

Why Did God Become One of Us?

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[0:00] Amen.

Amen. So I thought about preaching on marriage this morning, but then I remembered that our deacon did that recently and very well.

And actually, he and I just a minute ago were kind of whispering back and forth about our mutual undying love for Hebrews.

So I couldn't pass up the option to preach on that. Now, I might be about to show my age here in this crowd, and I might also be about to get a bunch of blank stares.

But does anyone remember that pop song from the 90s that asked, What If God Was One Of Us? Yes? Okay, a few people said yes. Now, along with that question, the song asked questions like, If God had a name, what would it be?

[1:46] If God had a face, what would it look like? Well, I hope I'm up here to answer some of those questions this morning. My answer is this.

God was and is one of us. That God who became one of us has a face, and He has a name, and that name is Jesus, the name above all names.

Our question this morning isn't, What If God Was One Of Us? Now, that question has already been answered by the life, death, and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

Our questions are, Why did God become one of us? Why? And why does it matter? Now, it's a hard thing to wrap our minds around.

I can understand why a pop song would struggle with it, because we all struggle with it. We're inclined to think of God somehow as way up there, right? This distant and remote figure.

[2:44] But that is not the Christian view, is it? Because the doctrine of the incarnation, that God became man, stands at the very center of our faith, and it is our hope.

And it means that God is not merely some impersonal force somewhere out there. No, it means that we can say, as St. Augustine once put it, God is more intimate to me than I am to myself.

So let's think about that this morning. Please open your Bibles with me to Hebrews chapter 2. Now, we read the whole chapter this morning. I'm not going to preach on the whole chapter.

I want us to focus on the final section of the chapter. We consider, why does it matter that Jesus is both God and man? Why does it matter that God became man?

Now, the first point I want us to consider is this. Jesus had to be a human being in order to be our great high priest. We read in verse 17, 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.

[4:06] So he had to be made like his brothers, that is us, in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest and make propitiation for our sins.

Well, that clears it up, doesn't it? Well, let's unpack that, and let's do a little bit of a history lesson in order to do it. Anyone familiar with the Council of Nicaea?

Ever heard of that before? Fourth century Council of the Church, you might remember it from such things as the Nicene Creed. You might also remember it from conspiracy theories in second-rate novels that would suggest that at that council, the bishops conspired to throw books they didn't like out of the Bible, and made up a whole bunch of stuff and decided that from that point on, the church would hate things like sunshine and puppies.

That's not what happened, by the way. It's not what the church fathers at Nicaea, some of whom bore the marks of having been tortured for their faith in Christ, were after.

They were out to contend for the truth that Jesus is not only fully man, He's also fully God. This important truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man was expressed in these terms.

[5:26] What has not been assumed has not been redeemed. Now, what does that mean? It means, in other words, that to save me, Jesus, who is God the Son, had to take on everything about me except for sin.

Or I'm not saved. He had to take on our full humanity, a human body, to become fully human, or else we would not be saved. To live a human life, to die a human death, or else we are still stuck without hope in our sins.

I mean, if we're looking at the Old Testament high priest, that Jesus is the fulfillment of, what did they do? Awkward sacrifices on behalf of the people for their sins as their representative, right? In other words, you know, they were the substitute or the representatives of the people. Now, to be my representative, Jesus had to become a human being like me, right?

But He couldn't offer a human life like mine tainted by sin. He had to offer a perfect life and then die the death that I deserve. But He did just that.

[6:45] And the result is that I am saved. And it's not because I deserved it. Not even because of my feeble attempts to imitate Jesus. It's because on the cross, He took my sin, paid my debt, gave me His perfectly righteous life, so when God the Father looks at me, He sees my debt is paid and that the perfect, sinless life of Jesus has been given to me as a free gift through faith in Him.

He lived the perfect life I could not live and He died the death that I deserve and He did it in my place as my substitute and as my representative. And this is true not only of me but of everyone who has received this great gift, forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ.

It means this, my brothers and sisters, we are forgiven and the guilt of our sins is gone forever because we have a great High Priest named Jesus. As our text tells us, Jesus is our propitiation. What does that mean? That is a fancy word that means that Jesus has, through His perfect life and His death in our place, has taken away the righteous wrath of God for everyone who believes in Him.

Our sins, no matter how grave they might have been, are gone forever through the life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. But that's not all, which brings us to our next point.

[8:19] Jesus, by becoming human, by dying, by rising again, has defeated death for us and set us free from the bondage, the slavery, and the fear of death.

Our text tells us, God became a human being, shared in our flesh and blood.

Why? So that He could take on death and win the fight. And that's such a glorious truth. Let's be real. People are afraid of death, aren't they?

Aren't we? I remember the period of my life when I was agnostic. I thought life was ultimately pointless.

No matter what we did, it would all end at the same destination and that is the grave. I remember thinking that nothing that I ever did would matter in the long run because it would all go back to dust and that would be the end of it.

[9:40] And that fear is how the devil keeps us in captivity.

In slavery. Because we either despair and we decide that life isn't worth living or we think, okay, I'll live it up because I'm going to die anyway.

I'll eat, drink, and be merry and if I hurt some people along the way, that's no big deal either. But the gospel changes everything, does it not? God became a man so that the God-man, Jesus Christ, could die.

But because He is God, because He is the life, death could not contain Him. And what happened on the cross wasn't just the death of a man, though it was, of course, that.

It was war breaking out between God and death, between God and the devil. And guess who was left standing when the dust settled? The resurrected God-man, Jesus Christ, who stands victorious over death, who stands victorious over the devil, and who offers His victory to everyone who will put their trust in Him.

[10:59] I want you to know, to be reminded this morning, that if you are in Christ, you have victory over death, and you are free.

The devil has no claim on you. Death has no claim on you. You have life everlasting, and no enemy, not even death, can stand in your way, because death lost.

Church Father Athanasius put it this way, death has become like a tyrant. It has been completely conquered by the legitimate monarch.

Bound hand and foot, the passers-by sneered at Him, hitting Him and abusing Him, no longer afraid of His cruelty and rage, because of the King who has conquered Him. So has death been conquered and branded for what it is by the Savior on the cross.

It is bound hand and foot, and all who are in Christ trample it as they pass, and as witnesses to Him deride it, scoffing and saying, O death, where is your victory?

[12 : 15] O grave, where is your sting? And why is that particularly important to us? Don't we live in a time that is dominated by fear?

Fear of death, fear of the future, fear of each other even. I was talking to Elaine just the other day about how the situation in the world is looking.

I said this to her, I would probably be afraid if I thought that my God could fail. But He can't.

The Gospel tells us, Jesus tells us, don't be afraid, because death is conquered, sin is defeated, and Jesus is Lord of all. The bondage of fear has no claim on the Christian, because Jesus has set us free, because God became a man and defeated death by dying and rising again.

It's easy to forget that, isn't it? There are no perfect people here this morning, myself certainly included.

[13 : 40] It's easy for imperfect people like us to fall, to feel the temptation to fall back into bondage, to fall back into fear. But here's the thing, and it leads me to our final point for this morning.

God becoming one of us means that we have a God who understands what it is to suffer, what it is to be tempted, even what it means to die.

We read in our text, in verse 18, For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.

Our God knows what it is to be tempted. Our God knows what it is to suffer. What a great God we serve, who would become a human being to be tempted and to suffer.

Can you imagine a greater and more loving God? He gets it. As the great Anglican theologian and preacher John Stott once put it, I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross.

[14 : 56] The only God I believe in is the one Nietzsche ridiculed as God on the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?

I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha. His legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing around His mouth, a remote look on His face detached from the agonies of the world.

But each time, after a while, I have had to turn away. And in imagination, I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross.

Nailed through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.

That is the God for me. He laid aside His immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us.

[16 : 01] Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of His. My brothers and my sisters, God suffered for us.

God became human. God became one of us. And if you could see His face as He hung on that cross, you would probably see that it was plastered with dried blood.

God. And if you could see Him now, even after His resurrection from the dead, you would see wounds in His hands, feet, and side. So I want to close this morning with a reminder that the truth is that what we are offered in Jesus is a God who became one of us for the forgiveness of our sins and for us to have eternal life and victory over death.

And because God became one of us, we have the amazing assurance that no matter what life throws our way, God understands whether it's suffering or temptation or anything else.

He understands and He cares. We serve a God who knows what pain feels like. We might find ourselves asking questions sometimes.

[17 : 26] Where is God in my suffering? Where was God when this awful thing happened to me? And then find our answer by looking to the cross and realizing that God understands, that God knows, and that God is in the business of bringing hope out of despair and joy out of grief.

And we can know, yes, all things are going to work together for good for those who love God because God became man and the God-man, Jesus Christ, stands in victory now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.