

Sermon August 1, 2021 The Spirituality of the Cross Part VIII

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is part 8 of the summer sermon series The Spirituality of the Cross. I hope to adequately finish the topic of Jesus Christ as the human God. I have to say, “adequately” because there is certainly no way anyone can completely cover such a topic.

There are many “-ologies” out there. We have biology which is the study of living things. There is archeology which is the study of past places and peoples. Geology studies the earth. In the church we also have a specific area of study called Christology. Guess what Christology studies? Yes, of course, it studies Jesus Christ. And THAT is no small matter. The truthfulness of every belief and teaching people have depends on how accurately they do their Christology. Most Christians don’t like Christology because they either find it requires too much diligent concentration (and who has the time for that these days?), or it challenges beliefs they hold to very fondly.

The most basic part of Christology is the incarnation. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. The baby Jesus is as we sing, “God in man made manifest.” This means something of eternal significance. First and foremost it means all the attributes – the things about God – are found on the human side of Jesus.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Colossian 2:9

We read about this in Matthew, Mark , Luke, and John where Jesus goes 40 days without water, feeds thousands with a small amount of food, calms storms, raises the dead, and knows what other people are thinking in their hearts. All this is true but there is much more to consider regarding the attributes of God flowing to Jesus’ human nature.

The other side of Jesus’ incarnation is his humanity being taken up into the Godhead. This is the part we have much more trouble coming to terms with. This is also the part that may well have much more meaning to us in our daily struggles. This is so important, it is highlighted in the Athanasian Creed. The creed says the divine and human natures of Jesus are fully united.

One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God.

Why does the Bible say that Jesus knows what it is like to be human? BECAUSE GOD IS A HUMAN BEING. Jesus has a human body with a human heart and a human brain and human eyes ears hands and toes. Jesus also has a human soul. He's not just the spirit of God poured not a human-shaped mold. He also has a human soul just like us. Think about that.

Do you see how this helps the cause of salvation from eternal death and hell? When it says Jesus took our place upon the cross, he really could. It was a one-for-one exchange. Human-for-human. When we think about what happened on the cross, God did not just put up a paper cut-out of a human form on the cross and the rest was all God stuff. Jesus who climbed up on the cross is human like us in every way. He is an equal exchange for us because of his humanity. Because Jesus is also fully divine, he can stand in for each and every human of all time and be their replacement as well. Going one step further, on the cross there is not just a human hanging there. God placed himself on our side of the scale of his justice. The scale is now balanced as Jesus is the ransom, payment, and recompense for every last one of our transgressions ever.

Do you see the importance of the incarnation? Sometimes when we get to the creeds some people are like, "I don't like those creeds. All that stuff is not important. They don't have anything to do with a personal faith in Jesus. That's what's important – a personal faith in Jesus." We may wonder what exactly that personal faith consists of and what it believes.

When we get Jesus wrong – when we have the wrong formula or recipe for the incarnation, our faith suffers. Some people don't think God placed enough of himself in the balance and there is still a deficit. We need to help our salvation out by being obedient to God's laws. We need to perform meritorious acts to reduce our time of pain and suffering in the afterlife or the pain and suffering of our relatives who are already there. If God is in the balance then the debt has been fully paid, right? Others believe Jesus did not die for the whole world, but only for part of the world – the elect. Some people are chosen for heaven, others for something less heavenly. Think about the cross. Was there 10% of a human on the cross? 33%? 50%? 80%? There was 100% of a human on the cross, so by our best reckoning all of Jesus sacrificed himself for all people. The working of it all out is a head-scratcher. However, the most clear teaching we have on this is from the third chapter of John,

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17

A final area I want to quickly point out on this is the Real Presence in the Lords Supper. This is the official position on Holy Communion in our churches. There is a reason for that. It flows right out of this incarnation business I've been talking about. Many people hold that in communion there is a wafer/ cracker and wine/ grape juice. That is certainly what we can see. Some say that is all there is to the food in communion. The reason for this view is that Jesus has gone to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father, so he can't be here. The benefit of such eating is mostly in the remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross to save us. Such remembering certainly has some value. Others say along with the wheat and grapes there is the spiritual presence of Jesus. His body is still upstairs, but he can be with us here in his Spirit which is part of God. The benefit of doing communion that way is not only do you have the remembering part, which is good, you also have Jesus right here right now among us. Even better. The view of this church and churches such as ours is yet another one. Here we consider the teaching in Ephesians chapter four where it says,

He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. Ephesians 4:9

Since the incarnation is the assumption of human nature into the divine, and here we read that Jesus fills all things, you see how we feel comfortable in saying Jesus body is also physically present with the bread and wine. This is what he says is happening when he says take and eat this is my body, take and drink, this is my blood. Now we can take him at his word and we are not forced to explain those words away because of our scientific sensibilities. Besides, just like in Egypt when God's people put the blood of the lamb on their doorways so the curse of death would Passover, now with he very blood of Christ the Passover lamb death will also Passover us. What fun!

The last really important thing about all this incarnation talk is it's meaning for our pain and suffering. Anybody got any pain and suffering? It's everywhere, all the time. Its people's biggest problem with God I think. Gracious and loving God? Oh yeah? Why all the pain and suffering? What's up with that? I don't believe you even exist. Through the incarnation, God took into himself all of human nature, body and soul. In this world he grew hungry, thirsty, and tired. He loved his mother Mary and

grieved the loss of his father Joseph. He grew up with many bratty brothers and sisters. He felt extreme cold and extreme heat. He worked for a living. He was mistreated, misrepresented, abandoned, beaten, flogged, crowned with thorns, driven through the city streets in blood, nailed to the cross, struggled for each breath, died and was totally abandoned by God the Father. Jesus Christ knows what pain and suffering are all about. We know he took our sin, as divine he BECAME sin. But he also takes our suffering.

**He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows; Isaiah 53:3-4**

Jesus bears our sins, yes. But he also carries our griefs and our sorrows. He takes our sin into himself. He takes our sorrows as well. We ridicule well-meaning people who say, "I can imagine how bad you must feel." No, they can't imagine, we say. They didn't lose a child, a spouse, a parent or friend. They have never been betrayed, lied to, lost a good job, had their house burn down with all the pictures and the dog still in it. They've never gone through any of that. Jesus has. In the Bible we read about all he suffered. As he lives in each of us he is there right along with us experiencing it the same as us. It is no easier just because he is God. He is also fully human. We have no idea what all Jesus has suffered. My arthritis, your cancer, stroke, disability, seizures, addiction, rape, torture, abuse, failures, everything. Jesus has experienced every pain and suffering known to man. We never go it alone. The thing that makes things the worse is when we feel like we are going it alone. Other people may care and want to help, but we have to walk the internal path of suffering ourselves. Not with Jesus. He's God. He's also human. He lives within us. We are never ever ever alone. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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