

The Fully Human Savior

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS IS FULLY HUMAN?

There are aspects of Jesus' humanity that we struggle to understand.

What must it have been like for God the Son who is eternal and spirit to fall asleep?

Did Jesus' voice crack when he hit puberty?

There are certain aspects of Jesus' humanity that we don't understand, and there are other ways in which Jesus' humanity makes us uncomfortable.

There are people who will say that Jesus never cried as a baby or spit up when he ate.

Some people get very uncomfortable when we talk about Jesus' humanity. Of course, we aren't the first people in history to think that way.

Docetism sprang up quickly in church history.

Docetism is the perspective that Jesus only appeared to be human.

People with a docetic perspective think that the material world is a shadow and evil not because of sin but by its very nature. They think of the material world as being inherently enemy territory for anything spiritual or divine.

Hence, they think of Jesus as a messenger from heaven who appeared to be human but who wasn't really human. He could never be fully human.

While Docetism was rejected quickly in Church history, it has never gone away completely.

We still wonder if the eternal Son of God could really take on human flesh.

However, Jesus being born is described in surprisingly human ways.

Jesus' mother, Mary, became pregnant.

Mary and Joseph travelled and searched for a place to stay and bedded down in a stable.

Mary went into labor and gave birth to Jesus.

Mary wrapped Jesus in baby clothes to keep him warm, safe, and clean.

Jesus grew up, and his body changed. As an older child, Jesus even did things that asserted his independence and purpose, which his parents found frustrating and confusing.

Adult Jesus ate, made friends, cried, bled, and died.

When we're talking about Jesus' becoming fully human, we're talking about Jesus' Incarnation.

The Incarnation is the doctrine that the Word of God, the eternal Son of God, became human. He didn't stop being God; he just also became human. Forever.

What does the Incarnation mean to us? That's what we really want to know.

Jesus becoming fully human changes our status in life, our eternity, and how we live right now. Let's dig in to see how.

THE SON OF GOD BECAME FULLY HUMAN

In Hebrews 2:14 we start with the fact that Jesus took on human flesh:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil ...

Hebrews 2:14 mentions children. These are sons and daughters of God by adoption.

Later they will be called sons and daughters of Abraham; we'll get to how that happens.

These children of God are flesh and blood human beings. We human beings are unique in that we are made in the image of God so that we might have more direct fellowship with him.

Hebrews 2:14 says that Jesus became one of us to save us.

If we put Hebrews 2:14 and 15 together, we find Jesus waged war in human flesh:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 2:14-15 assumes what we already know: In life, we fallen human beings are in the clutches of sin, death, evil, and the Devil. During life, the Devil tempts us and causes all manner of suffering. Unless something changes, we will spend eternity suffering at the hands of the Devil.

Life on earth can be described as slavery. Since sin entered the world, we have been slaves to sin. We sin; we must sin; we don't really have a choice.

Jesus came to do battle with sin, death, evil, and the Devil. He intends to destroy them all and to break the slave-like hold those things have on us.

Hebrews 2:16 points out that Jesus took on human flesh to help us:

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

Jesus became human to help humans.

Jesus could not become an angel and still help humans.

If Jesus became an angel, he would help angels, not humans.

In a similar fashion if Jesus became a cat, he would help cats, not humans.

All of creation benefits from God's saving work in Jesus, but humans are his special focus, so Jesus became human.

By becoming human, he helps those who will become "offspring of Abraham."

Abraham is the great patriarch whose biological descendants became the nation of Israel.

The "offspring of Abraham" are also those who put their faith in Jesus and get adopted into God's family. Paul describes this in **Galatians 3:29**:

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Jesus became human to help the natural born and adopted offspring of Abraham.

Hebrews 2:17 adds that Jesus took on human flesh to become like us for a reason:

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Jesus became human so that he might die in our place to pay the price for our sin.

We will say much more about this shortly.

Hebrews 2:18 concludes that in flesh Jesus had the entire human experience:

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Human beings were tempted. Human beings gave in to temptation and fell. Human beings continue to be tempted and to give in to that temptation.

Jesus became human. He had a full human experience. He experienced all the temptations we face. However, he did not give in to those temptations.

Since Jesus became human and faced temptation, he is uniquely able to help us. Let's dig deeper into why and how.

BECOMING FULLY HUMAN WAS NECESSARY

That's what Anselm of Canterbury argued.

Anselm lived in the 11th Century. His father intended for Anselm to go into politics.

However, Anselm felt pulled toward a monastic life of study.

As a monk, Anselm began studying, teaching, and writing.

Eventually, Anselm's theological mind and pastoral heart led the people of England to call him to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. During those years, Anselm wrote his most significant theological work, *Cur Deus Homo* sometimes called *Why Did God Become Man?* The title contains the question Anselm sought to answer.

In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm argued that satisfaction was required.

Anselm began with the idea that God is like the Great King of creation. We owe him honor through obedience and by resisting temptation. However, we have not given that honor to God. In doing so, we robbed God.

Anselm wrote: He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. Moreover, so long as he does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away. – Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.11

We took something from God, and we owe that back to God. Beyond that, we owe him compensation for the crime we committed against him. In theology, that's called "satisfaction."

Satisfaction had to be made by a man.

Humanity owed obedience to God. Instead, we disobeyed God and brought upon ourselves the penalty, death. We did it. Therefore, we had to be the ones to make satisfaction.

Anselm explained: For, as death came upon the human race by the disobedience of man, it was fitting that by man's obedience life should be restored.- Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.3

Satisfaction could only be made by a God-man. Why?

When we dishonored God, we took something of infinite value away from him. We must restore that thing of infinite value, but we fallen humans are not capable.

In addition, Anselm believed we owed satisfaction (compensation) to God. Since God is God, our gift would have to be worth more than all of creation. Again, we couldn't do that.

Anselm concluded that only the God-man could do that:

If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God-man to make it. - Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 2.6

Satisfaction, then, was made by Jesus.

Jesus obeyed God and stood against temptation. He fulfilled humanity's obligation.

Then Jesus willingly died on behalf of humanity, an infinitely valuable gift to God.

Anselm described it this way:

Now, nothing can be more severe or difficult for man to do for God's honor, than to suffer death voluntarily when not bound by obligation; and man cannot give himself to God in any way more truly than by surrendering himself to death for God's honor. - Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 2.11

Therefore, Jesus gained forgiveness as a reward for those who would believe in him.

Anselm really proved fundamentally that Jesus—the Son of God—had to become human.

BECOMING FULLY HUMAN MADE JESUS ABLE TO SAVE US

Anselm's thoughts on "satisfaction" matured into the Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement.

Anselm didn't get everything right. However, the theologians of the Reformation continued to develop Anselm's line of reasoning into the substitutionary view of the atonement.

The substitutionary view of the atonement is the idea that when we sinned, we broke God's Law. Breaking God's Law comes with a penalty, death. When we sin, someone dies.

It's still true that humans sinned and that, therefore, a human had to pay the penalty.

It's also still true that the penalty is infinite. We've sinned against an infinite God. We've sinned lots of times. And many, many people have sinned. The penalty is infinite, so only God could pay it.

We still come to Jesus. Jesus died in our place. He took the full weight of our sin on himself and died to pay our penalty. Jesus is fully God, so he is sufficient to pay the price. Jesus is fully human, so he can pay the price.

Anselm's thoughts on "satisfaction" got very close to the substitutionary view of atonement.

Some find the substitutionary theory of the atonement offensive.

The substitutionary theory of atonement involves wrath, penalties, and death.

They are offended by the idea that sin leads to God's wrath, penalties, and death.

They protest that God is infinitely loving and that none of that sounds loving or modern.

In fact, there are other helpful ways to look at the atonement.

Some people hold to the **Moral-Influence Theory of the Atonement**. They argue that Jesus died and that his death demonstrated God's love to humanity. We see Jesus' heroic, loving act and are moved to love God, love one another, and follow Jesus in response. There is value in the moral influence theory of the atonement; Jesus' death is inspiring, and contemplating Jesus' death does lead us to live changed lives. However, it's not enough. The moral influence theory of the atonement alone doesn't describe what Jesus did.

Some people hold to the **Christ-the-Victor Theory of the Atonement**. They argue that Jesus defeated the Devil to gain our salvation. There is value in realizing that Jesus defeats sin, death, evil, and the Devil. However, it's also not enough. The Christ the Victor theory of the atonement doesn't fully describe what Jesus did.

When you put all three theories of the atonement together, we get a robust picture of what happened when Jesus died and why the Son of God took on human flesh.

However, the Bible primarily and consistently points to the substitutionary theory of the atonement.

We make sense of sin. The penalty for sin is death. The Bible makes that clear from the very beginning to the very end.

We also make sense of the whole system of sacrifices. We can offer animals and other living things in our place to pay the price for our sin. In the Bible, they die in our place.

We even make sense of priests. Priests stand in the place of other human beings to offer sacrifices on their behalf.

The whole system gets mirrored in Jesus. Jesus is the perfect priest offering the perfect sacrifice to pay the price for our sin.

The biblical term is propitiation.

Paul describes it this way in **Romans 3:23-25**:

[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. ...

It all starts with the Incarnation and Jesus' becoming fully human.

Becoming fully human was necessary!

Becoming fully human made Jesus able to save us.

BECOMING FULLY HUMAN MEANS THAT JESUS UNDERSTANDS US AND IS WITH US

Hebrews 4:15 points out that being fully human made Jesus our perfect priest:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus had our fully human experience.

Jesus did all the stuff we do.

Jesus did all the stuff we hate about being human. He hurt. He was betrayed. He lost things and people. He died.

Jesus did the stuff we could never do! He stood firm against temptation and obeyed God.

Jesus had a full human experience.

Jesus is still fully human.

The doctrine of the Incarnation states that the eternal Son of God without ceasing to be what he was before took on human nature. Now he is one person—fully God and fully human—forever. That means Jesus never shed his human nature.

When he was resurrected from the dead, he still had a human body. It was glorified and somewhat different from what it had been before, but it was still a human body, a human nature.

When we see Jesus in the Revelation, he still has a fully human nature. When he appears to John who wrote the book, Jesus still has a human nature. When he stands after the end of time, Jesus still has a human nature.

In eternity Jesus will still be fully God and fully human.

That means Jesus understands us.

He has faced everything we face.

He has faced every temptation we face.

We don't come up against situations in life that are beyond Jesus' ability to understand.

Jesus is with us.

Jesus loves us still.

Jesus has never abandoned us.

Jesus is present even though we don't see him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are never alone.

That's what Jesus' incarnation means to us.