

*Who is Jesus Christ?***Introduction**

In lesson one, we stated that Jesus is the primary focus of the New Testament. In lesson two, we surveyed the four gospels because they contain the most accurate record of Jesus' life on earth. In this lesson, we focus on Jesus as a person. We will look at Bible passages that present Jesus as God and that present Him as human. Then we will briefly discuss Jesus' life and ministry while He was on earth.

I. Jesus Is God

The Bible makes it very clear that it intends for its readers to believe that Jesus was and is God. He was not an angel or a demigod or a great prophet. He was no less God than God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. The whole message of the Bible stands or falls on this single point of Jesus' deity.

A. Jesus' Humility about His Deity

In Philippians 2, Paul said that Jesus didn't consider His equality with God something to be exploited, but made Himself nothing. So we don't see Jesus taking a great deal of initiative to prove His deity.

B. Jesus' Actions Demonstrated His Deity

But we do find multiple instances in the Gospels where, when asked or challenged, Jesus made it clear He knew He was God. For instance in Mark 2, when He forgave the paralyzed man's sins, the religious leaders challenged Him that only God can forgive sin. Rather than debate them, Jesus did something else that only God can do. He healed the paralytic. And Mark makes it obvious that He did so to prove He was God.

C. Jesus' Claims Affirm His Deity

He also claimed to be one with the Father on various occasions. At His trial before the Sanhedrin, He made an unmistakable claim

to be God's Son.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy." (Matthew 26:63–65 NIV)

Jesus could have denied His deity to the high priest or to Pilate and His life would be spared. But He never did that. He could not deny that He was God because it was true. So to say that the gospel writers didn't believe Jesus was God or that Jesus never claimed He was God or that the New Testament never claimed Jesus was God requires a terrible misreading of the Scripture. Jesus was—and *is*—the Son of God.

D. The Gospels Affirm Jesus' Deity

1. *Matthew and Luke.* Consider how Matthew and Luke opened their gospels. Their genealogies and birth stories talk about the startling fact that Mary was pregnant while she was still a virgin. It was an amazing claim, but Matthew and Luke say that's just the way it was. They gave no defensive arguments, just the facts.

2. *Mark and John.* Mark began his gospel with a reference to Old Testament prophecy. He refers to Isaiah 40 and the coming of John the Baptist, the great prophet who would announce the Messiah. Then he went right into his story saying Jesus Christ came to fulfill that prophecy. John didn't start his gospel with Jesus' birth either. Since his purpose was to present Jesus as God, he opened with Jesus' eternal existence. He claimed that in the beginning was the Logos (the Word), the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. The Logos created everything. The Logos is the source of life and the source of light. And then the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us. So you can't even get beyond the first chapter of any of the four gospels without understanding that each of them assumes that this person they're writing about is God.

3. *All Four Gospels.* The four gospel writers not only affirmed Jesus' deity in their introductions but also in their conclusions. All four writers ended their account of Jesus' life with His crucifixion and

His resurrection. Every founder of every religion in the world has died. But only Christianity has made the claim that its founder was raised from the dead. The Gospels open and close on this amazing theme and leave no doubt in their readers' minds that this magnificent man they are writing about is none other than the Son of God. The Gospels are filled with references to Jesus' deity. To list all the references is far beyond the scope of this introductory course, but even a casual reading of the Gospels leaves us with no doubt that Jesus believed He was God's Son, and that the gospel writers believed and declared the truth of His claim. C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* makes the wonderful observation that since Jesus believed He was God, He had to be either a lunatic, a liar, or the Son of God.

E. The Whole New Testament Affirms Jesus' Deity

The New Testament message is based on the fact that Jesus is God; and in this course it's not possible to discuss the hundreds of references it makes to Jesus' deity. We will limit our references to three passages and encourage you to read them thoroughly.

1. *Philippians 2:6* teaches that Jesus was in the "form" of God. In both biblical and classical Greek, the word that's translated "form" refers to the characteristics that make something what it is. The English word metamorphosis is derived from it, and it tells us that Jesus had whatever He needed to fully qualify as God.

2. *Colossians 1:15–20* claims that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." And that "by Him all things were created." That "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." And that God was pleased to have all His "fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (NASB).

3. *Hebrews 1:1–4* claims that God spoke in His Son, "whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (NASB). It tells us "the Son is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." And Hebrews assures us that Jesus the God-man accomplished His earthly mission as our Savior and is now performing His heavenly mission as our High Priest. "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

This too-small sample should convince us that the New Testament,

from Matthew to Revelation, is based on the claim that Jesus Christ is God.

II. Jesus Is Human

As essential as Jesus' deity was to His ministry on earth, it was no more essential than His humanity. For Him to die in our place, He had to die as one of us. For us to take comfort in His role as our High Priest who understands our weaknesses, He had to legitimately suffer with those weaknesses as a fellow human. So it's necessary for us to believe as confidently in Jesus' humanity as we do in His deity.

A. Jesus' Actions Demonstrate His Humanity

Now to say that Jesus was human is not a surprise to anyone. People saw Him walking and talking and eating and drinking. In his first epistle, John testified about Jesus and declared what he had seen, heard, and touched with his hands. Not only did Jesus live a completely human life, He also died a human death. Jesus experienced hunger, fatigue, frustration, anger, grief, and a full array of human emotions.

Hebrews teaches us that "in the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety" (Hebrews 5:7 NASB).

B. The Scriptures Present Jesus as Human

John introduced Jesus as God's Word in John 1:1–13 and clearly established His deity. Then in verse 14 (NASB) he claimed, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Paul stated that He "was revealed in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16 NASB) and that, "When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4 NASB). Even after His resurrection, Jesus urged His disciples to "see My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39 NASB).

III. Jesus Is Fully God and Fully Human

Paul wrote to the Colossian church to correct their confusion

about Jesus. In Colossians 2:9, Paul gives us perhaps the clearest summary statement about Jesus Christ in all the New Testament. He wrote that “in Him [in Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” (NASB). This means that everything a being needs to be God, Jesus has. “All the fullness of Deity dwells in [Him].” And then the same verse tells us in what form He exists. He isn’t gas, He isn’t a mist, and He isn’t an angel. “All the fullness of Deity dwells [in Him] in bodily form.”

We’re edging into some involved theological turf here that is beyond the scope of this course on the New Testament. But if you’re interested in further study of Jesus’ nature and ministry, consider the ODBU course ST302: Christology to discover deeper truths about our Savior. It’s an amazing thing when you think about it. Jesus was completely God and completely human. He was undiminished Deity and complete humanity united in one Being forever. That’s Who Jesus is.

IV. Jesus’ Life on Earth

A. The Broad Sweep of His Life

What was Jesus’ life like? Well, His birth got lots of attention. Prophets wrote about it, and the story includes angels and wise men and a king and shepherds and a virgin who gave birth to a Baby. Amazing. Yet all we know of Jesus’ childhood is that when He was twelve years old He taught religious leaders in the temple and that He grew in stature with God and men. His ministry began when He was 30 years old (and lasted just over three years), and that’s where most of the gospel records focus. He died by crucifixion after an illegal trial. But three days later He came back from the grave, and after forty days of presenting Himself alive He ascended into heaven.

B. The Chronology and Geography of Jesus’ Ministry

When you’re reading the Gospels, it helps if you have some sense of the “where and when” of His activities. His ministry began in Galilee where He stayed for several months. His first miracle of turning water into wine occurred at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

Then He went south, about seventy miles to Jerusalem, which is in Judea, to celebrate Passover at the temple. He stayed there for several months and then went back home to Galilee. On the

way He stopped at a well in Samaria, a territory that was located between Judea and Galilee, and had a famous conversation with the Samaritan woman.

Jesus stayed in Galilee for about eighteen months. During that time He preached the Sermon on the Mount and appointed the twelve apostles. That period ended when the Jewish religious leaders unequivocally rejected Him as their king. They could not deny Jesus' miracles because too many witnesses had seen them or been healed. So instead, they claimed that Jesus' father was the devil and that he was the one who was giving Him miracle-working power. They crossed a line by this blasphemy, and Jesus withdrew to the Gentile territories.

Jesus ministered in the Gentile areas of Decapolis and Phoenicia for about six months, where he performed many more miracles. Then He returned to the Jewish territories for the remaining time of His ministry. When you see these geographical names in the Gospels, it's helpful to find them on a map so you can see where Jesus was when various events occurred.

C. The Focus on Passion Week

The next to the last period of Jesus' life is called Passion Week. The week began with Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem with His disciples and the people claimed Him as their King. But then on Friday of that week, they crucified Him. Three days later on Sunday morning, He was raised from the dead. We call that eight-day period from Palm Sunday to Resurrection Sunday, Passion Week.

It's instructive that Matthew devoted 25 percent of his gospel to that single week. In Mark, 30 percent of his book is devoted to Passion Week. Twenty percent of Luke is focused on Passion Week; and John devotes 42 percent of his gospel to Passion Week. Jesus was on earth for about thirty-three years, but the amount of space given to this one week of His life affirms the gospel writers' claims that Jesus came to seek and to save lost people. All of the magnificent things Jesus said and did were crucial. But all four of the gospel writers emphasized this period of time when Jesus exerted and exalted Himself for who He really was. He was none other than the Son of God who died for you and me.

Conclusion

The final period of Jesus' life on earth occurred after His resurrection. Luke informs us in Acts 1:3 that "after his suffering, he presented himself to them [the apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (NIV). A foundational truth about Jesus is that He is still alive and active in the lives of His people. A favorite hymn declares, "I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today; I know that He is living, whatever men may say." Paul declared that, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:17–19 NIV). But Paul assures us Jesus is alive and our hope in Christ is not limited to this life. It is an eternal hope. So His followers are not "of all people most to be pitied." We are of all people most to be envied, because our hope is based on a living Savior who has proven He is God's own Son.