who affirm him to have been a man, and to have been anointed by election, and then to have become Christ, appear to me to speak more plausibly For we all expect that Christ will be a man [born] of men, and that Elijah when he comes will anoint him. But if this man appear to be Christ, he must certainly be known as man [born] of men; but from the circumstance that Elijah has not yet come, I infer that this man is not He [the Christ].²

That the Jews held this belief in the time of Jesus is seen from an incident recorded in Matthew 22:41–45:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying,
 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,
 “Sit at My right hand,
 Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet”’?
 If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?”

Why were those Jews unable to explain why David called his descendant “Lord”? The simple answer is that they expected the Messiah to “be a man born of human parents” in the family of David. If they had known the Scriptures, which taught that He was to be God in flesh (flesh descended from David), they could have answered the question.

In the estimation of the Jews, it was no great sin for one to claim to be the Christ, the Messiah; nor was it a crime for people to believe someone to be the Christ. In Matthew 9:27 two blind men called Jesus “Son of David”; in Matthew 15:22 the woman of Canaan did

²Ibid. 49.

the same. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem in what is called His “triumphal entry” the multitudes went before Him, saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:1–17). The expression “Son of David” was used in the same way in Matthew 21:9 and 22:42. The multitudes were calling Him the Christ, yet very few of them believed Him to be the Son of God, God in flesh. Only days later, they joined the leaders in condemning Him for blasphemy because He said He was the Son of God.

Jesus’ Claim

Keeping all of this in mind, let us notice that Jesus called Himself God. He used the term “Son of God” to mean “God,” just as the expression “son of man” means “man.” In John 5:17, 18, we read,

But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

The Jews called themselves sons of God, and they called God their Father (John 8:41). Surely, they should not have objected to Jesus’ calling God His Father—but they did. Why? Their objection was that Jesus used a term meaning “own Father,” which implied that He was “equal with God.” When He used a term which made Himself equal to God, it was the same as calling Himself God, which they considered blasphemy.

In John 8:53b, 54, the Jews asked Him, “Whom do You make Yourself out to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father

who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'" Jesus identified His proper Father as being the One whom the Jews called their God. This was another way of saying that He was the Son of God in a distinct way in which no other being is. Therefore, He was making Himself equal with God.

The Jews understood that Jesus was making Himself equal with God when He called Himself the Son of God. This is made clear in John 10:30–36. Jesus' statement "I and the Father are one" drew a strong reaction:

... The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, you are Gods'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Here it is plainly set forth that when Jesus called Himself the "Son of God," the Jews understood that He made Himself God.

This claim was what finally led Him to His death. Before the Jewish council, He was ordered, "If You are the Christ, tell us." To this, His answer left them no room to doubt His claim. Since there was no law against a man's claiming to be the Christ, they could do nothing. Next, He was asked, "Are you the Son of God, then?" He answered, "Yes, I am." Following this affirmation, the Jews said, "What further need

do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." (Read Luke 22:66–71.)

They then took Him before Pilate. The first accusation brought against Him there was that He had made Himself "Christ," a king. When they saw that this accusation would not secure a sentence, they said, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). According to their law, one guilty of blasphemy was to be put to death (Leviticus 24:16). They accused Him of blasphemy because He had confessed to being the Son of God (Matthew 26:63–66). We see, then, that Jesus claimed to be equal with God; He claimed to be God in the flesh.

THE APOSTLES PROCLAIMED THAT HE WAS GOD

The men who were nearest to Jesus while He was on earth—the men who saw His miracles and constantly heard His teaching for more than three years—were the apostles. Those men saw Him and ate with Him after He arose from the grave. Later, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, who not only guarded them from error but also gave them the words they should use in conveying to us the message. Those men said that Jesus was the Son of God, God made flesh, God manifested in the flesh.

John

John, the beloved disciple, perhaps most fully understood and appreciated our Lord's relationship with the Father. Guided unerringly by the Holy Spirit, he wrote,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. . . .

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-4, 14).

The "Word" here mentioned was the second person of the Godhead. The Word became Jesus. This fact need not be argued, since it is all but stated in verse 14. Therefore, let us first notice the statements made about this Word which prove Him to be God. Second, we shall notice that this Word, who is proved to be God, became flesh and was known as Jesus of Nazareth.

The eternity of the Word is first stated by the phrase "in the beginning was." The Word already "was" when everything else began to be; He existed before any created thing. He therefore was no part of creation; He is eternal. None but God is eternal; therefore, He is God.

Next, His coexistence with the Father is stated twice in the text: "And the Word was with God"; "The Word was in the beginning with God." Then, His essential and personal deity is affirmed: "And the Word was God." Finally, His distinction from the Father is stated: "He was in the beginning with God." These words are but an unintelligible jumble if they do not convey the idea that there are two Beings, each of whom may accurately be called "God." "The Word was God," yet He was with another Being called "God"; consequently there were two Beings

called "God." On the other hand, because of Their unity, we can truly say, "There is one God."

Further, this Word is said to be the Creator: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." This again proves that He existed before all creation and therefore was not created. His self-existence and His vitalizing and enlightening power are reflected in the next statement: "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." According to this, He was the source of all life and light. Truly, He was God.

This Being, this Word, "became flesh and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth." In becoming flesh, He lost none of those attributes which characterized Him as the Word, God. In the flesh, He asserted His eternal existence when He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). As Jesus of Nazareth, He declared His coexistence with the Father by saying, "Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

In 1 John we find further evidence of the divinity of the Lord Jesus. The beloved apostle wrote in 1:2, "The life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." This is similar to John's statement in his Gospel Account. The life which was manifested was the eternal life. It was first with the Father and then was manifested to us. If the Son of God was with the Father and then was manifested to us, and the eternal life was with the Father and then was manifested to us, we must be correct in concluding that the eternal life was the Son of God; but we are not left to draw conclusions.

John said, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20, 21). From this we learn that the Son of God is that eternal life which was with the Father, was manifested to us in the flesh, and is known as Jesus Christ.

We might well make this the end of our quest, for we have found the positive inspired statement that this Son of God, Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwelt among us, "is the true God."

Paul

Another apostle who wrote of the divinity of Jesus was Paul, the apostle to whom the Lord appeared after He had ascended to heaven, and the one who was caught up and allowed to see and hear things not lawful for him to utter (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). He described Jesus in these terms:

[Jesus], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

Here Paul said that this Jesus was once on equality with God, but that He emptied Himself of, or gave up, that equality. While on the earth, Jesus was the equal of God in that the fullness of the Godhead, all the powers of God, dwelt in Him. In what way was He *not* the equal of God? He was made in the likeness

of men and was no more in the likeness of God, a Spirit. He gave that up when He identified Himself with humanity. This is the explanation for which we have been searching—that Jesus Christ was God made in the likeness of men and dwelt among us as God in the flesh. (See Hebrews 2:14–17.)

Paul further said of the Son of God,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15–17).

Those who do not believe in the divinity of Jesus use the phrase “firstborn of all creation” to mean the “first made creature.” The next statement is given as the reason why He is the “firstborn of all creation”—for by Him all things were created. The word “firstborn” means heir and lord, as well as one born first. Jesus is Lord of all creation, for all things were made by Him. This makes good sense; the other interpretation does not. “He is before all things,” meaning all created things. This argues His divinity in that He existed before all created beings. “And in Him all things hold together.” This cannot be said of a created being, but may with propriety be said of Him who created all things.

Next, let us consider a statement by Paul which is too plain to allow doubt or misunderstanding. In speaking of the Jews, he said, “. . . from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Romans 9:5). The plain significance

of this passage in its present translation is that Christ, in the flesh given to Him through His Jewish lineage, is God. Because He is God, He is entitled to blessings rather than the cursings which He was, and is, receiving from the Jews.

The apostle Paul considered the resurrection of Jesus the greatest proof that He was the Son of God, or God in the flesh. Twice God had spoken from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; see Luke 9:35), but the Jews refused to believe Him. Jesus had performed such miracles as no man ever had done, yet they did not believe Him. He had testified under oath that He was the Son of God; but instead of accepting this testimony, they crucified Him as a blasphemous imposter because of it. The great God of heaven reversed the decision of the highest courts on earth; by raising Christ from the dead, He declared Him to be His Son.

In speaking of the gospel of God, Paul wrote,

. . . His Son . . . was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:3, 4).

Here Paul referred to Jesus Christ our Lord as God's Son. This Son had His humanity through David, but His resurrection declares that He was more than human. He was crucified for saying that He was the Son of God—that, though He was the son of David, He had a higher relationship than that. His divinity came not through His connection with David, but through His relation to God. God honored the claim that Jesus made by raising Him from the dead. This passage

stands as solid rock in proof of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. It ties humanity and divinity together in the person of “Jesus Christ our Lord,” calling that person God’s Son.

Paul said, relative to the flesh, that Jesus was “born” of the seed of David. Birth denotes the beginning. Of Christ’s spirit, however, Paul said He “was declared to be” the Son of God. That does not denote a beginning. In Jesus of Nazareth we see the fusion of that humanity, which had its beginning at birth, and divinity, which was with God and was God. In Him—and in Him alone—we see God manifested in the flesh.

HIS WORKS DECLARE HIM TO BE GOD

The works Jesus did while here on earth, according to His own statement, were such as had never been done by anyone else. He said, “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin” (John 15:24a). He considered His works sufficient evidence of His deity. He said, “For the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). These works provide sufficient, even abundant, evidence of Christ’s deity. All who disbelieve are condemned. He said, “For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Power Over Demons

The power that Jesus exercised over evil spirits is proof of a power beyond that of a human being. When He was accused of casting out demons by Beelzebub, He replied, “No one can enter the strong

man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:27). Here He claimed a power beyond that of humanity.

Jesus' very presence was disturbing to the demons. In the synagogue at Capernaum, one cried out, saying, "Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24b). Another said, "You are the Son of God!" (Mark 3:11b). Evil spirits recognized in Him the One who is to destroy them; they asked, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29). Aside from proving that His power was no less than God's, these passages show that the demons recognized Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the One whom they will have to face when the time for their punishment arrives.

Power To Forgive Sins

While here on earth, Jesus forgave sins—which, as the scribes and the Pharisees correctly said in Luke 5:20, 21, none but God can do. They accused Jesus of blasphemy when He said to a man, "Your sins are forgiven." He healed the man before their eyes to prove that He had the power to forgive sins. (See also Matthew 9:2–8 and Mark 2:1–12.) This incident proved two truths. First, one who could heal the sick through His own power could also forgive sins. Second, since Jesus could forgive sins (which none but God could do), He was God.

Power Unlimited

Time forbids us to review His stilling the tempest, feeding the thousands with morsels of bread and fish and then gathering twelve baskets of fragments,

walking on the water, and raising the dead to life again. The just conclusion based on each of these events is that Jesus was God in the flesh. Since no man has ever been able to perform any such miracles, except while confessedly doing it in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (as did Peter when he healed the lame beggar at the Beautiful gate in Acts 3:6), we are surely justified in concluding that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh. No other could have exercised such power in person.

CONCLUSION

The theme that Jesus is the Son of God, God manifested in the flesh, is at the heart of the gospel. It is the foundation upon which everything else rests. From this truth, we may draw many lessons of encouragement to sustain us in the hours of trial.

First, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism is based upon the fact that Jesus is greater than Moses. Jesus was the Son of God; Moses was not. This is discussed at length in the Book of Hebrews.

Second, our hope of an exaltation above the angels rests upon the truth that Jesus was God in flesh. He is set forth as an example; He is the firstfruits as proof that we too shall be exalted (1 Corinthians 15:20–22; 1 Peter 5:6). With Him, we shall be given an inheritance that is undefiled and that does not fade away, which is reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

Third, God's becoming flesh and living among men demonstrates His love for the lost. Here we have a picture of God seeking man. There is much said about the duty of man to seek after God, but it became the duty of man to seek God only because God came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

It is interesting to note that the Son of God passed over the angels who had fallen and did not extend help to them, while He “gives help to the descendant of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). It was humanity that He loved and lifted, not angels.

Fourth, God’s becoming flesh, living among men, and dying for man shows how valuable a human being is in the sight of God. Jesus taught the Jews that a man is worth more than a sparrow or a sheep. The fact that He died for man, giving His life in place of ours, indicates that He valued our lives more highly than He did His own. He wishes to save us—not from hell only, but from sin in this life, that our lives may be worth as much as possible on earth. If we live in sin, we are worthless. Living for Him is the only way to make our lives worthwhile.