



Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times

Week 8

What do we proclaim about Jesus?

Much of the material for this class, even its general structure, is taken from the work of N.T. Wright, currently the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. Dr. Wright is one of the foremost New Testament scholars and probably the most respected first century biblical historian working today. He is currently working on the fourth volume of a projected six volume work titled, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. This is a monumental work and an extraordinary gift to the church.



The UMC Proclamation about Jesus

We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man,
in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and
inseparably united.

He is the eternal Word made flesh,
the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin
Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As ministering Servant he lived, suffered and died on the
cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and
ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from
whence he shall return.

He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us,
and by him all men will be judged.

From the UMC *Book of Discipline*, 2000



Jesus Brings a New Understanding of God



- One God in three persons
- God has always known himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
- God is inherently relational!! God is a community of three!!



The Hypostatic Union (what??!!)

- ❖ The classic understanding, reflected in our own Confession of Faith, was hammered out in a council that met at Chalcedon in 451AD.
 - The Council didn't invent anything – they simply brought together the core teachings and practices of the early church. Their language expressed, in precise terms, those teachings and practices.
- ❖ *Hypostasis* means entity; *union* refers to the union of two natures.
 - We believe in the perfect union of two distinct but never separate natures – one human and one divine – in one integral, eternal divine person.
 - One person – two natures
 - We can think of the trinity as one what and three whos; Jesus is two whats and one who
- ❖ The early church concluded that this must be so, even if we can't penetrate the mystery.



The Denial of Jesus' Truly Human Nature

- ❖ *Docetism* (from the Greek word for *appear*)
 - Jesus only appeared to be human
 - Perhaps there is a heavenly, spiritual redeemer, the "Christ," took who over a human body, "Jesus"
 - "God in a bod" or God with a human skin are both *not* the way to think about Jesus. He was more human than you and I.
- ❖ We can be drawn to this if we see the material world as inherently evil and something to be escaped from.
 - Gnosticism
 - We end up thinking Jesus didn't really suffer, nor was he really tempted, that he was omniscient and omnipotent throughout his life
- ❖ This heresy weakens our the message of the incarnation – that God became human so that our humanity might be healed and restored.



The Denial of Jesus' Truly Divine Nature

- ❖ *Arianism* and *adoptionism*
 - Jesus was only a very special human – one "adopted" by God as his special son and prophet.
 - Jesus was a human being perfectly fulfilling the image of God and God's ideal for humanity.
 - Jesus is unique in his relationship with God, but is NOT equal with God's eternal being.
- ❖ Something like this underlies the Unitarian church and much 19th and 20th century liberal Protestantism. Also Jehovah's witnesses.
- ❖ This heresy weakens the Christian understanding of redemption. Leads to redemption being redefined as pulling us up by our bootstraps or following Jesus' good example. *We lose the God-who-suffers!!!*



The Denial of Jesus' Unity in Two Natures

- ❖ Here, the mystery is solved by seeing Jesus as having only one nature, a hybrid of sorts – the unique “God-man.”
- ❖ Another way was to suggest that Jesus had a truly human body, but lacked a human rational mind or soul, instead being filled with the divine Logos/Word . . . “God in a bod.”
- ❖ Or perhaps Jesus was a perfect “moral union,” much like persons in a perfect marriage. One doing the “God stuff” and one doing the “human stuff.” The denies the inseparability of the two natures.
- ❖ Or another choice . . . “Jesus’ humanity was like a drop of wine in an ocean of his divinity” . . . Jesus’ humanity was swallowed up in his divinity.



Diversity within Our Confession

- ❖ The great Christian confessions, including the UMC, uphold two inseparable natures, divine & human, in one person, Jesus – two “whats” and one “who”
 - Don’t deny the full and true divinity and humanity of Jesus
 - Don’t divide him into two persons
 - Don’t make him into some hybrid “God-man”
- ❖ Beyond that . . . There is plenty of room for diversity and exploration! For example, what was Jesus’ self-awareness?
 - Knosis – “emptying (Philippians 2:5-11) – the divine Son did not set aside his divine attributes but suppressed or restricted them during his time on earth.
 - Others strive for a way to see Jesus as having two minds during his time on earth.



Jesus' Work

"He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all men will be judged." (from the UMC *Discipline*)

- ❖ Look at the verbs -- Jesus saves, mediates, intercedes, and judges!
 - "intercede" means to intervene between parties with a view to reconciling differences; "mediate" is a synonym
 - Jesus' judgment has to be viewed in this context
- ❖ How does Jesus save? The meaning of the cross
 - We need to keep in our mind and heart several images – none are complete
 - Jesus won a victory over evil.
 - Jesus bore our punishment.
 - Jesus displays God's love, drawing us to God.
 - Through his faithfulness to his vocation and God's covenant, Jesus was Israel's representative Messiah, doing for Israel, what Israel (and we!!) are unable to do for ourselves.



Some Parting Thoughts

- ❖ Jesus – the sinless friend of sinners
 - His *invitation, welcome, challenge, and summons*
- ❖ Jesus – Lord of all creation!
 - No part of our lives and no part of the world is excluded. We can have no other master – "no king but God"
- ❖ Jesus – the "image of the invisible God."
 - Want to know what God is like – look to Jesus. This ought to inform all our reading of the Bible and our thoughts of God's nature.
- ❖ Jesus – the face of true humanity
 - What ought we to be like? How did God intend humans to live? Jesus is the portrait of true humanity. Jesus is the most human, human. His humanity is not distorted by sin.



Some Parting Thoughts II

❖ Jesus – Love

- "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)
- Love as action, not just sentiment.

❖ Jesus – the wounded healer; God-who-suffers

- This is uniquely Christian.
- For all those who struggle with questions about God and suffering can find comfort here.

❖ Jesus – new life and new world

- Jesus points us toward the hope in our own eternal destiny – bodily resurrection and everlasting fellowship with God and one another. When we can look back on the whole of human history, Jesus' resurrection will not have been unique.
- Jesus points us toward the renewal and restoration of all creation.