

Jesus, One of Us



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 2.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Jesus came in human flesh, was tempted in human flesh, suffered in human flesh, and died in human flesh; yet never once did He sin in that flesh. Now He is our High Priest in heaven.

CONDUCTOR AND COMPOSER LEONARD BERNSTEIN once was asked: “Mister Bernstein, which is the most difficult instrument?” Bernstein replied: “The second violin. I can get many first violinists, but to find one who with the same enthusiasm plays second violin or second French horn or second flute, is a real problem. Yet, if nobody would play second violin, we would not have harmony.” It is not always easy to be second, especially if one deserves to be first. It is even more difficult to step down after having been first; and it's more difficult still to be ridiculed and humiliated after having stepped down from being first. This, however, is exactly what Jesus did, and our lesson this week takes a look at what His condescension means for us.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why the emphasis on Christ's humanity? Why does Scripture present such a cruel picture of Christ's sufferings? What does His humanity have to do with His high-priestly ministry?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.

Sunday

July 13

JESUS' HUMILIATION.

“But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9, RSV).

Hebrews 1 shows the superiority of Jesus over the angels (vss. 5-14). Then, the next chapter, in the context of His earthly ministry, says that Jesus “for a little while was made lower than the angels.” What a contrast!

Read Hebrews 2:5-18. Summarize in a few lines the essence of the verses:

Whatever you wrote, one thing is certain: This section is adamant about the humanity of Jesus, that though He was King and greater than the angels, He took upon Himself “the seed of Abraham” (vs. 16), human flesh, and He not only tasted death for every man (vs. 9), but He also became a “merciful and faithful high priest” in our behalf (vs. 17).

Notice, too, that Hebrews 1 refers to Jesus’ exaltation, while Hebrews 2 focuses on His humiliation. Chronologically, at least in the context of His work of Redemption in our behalf, the humiliation came first and then the exaltation. Perhaps the author of Hebrews wanted to depict Jesus in His majestic role so the readers would immediately notice in whom they believe and would be reconfirmed in their faith.

The role of Jesus as the Creator points to His preexistence (that is, before He stepped into humanity); the role of Jesus as King points to His ascension (that is, after His earthly ministry). Although His incarnation, including the substitutionary death, are of extreme importance, they must be seen against the background of Jesus’ eternal existence as God. Only then can the depth of His humiliation be truly appreciated.

Jesus, the Creator, God Himself, the King of the universe, had taken upon Himself a humanity in which He suffered more than any of us ever could. Dwell upon what this means. Pray over it. Ask the Lord to help you grasp the hope, the promise, and the good news in this amazing truth.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 2:9.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the importance of Christ's humanity.
2. To explain the significance of Christ's sufferings, both in His life and on the cross.
3. To define how His humanity and divinity work together.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christ Before His Humanity.

- A. Christ existed before the world was created.
- B. Christ held the heavenly office as the Right Hand of God.
- C. Christ was exalted above all the host of heaven.

II. Christ Embraces Humanity.

- A. Christ chooses to take human nature.
- B. He becomes a true Representative of humanity.
- C. Only by assuming human nature and dying for us could He, the perfect Sacrifice, lead us to salvation.

III. Christ's Suffering and Death.

- A. Christ suffered at the hand of humanity.
- B. Christ accepted upon Himself God's wrath for humanity's sins.
- C. Christ accepted our punishment, so we might receive the gift of salvation.

Summary: Christ was both fully human and fully divine. To redeem us, He chose to come in human flesh, endure the weakness of human flesh, face temptation in the flesh, and overcome sin. Only then could He serve as the High Priest of humanity in the presence of God.

Commentary.

In Hebrews, chapter 1, we learned that Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets and to the angels. In chapter 2 we learned that He became the Originator and Deliverer of salvation, not for the angels but for His elect brothers and sisters in the human race.

The Jewish audience to whom this epistle is addressed is made to understand why God had to become a Man in order to make reconciliation and offer propitiation for our sins. Jesus became a Man in order to save humanity.

Monday

July 14

JESUS, THE HUMAN PAR EXCELLENCE.

“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps. 8:5).

Compare Hebrews 2:6-8 and Psalm 8:5-7. How does the author of Hebrews use that psalm? What application does he give it? What point does he make by interpreting it as he does?

The use of Psalm 8 is . . . interesting, for this passage was never considered to be Messianic. The original context is man, yet not in his ordinary state but in his ideal state. . . . At creation man was given dominion over the earth, but ever since the fall that authority to subject has been lacking. The psalm is only perfectly fulfilled, therefore, in the ideal Man, Jesus Christ, who alone has that authority. The writer sees a fulfillment of this psalm in a way that the Jews never foresaw. The same psalm is cited by Jesus (Mt. 21:16) and Paul (1 Cor. 15:27), both in a way which points to its fulfillment in Jesus himself.”—Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 84, 85.

Jesus is the true Representative of humanity, and in Him the psalm found true fulfillment. As humanity’s Representative, He must share in the same conditions as humanity. To truly represent us, He had to be One of us. That makes sense. Only then could He blaze the trail of salvation for us and be an effective High Priest in the presence of God in behalf of humanity.

Though the basic meaning of Psalm 8 was to deal with humanity in general, Hebrews applies it in particular to Jesus, who was the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), the new Representative of the race depicted in Psalm 8. By applying the psalm in this manner, the author helps establish clearly not only the humanity of Jesus but the efficacy of His role in redeeming us from sin.

What we see in Hebrews 1 and 2 is the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. However difficult it is to understand this from a purely naturalistic perspective, what does the humanity and divinity of Christ tell us about the link between heaven and earth? How does this reality (the humanity-deity) of Christ help us trust in the salvation we have been offered?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

He took all our problems on Himself, becoming one with us, in order that He could deliver us. He descended and condescended, humiliating Himself in service to win the world.

How can these things happen? How can God become Man? In order to understand better this issue, we should study two main concepts: Jesus' status and Jesus' human nature in relationship to us.

I. Jesus' Status: From the Highest to the Lowest.

When the Son, the Creator and Lord of angels, humbled Himself, He passed by angelic estate and stooped lower still, becoming Man for men's salvation. Angels are not God's crowning achievement in creation. Adam was, and thus the race is. Angels were not given sovereign control over all else He created; humanity was, at least in the context of the earth.

When Adam fell, he became a victim of the world system that was to have been his. But no angel is destined to rule the world system. On the contrary, the angels, in addition to being God's subordinate workers in the administration of universal affairs (Heb. 1:7), are also assigned to be servants to the saints (Heb. 1:14).

It would hardly serve the divine purpose, therefore, for the *Logos* to become incarnate as an angel. He became a Man, because He had to become in eternity past for humanity He never had for angels. He became a Man in order to save humanity, not an angel.

No one, however, can become a man without thereby becoming a member of some specific human group or family. So, when the Son of God took our nature upon Himself, He became "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). In doing that, however, He became the Helper and Liberator of all the children of Abraham, and here, quite certainly, we are not to confine the scope of "the seed of Abraham" to his natural descendants; we are, rather, to understand the whole family of faith. Jesus became of the Seed of Abraham, and this was the only way Jesus partook of the human nature in order to save the whole humanity.

II. Jesus' Human Nature and Priestly Role.

Having thus emphasized Jesus' solidarity with humanity, the author of the book of Hebrews now introduces the special aspect of His solidarity with them. The author especially is concerned about explaining Jesus' human nature and His high-priestly ministry in behalf of the humanity to which Christ so closely associates Himself now.

In order to serve them in this capacity (His people's High Priest), Jesus was obliged to become like His brethren, without sin, of course, as is pointed out in Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (NKJV). Jesus, who became Man; who was made "a little lower than the angels"; Jesus, who endured death; was raised to the place of highest exaltation and honor.

Tuesday

July 15

JESUS' SUFFERING.

Hebrews 2 contains strong language in regard to Christ's suffering. The author talks about "the suffering of death" and states that Jesus by the grace of God might taste death for everyone (vs. 9). Death and suffering are again mentioned in Hebrews 2:14, 18; 5:8; 9:26; 12:2; and 13:12.

It is, in many ways, a cruel picture: the innocent Son of God suffering for the sins of the world. Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God for sins He never committed, tasting death for every man, woman, and child, even those who, in the end through disobedience and rebellion, have to taste it themselves anyway.

Sure, it's cruel, but that's what it was meant to be, to help show us not only the cost of sin but what it cost to redeem us from that sin.

What are the results of Christ's suffering?

Heb. 2:9-11 _____

Heb. 2:14-16 _____

Heb. 2:17, 18 _____

However great that suffering, look at what it wrought for us. Though much about Christ's suffering and death eludes our experiences and is beyond our comprehension, we can only marvel at the results of that death, which include (1) the exaltation of Jesus, (2) the defeat of Satan, (3) the surety of salvation for us, (4) the closeness of Jesus to humanity, (5) His efficacy as our High Priest, and (6) His aid for us now when we ourselves face temptation. What else do we need?

Look at verse 14. It says that Jesus came so that by His death He might destroy the one who has the power over death. How do you understand this verse, given that we still die?

Some psychologists believe that the fear of death is the dominating force in our lives and that much of what we do, consciously or unconsciously, stems from this fear. Look at verse 15. According to this text, what has Jesus done that should give us the answer and the solution to this fear?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Moreover, it is exactly because of His humiliation, suffering, and death He has been invested with heavenly glory. This interpretation is in agreement with Paul's statement that "therefore God also has highly exalted Him" (Phil. 2:9, NKJV). Jesus suffered with humanity and for humanity and through His sufferings was made perfect, qualified in every way to be our High Priest. He is merciful, because through His own sufferings and trials He can sympathize with ours; He is faithful, because He endured to the end without sin.

Most crucial among these matters is the matter of sin. How can sinners approach the throne of God, either personally or through a representative? They can come to Him with confidence, only if their sin has been dealt with. And this, above all else, makes Jesus so

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:4, 5; Matthew 4:1-11; John 17:5; Philippians 2:7.

1. Why were Jesus' abasement, suffering, and ultimate death necessary and sufficient to redeem us from our own sin and ultimate death? How is it possible for one being to bear guilt for another? What part (if any) does Jesus' divinity play in this? What does this tell us about God in that He was willing to do this for us?
2. In what sense is humankind "lower than the angels"? Does this apply to the human race before the Fall as well as after? If it applies to humankind only after the Fall, what

does it say about the nature of Jesus' humanity?

3. What does the fact that God—in the form of Jesus—became human tell us about the relationship between God and humanity? Might it have anything to do with humanity being created in God's image? How does your understanding of the humanity of Christ help you relate to Jesus? If He weren't human, what difference would that make for us in how we relate to Jesus?
4. Hebrews mentions Christ being tempted, in a sense tested. Was it a foregone conclusion that Jesus would pass this test? Did the possibility of failure exist? Why, or Why not?

Wednesday

July 16

JESUS, OUR BROTHER.

Read again all of Hebrews 2, focusing particularly on verse 11. In the context of the whole chapter, what does the word *brother* indicate? What point was the author trying to make?

It is amazing that Jesus indirectly calls Himself our Brother. As the Creator and the King of the universe, He is, nevertheless, still willing to be the Brother of His creatures; that is, His fallen, sinful, and, oftentimes, pernicious creatures. Amazing!

The term *brother* in this context points to an intimate closeness and relationship. Jesus and His followers are one family. Because of what He went through and suffered, Jesus is one of us, and He will stay one of us in spite of His royal dignity. Verse 14 emphasizes that He became a partaker of our flesh and blood, of our nature and of our experience. There's no question: By having become one of us, He can relate to us and we to Him, in a manner differently than were He to have never lived as a human being. What better way could there have been for God to become close to us other than by what Jesus did?

Closeness may contain certain dangers. We can, for instance, turn Jesus into nothing but our buddy. Though there is the friendship element (John 15:15) in our relationship with Christ, it isn't the only term used to depict that relationship. What other images and terms does the Bible use to define that relationship? Matt. 22:36; John 10:11; 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:1.

When it comes to the Bible and to God Himself, we often talk in paradoxes or contrasting pairs. There are three divine Personalities and yet one Godhead. God is far away, unreachable yet present and close to us. Though not limited to time, He reveals Himself in time. We are already saved, and we still will be saved.

It is not either/or but one and the other. We must keep these different truths together, balanced with each other the best we can. Let us neither exclusively view Jesus as the distant Ruler of the universe nor treat Him just as a pal. Let us approach Him as our Brother in all due respect and love, because, no matter our intimacy, He's still the Creator, and we are still the creature—and a great distance exists between the two.

Caroline grew up abused by her brothers. Thus, the image of Christ as her "Brother" hardly evokes a positive response. How do you present Christ to someone like her?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

incomparable a High Priest and Representative of His people; not only is He sinless Himself and, thus, entitled to enter the presence of God on His own account, but He deals effectively with His people's sins and can, therefore, enter into the presence of God on their account too.

Jesus, our High Priest, not merely removes His people's sins but also removes the barrier they erected between themselves and God.

WITNESSING

Imagine a young man bowing before the throne of God, his face to the ground. He trembles in the presence of holiness. The whole universe watches in utter silence. Suddenly, a shadow hovers over him. He timidly lifts his head and looks into the loving face of Jesus. A strong hand reaches down and lifts him up (he has no strength of his own). Standing in front of the young man, the Savior turns to the Father and says, "He is with Me."

It is easy to identify with someone with whom you have something in common. Jesus can identify with us. He assumed human nature and was tempted "in all points" as we are, "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He experienced what we experience, and He overcame. So, we can be sure the One who stands before the throne of

God to speak in our behalf is a "faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5), and He has the power to save us.

One innocent Man stood against a mob of hate-filled people. They spat upon Him and cursed at Him. They accused Him falsely. He had done no wrong, yet He was scorned, beaten, and finally killed by the hands of those He had come to save. The same cruelty and hatred have caused the death of millions of innocent people since the beginning of earth's history. Jesus experienced what we experience, and He overcame. And because He now lives, we, too, can live, eternally.

As we witness, let us speak of how Jesus became one of us, so we could be one with Him. And now when the heavenly Father looks at us, He does not see us; He sees Jesus.

Thursday

July 17

JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

Hebrews 2 culminates in the high-priestly office of Jesus, our Brother. It lists qualifications for that office. It describes Jesus in this function and briefly points to the ministry He performs. And one of the qualifications of Jesus was that He had to face temptation to sin, just as humans have, as well.

That Jesus was tempted is mentioned only two times in Hebrews (2:18 and 4:15). Look up the texts. How do they complement each other? What does the second one say that helps us understand what the first one says? Also, how can we understand the statement that Jesus “has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin”? (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

British author Oscar Wilde once said that the only way to deal with sin is to succumb to it. In contrast, it has been said that the one who falls never knows the full force of temptation, because he or she fails before the test ends. If true, then Jesus is the only One who has known the extremity of temptation, because He alone remained “without sin.” He never gave in to it; therefore, He felt its tug worse than any of us have.

Even more so, He faced all that we face and so much more. When was the last time any of us were tempted to turn stones into bread or to command a legion of angels to bear us? And, considering the issues at stake in the great controversy, Satan must have been much more interested in causing Jesus to commit a sin than he is interested in getting us to. And yet, in the midst of all this temptation, Jesus never fell, never sinned, and this experience was one of the things that qualified Him to be our High Priest.

Read Hebrews 2:16-18. As we saw earlier in the week, Christ’s humanity is likened to His high-priestly ministry. Look at the two words in verse 17 that describe the kind of High Priest He is. What did His humanity have to do with these two characteristics becoming descriptive of His ministry?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: In Laurie Beth Jones’s prologue to her book, *Jesus in Blue Jeans*, we read: “Many years ago I dreamed that I was standing in a meadow. Suddenly I saw a man approaching me. As he got nearer I gasped to realize that it was Jesus in Blue Jeans. When he saw the expression on my face he said, ‘Why are you surprised? I came to them wearing robes because they wore robes. I come to you in blue jeans because you wear blue jeans.’”

“I fell in love with him at that moment. There is something so familiar—and so powerful—about a man in jeans.”—*Jesus in Blue Jeans* (New York: Hyperion, 1997).

Thought Question:

In every facet of His life, Jesus sought to find common ground with humanity. He could have come to earth as a glimmering giant with a superwide halo to impress the world with His greatness. But He didn’t. Think about His life—where He lived, how He lived, what He spoke. List the ways in which He was “one of us.” Why do you think it is important to have common ground

with God, the Supreme Being?

Application Questions:

1. Finding and having common ground between one another removes barriers. The more you have in common with your neighbors, the more likely you are to associate with them. Consider someone who is your “enemy.” Now, find at least ten things you have in common with him or her. How does this help you to be more forgiving? To be more like Jesus? If Jesus, the Son of God—in an effort to be our “Brother”—could find things in common with us, how must we reflect this “unity”?
2. In retrospect, Jesus’ life and mission on earth were a success. Before He equipped His followers to continue His work, He revealed to them His divinity. How does our work convey the humanity and divinity of Jesus? Why is it important for people to understand the human side of Jesus? What difference does the dual function of Jesus (as Man and God) make to our spiritual growth?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the chapter on “Gethsemane” in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 685–697. It highlights Jesus’ temptation and suffering.

In Christ were united the divine and the human—the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus—the Son of God, and the Son of man. And having with His own blood paid the price of redemption, having passed through man’s experience, having in man’s behalf met and conquered temptation, having, though Himself sinless, borne the shame and guilt and burden of sin, He becomes man’s Advocate and Intercessor. What an assurance here to the tempted and struggling soul, what an assurance to the witnessing universe, that Christ will be ‘a merciful and faithful high priest’ (MS 141, 1901)!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 926.

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’ (Ex. 3:5). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.” —Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Dwell on the thought that Jesus Christ as a human being—that is, in human flesh—never sinned. Imagine a whole life in which He never, even once, succumbed to temptation. What does this truth do to all our excuses for sin?**
- 2. How do you understand Ellen White’s statement that the humanity of Christ is the “golden chain” that binds our souls to Christ? What does that mean?**

SUMMARY: Hebrews 2 portrays Jesus in His humanity and describes His accomplishments. He tasted death for us, became the pioneer of our salvation, conquered Satan and death, freed us from existential fear, makes atonement for our sins, and aids us when tempted. A heavy emphasis is on our salvation and the closeness of Jesus with us. We can be confident, because He is our Brother.