

The man Christ Jesus. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 19 August 2015.

This morning we begin a *new* series of talks. This series, which, God willing, will take us up to the end of the year, will focus on many of the names, titles and descriptions of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament.

The last time I spoke here – more or less a month ago – I spoke about Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor who finally caved in to the demands of the Jewish rulers and who ordered our Lord's crucifixion. Today we start our new series with words spoken by Pilate during our Lord's trial. 'Pilate', we read, said to the Jews, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in Him". Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "*Behold the man!*"¹

And that is my text for this morning: '*Behold the man!*' For my subject is that of *the humanity of our Lord Jesus*. And during His time 'in the world'² (that which the Bible speaks of as 'the days of His flesh'³), although there were those who challenged and denied many of His claims, nobody ever dreamt of denying the reality of His manhood.

On one occasion He said to the Jews, 'Now you seek to kill me, a *man* who has spoken to you the truth which I heard from God'.⁴ Not many minutes later, the Jews, we read, 'picked up stones to throw at Him', on account of His claim, 'before Abraham was, I am';⁵ but, in contrast, no one objected to His description of Himself as 'a man'. And indeed our Lord's true humanity provided the launching pad of the first Christian sermon, preached by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. I quote, 'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a *man* approved of God to you by mighty works, wonders and signs'.⁶

During the time of our Lord's public ministry and the preaching of the apostles, men around demanded evidence that He was *more* than an ordinary man, and they were presented with the compelling proofs of His miraculous works⁷ and of His own resurrection.⁸ But the one thing that nobody cared – or dared – dispute was that Jesus of Nazareth was a man.

And scripture makes it clear that, as is true of all other men, our Lord possessed a human body, soul and spirit.⁹ As far as His body is concerned, we have only to listen to how Elizabeth (the mother to be of John the Baptist) spoke to the virgin Mary concerning, as she said, 'the fruit of your womb'.¹⁰ And then we note how, during the years our Lord grew up in Nazareth, in the language of Doctor Luke, 'Jesus increased', not only 'in wisdom', but in 'stature'.¹¹ And then we read of His hunger and of his eating,¹² of His thirst and of His drinking,¹³ of His weariness¹⁴ and of His sleeping,¹⁵ of His weeping,¹⁶ His suffering¹⁷ and His death.¹⁸

Personally, I like to link together two expressions in Luke's gospel, the one from towards the beginning and the other from towards the end. The first is found in chapter 2, where, concerning Mary, it says that 'she brought forth her firstborn son'.¹⁹ I like to think of that as the Saviour's birth certificate. The second expression comes towards the close of chapter 23, where, concerning the Lord Himself, it says that, after 'calling out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit", Jesus 'expired' – He 'breathed out' His last.²⁰ And I like to think of that as His death certificate. And I cannot help noting that a doctor's signature (that of Luke) appears on both.

O yes, without question, this was no phantom or apparition; our Lord's body was real alright.

But man, of course, is much more than a body.²¹ And we find that our Lord spoke both of His soul and of His spirit. 'Now is *my soul* troubled', were His words in anticipation of His forthcoming suffering and death,²² and, as we noticed just now, His very last words before He died were 'Father, into your hands I commit *my spirit*'.²³

And the gospels bear witness to a vast range of human emotions which our Lord Jesus experienced. For example, emotions of : compassion (both for individuals²⁴ and for multitudes²⁵), of anger and righteous indignation at unbelief and sin in general,²⁶ of burning zeal for the glory of God,²⁷ of thankful and exulting joy,²⁸ and of deep and dreadful sorrow and distress.²⁹

And we can add to all this, His life of prayer,³⁰ and His *trust in*,³¹ *dependence on*³² and *obedience to*³³ God.

Oh yes, beyond question, our Lord Jesus was a true and a real man – fully and perfectly a man. And yet, there was *one* aspect of His manhood which set Him apart from all other men who have ever lived – for, unlike all other men, He never sinned.

And the Bible makes it clear that, though He very much shares *our human nature*, He did not – and He does not – share *our sinful nature*. And I bear in mind the very clear distinction which exists between two expressions used by the apostles. On the one hand, the apostle John assures us that 'Jesus Christ is come *in the flesh*',³⁴ whereas, on the other hand, the apostle Paul assures us that God sent 'His own Son' only '*in the likeness of sinful flesh*'.³⁵ The scripture insists that, when He was here in the world, He was 'tempted in all points as we are, *yet without sin*'.³⁶ And that He 'did no sin', and that 'in Him there is no sin' is the joint testimony of the two apostles who knew Him best.³⁷

So, yes, we can say with absolute confidence that the Lord Jesus was a man; but we can say with equal confidence that He was *not* a sinner.

And because He was personally free from any taint of sin, and yet, as the Bible says, He really ‘partook’³⁸ of ‘flesh and blood’ as we do,³⁹ for this reason He was perfectly fitted to suffer for the sins of other men, and thereby become a Saviour for all who believe. And so, as believers, we can therefore say that *He took our flesh that He might take our sins*.

Early in Old Testament days, the patriarch Job bewailed the fact, and I quote, that ‘God is not a man, as I am ... *there is no mediator between us, who might lay his hand on us both*’.⁴⁰

But, over against Job’s lament that ‘*there is no mediator between us*’ (the ‘us’ speaking of God and of himself as a man), it is music to our ears to read the declaration of the apostle Paul in the New Testament, ‘there is one God, and *there is one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus’.⁴¹ And, as One who (in the words of the apostle John) *was* God,⁴² and yet who *became* flesh,⁴³ He (the Lord Jesus) was (and is⁴⁴) uniquely qualified, in the language of Job, to ‘lay his hand on us both’.⁴⁵ And so, as has often been pointed out, the Son of God became man that men might become the sons of God.

And what a thrill it is for the Christian to know that, because our Lord is truly man, He is supremely qualified to be, not only his or her Saviour, but to be his or her great High Priest.⁴⁶ ‘We do not have a high priest’, insisted one New Testament author, ‘who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who (as we have seen today) has been tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin’.⁴⁷ And so it is that this morning the Lord Jesus retains His ability to identify and to sympathise with us in our trials and temptations – ‘for’, as the same writer made clear, ‘in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour (to help and support) those who are being tempted’.⁴⁸

I began with the words of Pontius Pilate, ‘Behold the man’. And I close with two short quotations which sum up much of what we have thought about this morning. The first is taken, not from the Bible but from an early Christian Creed – the so-called Nicene Creed.⁴⁹ Speaking of our Lord Jesus, it says, ‘Who for us men, and *for our salvation*, came down from heaven... and *was made man*’.

My second quote come straight from the Bible itself. Towards the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote, ‘This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus *came into the world* to save sinners’.⁵⁰

Endnotes

¹ John 19. 4-5.

² 'He was *in the world*, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him', John 1. 10. Compare His words, 'I came from the Father and have *come into the world*, and now I am *leaving the world* and going to the Father', John 16. 28.

³ Heb. 5. 7.

⁴ John 8. 40.

⁵ John 8. 58-59.

⁶ Acts 2. 22.

⁷ John 10. 38; 14. 11.

⁸ Matt. 12. 38-40; John 2. 18-19; Rom. 1. 4.

⁹ 'He became flesh, possessing full and perfect manhood, body, soul and spirit. These three constitute the totality of all that is essential to manhood', W. E. Vine, *The Person and Work of Christ*, Chapter 3: The Incarnation of Our Lord, 'The Word Became Flesh'. This is, of course, the inverse order of Paul's words in 1 Thess. 5. 23.

¹⁰ Luke 1. 42. Yet especially 'prepared' by God, Heb. 10. 5.

¹¹ Luke 2. 52.

¹² Matt. 4. 2; Luke 22. 16. Compare Luke 7. 34.

¹³ Luke 22. 18; John 4. 7; 19. 28-30.

¹⁴ John 4. 6.

¹⁵ Mark 4. 38.

¹⁶ Luke 19. 41; John 11. 35.

¹⁷ Luke 9. 22; 17. 25; 22. 15; 24. 46; Acts 3. 18..

¹⁸ Matt. 27. 50; Rom. 5. 6, 8; 8. 34.

¹⁹ Luke 2. 7.

²⁰ Luke 23. 46.

²¹ 'The soul, as distinguished from the spirit, is the seat of appetites and desires ... The spirit is distinctively the higher part of man. It marks the conscious individuality, and distinguishes man thus from the inferior creation. The spirit is the element in humanity which gives us the ability to have an intimate relationship with God', *The Bible Dictionary*, Morrish, article 'Soul, Spirit'.

²² John 12. 27.

²³ Luke 23. 46.

²⁴ Matt. 20. 34; Mark 1. 41; Luke 7. 13.

²⁵ Matt. 14. 14; 15. 32.

²⁶ Mark 3. 5 ('As a true man, Jesus experienced normal human emotions, among them anger as well as grief at obstinate sin. In His reaction to the sullen refusal of the Pharisees to respond to the truth, the incarnate Christ revealed the character of our holy God', D E Hiebert, *Expositional Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, page 81); Mark 10. 14.

²⁷ John 2. 14-17.

²⁸ Luke 10. 21,

²⁹ Mark 14. 33-34.

³⁰ Matt. 14. 23; Mark 1. 35; 14. 35; Luke 5. 16; 6. 12; 9. 29 etc.

³¹ Heb. 2. 13; cf. Matt. 27. 43; 1 Pet. 2. 23.

³² John 6. 38; 8. 28; 12. 49; 14. 10.

³³ Heb. 5. 8; John 14. 31.

³⁴ 2 John 7.

³⁵ Rom. 8. 3.

³⁶ Heb. 4. 15.

³⁷ 1 Pet. 2. 22; 1 John 3. 5.

³⁸ Μετέσχευ. See the Revised Version and W E Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, article 'Partake, Partaker'.

³⁹ Heb. 2. 14.

⁴⁰ Job 9. 32-33.

⁴¹ 1 Tim. 2. 5.

⁴² John 1. 1.

⁴³ John 1. 14.

⁴⁴ For the Lord Jesus is still a man today. He didn't relinquish His human nature when He ascended back to heaven and the Father any more than He relinquished His nature as God when He came forth from the Father and came into the world. I note that just before being stoned to death some three years after our Lord's ascension, Stephen reported that he saw the heavens opened and '*the Son of man*' standing at the right hand of God, Acts 7. 55.

⁴⁵ 'In becoming—what He was not before—man, He did not cease to be what He ever had been—God', W. E. Vine, *The Person and Work of Christ*, Chapter 3: The Incarnation of Our Lord, 'Reality of His Manhood'.

⁴⁶ 'The writer to the Hebrews stresses that in virtue of his first-hand experience of temptation and the costliness of obedience he is able to extend effective sympathy and help to tempted and distraught Christians (Heb. 2. 18; 4. 14-15; 5. 2, 7ff.)', J. I. Packer, *The IVP New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.), the article 'Incarnation', page 504.

⁴⁷ Heb. 4. 15.

⁴⁸ Heb. 2. 18.

⁴⁹ This is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed version of A.D. 381 – which added the words, 'from heaven' to the original Nicene version of A.D. 325.

⁵⁰ 1 Tim. 1. 15.