



Sermon Notes

Term – Autumn 2019

Series – Luke

Gathering & Date – the 10 & the 5, 15 September

Title – The Manifesto of Jesus (Part 2)

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – Luke 4:14-21

**** PLEASE BEGIN TO READ THE GOSPEL OF LUKE IN PREPARATION FOR OUR SERIES BEGINNING ON 29 SEPTEMBER ****

Main message of this talk in one sentence – The New Testament is quite clear that Jesus, without ever losing his divine nature (he was, is and always be God), voluntarily laid aside his divine status and power, fulfilling his earthly ministry through the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the will of his Father, to whom he submitted himself.

Main points –

- The New Testament is explicitly clear that Jesus was God
- The world beyond the church is mostly happy to accept Jesus' humanity ("he was a great man' etc.) – but will not bow the knee to him as God
- The world within the church is mostly happy to accept Jesus' divinity, but struggles to embrace the full implications of his humanity
- Jesus himself clearly understood and proclaimed himself to be God
- Yet also clearly indicated his self-imposed limitations as a human being
- For the cross to work, Jesus had to go to it as a human, a second Adam in St Paul's terminology – hence his temptations at the beginning of his earthly ministry (in the wilderness) and on the final night of his earthly life (in Gethsemane) to abandon that pathway and instead use (or abuse) his divine power to serve and save himself
- Without this understanding of Jesus, his call to those who follow him to do greater works and miracles than he did rings false

Questions

- How does this teaching about the nature of Jesus Christ – that though he remained fully God, while he was on earth he lived in human submission to the Father's will – change the way you think of his life and death?
- What previously unanswered questions does it address?
- What are the implications for what might be possible for you, as a Christian submitted to the Father's will?

Spend some time thinking about not just the humanity of Jesus, but his humility – his willingness to lay aside his eternal, supreme authority as author of life, to become one of us, to run our race, pay our price and secure eternal life for all who trust in him.

Use this as a basis for worship ...

FULLER TEXT OF PAUL'S TALK

Christology

All about Jesus ...

Biblical theology – God & man ... human & divine

1 World beyond the church – happy to embrace Jesus' humanity

Billy Connolly "I couldn't believe in Christianity, but I think Jesus was a wonderful man".

Clive James, in an article titled 'Leading man'

But the Christmas will come when our granddaughter will want to know more about just whose birthday Christmas is, and an important part of her upbringing will begin. Her parents are both believers in the classic sense, but it might be that their daughter will one day become an unbeliever, as I did.

She might not believe that Jesus is still alive, in heaven. But there is one important thing that even I will be able to tell her, which is that Jesus, the first great man to be a champion of women, believed in her, and that alone would be sufficient cause to bless every night and day of the season wherein his birth is celebrated. [PRESS RED]

But cannot accept his divinity

Dividing line for Christians e.g. sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses

Above all, we want to honour Jehovah, the God of the Bible and the Creator of all things. We do our best to imitate Jesus Christ and are proud to be called Christians.

*We have faith that Jesus came to earth from heaven and gave his perfect **human** life as a ransom sacrifice.*

[BUT] ... we do not worship Jesus, as we do not believe that he is Almighty God.

Quoting from the official Jehovah's Witnesses website

In support of that statement, they quote John 14:28 where Jesus says, "The Father is greater than I am."

Irony ... John 14 is also where Jesus tells his disciples that in knowing him they have met the Father. John's gospel is in fact full of assertions that Jesus was, is and always will be, God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God ... John 1:18

*'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before **Abraham** was born, I **am**!' John 8:58*

³⁰ I and the Father are one.' ³¹ Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' ³³ 'We are not stoning you for any good work,' they replied, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.' John 10

he accepts Thomas's confession, 'My Lord and my God!' John 20:28

Rest of NT = clear that Jesus is God ...

*from [the Jews] is traced the human ancestry of Christ, **who is God over all**, forever praised!
Romans 9:5*

Ironically ...

2 World within the church – happy to embrace Jesus' divinity

"Jesus was different, wasn't he?"

Like a hybrid car (but only one exists) – Jesus switches into God-mode / God-gear when needs to ...?

So, what does scripture have to teach us today? That, while Jesus was never anything less than divine in nature, his ministry was that of a human being empowered by the Spirit of God ...

Our reading today began with the words

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit

He quotes from Isaiah 61 the words

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me ... he has sent me ...

If ministering according to his divinity, none of this would have been necessary – indeed, it would have been appropriate.

The Bible is clear that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal ... the only way we can make sense of Jesus of Nazareth needing to be full of the Holy Spirit is to accept the NT message that he lived and ministered and died as a human being ...

Interestingly, one of the passages in John which provoked the Jewish bigwigs, is also one of the clearest indications of the balance the NT holds about the nature of the Son

*Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God**. Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, **the Son can do nothing by himself**; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. John 5:17-19*

- on the one hand, Jesus is 'equal with God'
- on the other, Jesus understands himself to be 'limited' in the scope of his ministry – 'the Son can do nothing by himself'

In fact, Jesus' own preferred self-designation is Son of Man. He consciously and intentionally identifies himself with humankind

I mentioned last week the different opening words the 4 gospel writers give to Jesus

Matthew (chapter 3)

When John protests at Jesus' request to be baptised

Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' (3:15)

John had already identified Jesus as 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). In the OT, a sacrificial lamb had to be 'without defect'. So John is clear that Jesus must be without sin. As his baptism was for repentance, John realizes it is inappropriate for Jesus to be baptised. But Jesus insists – why?

Righteousness is what Jesus won for us on the cross – we have none of our own, but Jesus gifts us 'right-standing' with God the Father by his blood, shed for all. So Jesus is saying here that he can only win humanity its righteousness if he does so intentionally as one of us.

Think too of the temptation by the devil immediately afterwards ...

three specific temptations

1. to turn stones into bread
2. to worship Satan in return for lordship over the world
3. to force God to fulfil the promise of Psalm 91:11, 12 by throwing himself from the Temple

The first two are specific temptations for Jesus to use his divine nature independently of his Father's leading & will – Jesus spots the danger and refuses: note that in the first, Jesus quite deliberately responds as an obedient human ('Man shall not live by bread alone') and in all three subjects himself to the authority of God's written word – even though he himself was that Word made flesh (John 1:1, 14)

I believe that scripture is quite clear that Jesus, without ever ceasing to be God, voluntarily laid aside his divinity, and fulfilled his earthly ministry through the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the will of his Father, to whom he submitted himself.

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. Philippians 2:5-11

Again, we have a dual thrust

- Jesus emptied himself of his divinity – 'made himself nothing'
- this is confirmed by the subsequent exaltation of God the Son by God the Father – why the need for exaltation had Jesus not divested himself of his status & power first?

The most significant text

Romans 5:6-21

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam], how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous.

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[Adam] & [Jesus] added to the text for emphasis

Note the constant use of 'the one man' to describe both Adam & Jesus – Paul is underscoring that Jesus won our salvation by submitting himself to the same limitations as Adam, but not falling into disobedience, despite having opportunity to do so

- the temptation (see above)
- the torment in Gethsemane ('yet not my will but yours be done')
- even on the cross

'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. Matthew 27:42

The writer to the Hebrews tells us:

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. Hebrews 4:14-16

The whole argument Paul makes in Romans 5 & 1 Corinthians 15 about Christ as second Adam (and the argument of the writer to the Hebrews above) falls apart if, when push came to shove, Jesus could, as it were, move into some extra gear denied to the rest of humanity. If he could, how could he be a model or example to us? How could he sympathise with our human lot?

I believe the NT teaches that Jesus was able to live the life he lived and work the miracles he did, not by using his divine power (for Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that he had 'emptied himself' of that) but through the anointing and equipping of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Peter to Cornelius

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38)

Some commentators have used the analogy of Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia (1672-1725), who spent several years early in his reign travelling incognito across Europe, dressed and living as a wandering labourer, taking work in factories and shipyards, to gain knowledge about his neighbours and prospective enemies.

At no point did he ever cease to be Tsar of Russia. But no one apart from his closest companions who travelled with him had a clue who he was, and he was not able to act except in the persona he had adopted for the purpose of his mission.

Christ's mission was the Cross, to work our salvation. At no point did he cease to be God. But the Cross would have counted for nothing unless he could embrace it as a human being, without recourse to his divine nature: 'tempted as we are – yet without sinning.' In other words, he had to run Adam's race again, but this time run it perfectly, without falling. Praise be to God that he did just that!

The challenge for us is to consider what we are called to do in his name by the power of the same Holy Spirit at work in us

So let's end almost where we began, in John 14, the passage from which JW's take one verse out of context to bolster their view that Jesus is not God.

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:1-14

I offer my own translation of Philippians 2:5-11 (taken from 'Who?') as a way into reflection and worship of our humble God, the Lord Jesus Christ:

*⁶ He was and is God,
but willingly set aside his majesty for us.*

*⁷⁻⁸ He took off his royal robes
and stepped from heaven into the world he'd created.
Just think! The One who designed the human body,
becoming fully human, one of us, one with us.*

*Imagine the One whose hand spun the stars into place
and whose mind designed the human eye,
opening his baby eyes for the first time
and seeing his own tiny hand.*

*Just think! The Lord of lords becoming a slave,
on a rescue mission he knew would cost him his life.
Willing to do whatever it took to save us,
he humbly accepted a criminal's execution;*

nailed to a Roman cross, his life ended in a slow agony.

⁹ *For such obedience,
God his Father has made Jesus
the ultimate authority in the Universe,
outranking all others.*

¹⁰ *One day everyone will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord*

¹¹ *and give God all the glory he deserves.*