

The Two Natures of Jesus the Messiah

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Preacher: Rev Dave Brown

[0 : 00] Well, let's pray together, shall we, as we come to God's word this morning. Father, we thank you for the teaching the Lord Jesus gives here.

! A question that points us to the mystery of the incarnation. Please open our minds to understand these great truths! And soften our hearts, Lord, that we might live in the light of them.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So we're in Mark chapter 12. Just three verses this morning. But there's a lot here.

At various times in our lives, we find ourselves faced with some life-changing, massive personal questions, don't we? If we were to offer you the job, would you accept it?

Will you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife? The operation is available. Will you go ahead? Maybe you've faced one or two of those questions yourself over your lifetime.

[1 : 08] But I tell you, no question carries more weight than the one that Jesus is pointing us to here. And that is this. Who is Jesus? See, our answer to that question will not only shape our life here on earth, but it will also, if we follow through on our answer, decide our eternal destiny.

So as we go through this morning and take a deep dive into the identity of the Messiah, I'd like you to hold two questions in your mind, okay?

Who do you believe Jesus is? And does your life reflect that answer? Who do you believe Jesus is? And does your life reflect that answer?

Well, let's think about the context here. Over the previous verses, we've seen the religious leaders and their unholy, unlikely alliance come to Jesus with lots of questions about his authority to teach, about paying taxes, about marriage at the resurrection, and the greatest commandment.

All but the last of the questions, the one we looked at last week, was asked with a view to try and trip Jesus up and get him into trouble. But this is Jesus, isn't it?

[2 : 18] And he's able to answer all of those questions with such wisdom that, verse 34, from then on, no one dared ask him any more questions. Round one to Jesus.

But the battle's not over. Because here in this passage, Jesus turns the tables on his questioners and asks them a question of his own. It's not a question of practice, of obedience to various commands, although the answer does have huge implications.

It's a matter of theology. What is the true identity of the promised Messiah? Or to think about it more deeply, what is the true nature of the promised Messiah?

And of course, this is a question about Jesus, isn't it? For he claimed to be the Messiah, and he has been declared by the church to be the Messiah for the last 2,000 or so years.

So who is he? What is his true nature? Well, on a human level, there's a very straightforward answer, isn't there? He's the son of Mary, the adoptive son of Joseph.

[3 : 24] His CV would explain that he was born in Bethlehem. He had a short time living as a refugee in Egypt before being raised in Nazareth, where he learned his father's trade and lived as a carpenter builder.

Then we have that interesting period that the Gospels are focused on, those three and a half years, as Jesus travelled around ancient Israel, teaching, telling stories, performing amazing miracles, upsetting the religious elite in the processes, before being put to death on a Roman cross.

If you want to look more deeply at Jesus' background, Matthew chapter 1 has Jesus' full genealogy, and that shows us that he came from the tribe of Judah and in the line of David.

Now, both of those things are important because the Old Testament said that the Messiah, God's chosen rescuer, would be born into the tribe of Judah in the family line of David.

The passage quoted in Mark chapter 12 here comes from Psalm 110. Actually, it's the most quoted verse from the Old Testament anywhere in the New Testament.

[4 : 31] This verse is quoted more than any other. And by the time of Jesus, it had become to be seen as a Messianic psalm, one that was pointing forward to the coming of the Saviour.

Now, if you know the Psalms, you'll know that they are full of Messianic prophecies. But the Messiah's human heritage in the tribe of Judah appears lots of other places as well.

Let me give you just two. Genesis chapter 49, Jacob makes this prophecy as he's dying on his bed in Egypt. He says this, with all his sons gathered around, the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

The ruler will come, the ultimate ruler will come from the tribe of Judah. Isaiah 11, the prophet writes this, in that day, the root of Jesse, remember Jesse was David's father.

In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as the banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious. Tribe of Judah, the line of David.

[5 : 38] None of that was controversial. When the people spoke about the Messiah being the son of David, that's what they meant. Everyone knew it, but that generally led to the assumption that the Messiah would come to be a king like David, a military hero, a wonderful ruler over the nation, one who would subdue their enemies, getting Roman rule away from the land, someone who would restore true religion and bring back the glory days again.

Well, if so, the Messiah's reign would be wonderful, but it would be short-lived, wouldn't it? Because human kings have a certain lifespan. All human kings die. But as Jesus asks this question, he is wanting to point them in a different direction, a broader direction, to see that the Old Testament was actually pointing them further than that.

Well, let's have a look at this quote from Psalm 110. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. Maybe, as the psalm, that verse was read, you thought I have no idea what that's about.

It is a little confusing. It's not clear who's speaking, is it? Well, it's David who is speaking. And there are two words, Lord, which we see in that verse.

But they refer to different people. In Hebrew, the first Lord is the word Yahweh, the title given to God, the Lord, God, the Father. The second Lord in that verse is Adonai.

[7 : 15] That's also a title often referred to or associated with God. But more commonly, it means Master, Lord, someone who is superior to me, my Adonai, my Lord, someone who is senior.

So here we have David, the great king, saying that he hears God the Father saying to another person, another Lord, Adonai, come and sit at my right hand.

Come and take the place of honour, of divine power and authority. And stay there until the day when I make all the nations come and sit under your feet.

This is David, the great king, saying, the Father is giving the kingdom to someone else, and he is willing to share his glory and throne with him. This made David's Lord, the one the Father was speaking to, far, far greater than David ever would be.

Couldn't possibly just be a king like David. Now, that was challenging to the people at the time because there was a tradition that placed someone's elders or forebears, senior in rank and importance, to the living generations.

[8 : 27] So I can never be as great as my grandfather. I can try and live up to him, but our elders are the ones we look up to. And if that was the case, however great David's messianic son would be, well, he would still be outranked by David.

But as Jesus explains here, that can't be the case. David is looking to the day when David's Lord has all glory and power.

His descendant would be far, far greater than his kingly ancestor. A person worthy, not just of obedience and loyalty, as any great king would be, but a person worthy of worship.

Because God the Father has chosen to give them all honour and glory and a throne next to his own. Do you see how that raises the stakes on the coming of the Messiah?

The Messiah must be a man in David's line, must be in the tribe of Judah, but he must be someone far, far greater. What might that be?

[9 : 28] And assuming that Jesus is the Messiah and that's what the scriptures teach us, what does that mean for who Jesus is and how we must relate to him? Mark tells us that those listening were enthralled by what Jesus taught.

Their minds were being expanded. Maybe their delight was just at the Pharisees and the teachers of the law being brought down a peck or two. We all like it when those people who are proud and loud get shown up to be empty vessels.

But maybe they were starting to see that the long-promised Messiah would be far greater than they ever imagined. I wonder what you make of this verse so far. Maybe at the moment you're thinking, OK, you've stretched my mind a bit this morning.

It's a Sunday. It's still a little early for a Sunday. It's been a hard week. And you're making me think these big theology thoughts. Well, if you can't see any relevance, let me unpack two truths that flow out of this verse and on the way give you a few reasons why they are so important.

The first thing we need to hold on to, whatever else we say, is that Jesus, the Messiah, was absolutely fully human. I don't think many of us struggle with that idea.

[10:42] After all, if he was part of David's line, born into the tribe of Judah, he would have to be, wouldn't he? He would have to be human. But was he fully human?

That's the big question. Lots of theologians and people across the ages have mulled over that question. And it's not hard to see why. From the virgin birth, to Jesus' incredible wisdom, to his divine power, some people have thought of Jesus as perhaps some kind of demigod.

Or a superhero. Someone like Superman, who looks human on the outside, who sounds human, who feels human, but who has superhuman DNA. Kind of a hybrid.

Not fully human, but more than that. Mixed up. But the teaching of Jesus is that by his incarnation, Jesus became truly and completely like us.

That's why he had to grow for nine months in his mother's womb. That's why he entered the world by a very natural birth. That's why he had to grow up in the care of his parents, learning to walk and talk and write and think, learning the tools of his trade, submitting to his parents as the Lord demands.

[11:55] That's why the Gospels describe Jesus as getting tired, John chapter 4. Being hungry, Matthew 4. Thirsty, John 19. Needing company, Matthew 26.

Suffering anguish, Mark 15. And then experiencing death on the cross. In all of these ways, Jesus showed that he is not semi-human, but fully human.

When the eternal son took on flesh and became one of us, he truly became one of us. Not just in part, not just some kind of mutant superhuman person, but like us, in every way except two, Jesus had no human father and he never sinned.

Apart from that, Jesus was absolutely fully human. Why is that important? Let me give you four very quick reasons. Firstly, it fulfills the scriptures. The Old Testament scriptures to be fulfilled, the Messiah had to be human and be born in the tribe of Judah in Bethlehem.

Moses calls him a prophet like me, tells people to obey his teaching. Isaiah calls him a man of sorrows and speaks of his rejection and suffering and death.

[13:11] For the Messiah suddenly to appear from nowhere like an alien beamed down to the planet would be unthinkable. It would contradict all of the Old Testament prophecies about him. The fact that the Messiah was fully human shows us that God is trustworthy, that the scriptures have been fulfilled.

Secondly, it's important because of our salvation. For the human race to be saved from its sin, the human being had to die. Animal sacrifices had their role, but they could never be truly effective.

Hebrews 10 says that. It says, it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. If God was truly to forgive people like us, making us fit for heaven, then one of us would have to die.

If Jesus were not fully human, his sacrifice would be invalid and our forgiveness would be impossible. But Jesus came as a second Adam, a fully human person, yet perfect, yet fully perfect as well, a representative for the human race who could take away the sin of the world.

For you and I to be forgiven, Jesus had to be fully human. Thirdly, it's important for our comforts. You see, because Jesus lived a fully human life, he knows what you and I go through.

[14:40] Superman can tell Lois Lane that he's sorry for her and he understands her pain. He doesn't, really. He doesn't. He can feel empathy, he can feel sorry for her, but he doesn't know what she's going through.

He's not human. But because Jesus, the Messiah, can, the writer of Hebrews puts it like this, we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are.

So when we come to him with our prayers, he truly understands. When we pray in our need and grief and sorrow, we pray to a God who has been there, who has suffered like us.

That should give us great comfort. Lastly, for our hope, because Jesus was raised to life, we too can be raised.

Though in our nature we are linked to Adam, we share in his guilt and death and alienation from God that his sin brought into the world, through Jesus, the second Adam, by his life, perfect life, by his sacrificial death and by his mighty resurrection, the gates of heaven are now open for human beings to enter in.

[16:05] And in Jesus we have the pattern for eternal life and a certain hope in the face of death. If Jesus had not been fully human, we would have no hope for the future, no comfort in our struggles, no possibility of salvation from our sin and no confidence in God and his words.

But praise God, Jesus was fully human and we now have all these things. But of course that isn't all Jesus is. It is questioning.

Jesus points out a second truth about the Messiah. Now this is where our minds need to get stretched because this is God we're thinking about. Jesus is not just fully human, secondly, he is also fully God.

The Bible is absolutely clear on this point. No one and nothing deserves our worship except God alone. That's right, isn't it? The commandments declare it, require it, the psalmists sing it, the prophets declare it, the New Testament endorses it.

Only God is worthy of our worship. That's why we don't bow down or make sacrifices to idols or icons. That's why we don't worship the creation nor sing songs in praise of the saints.

[17:19] And yet here in this passage and in Psalm 110, the one who David calls his Lord is given the place of honour next to God and told that one day all the enemies will be under his feet.

That psalm goes on to speak about him ruling in the midst of his enemies, that his rule will last forever. And since we are told that God does not give his glory to another nor share his throne, the only conclusion that we can draw, the conclusion that Jesus is pointing his listeners to here, is that although the Messiah must be fully human, he must also be fully divine.

Jesus is the God-man, God and human in one flesh together. Now any honest reading of the Gospels will remind you of that.

That is the conclusion that the life of Jesus gives us, isn't it? Because what does he do? He speaks with divine authority. Think of the way he teaches like no one else.

He demonstrates divine power over sickness, over storms, over evil powers, over death, even sin. He behaves in a way that God would behave in.

[18:32] And think of the way Jesus speaks of himself, the way he is described, the way he accepts worship on occasions, worship due to God alone. And you can draw no other conclusion than this, that Jesus the Messiah is not only fully human, he is also fully divine.

The way those two natures, his human nature, and his divine nature, fit together without doing damage to each other. I tell you, it was a subject that far too deep and long for a talk like this.

If you want a succinct definition, let me point you in the direction of the Chalcedonian Creed, which puts it like this. Jesus, the incarnate son of God, is to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfutedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably.

inseparably. The distinction of the natures being no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same son, the only begotten, God, the word, the Lord, Jesus Christ.

That's something to mull over over coffee. Now, this is deep theology, but I have to say it is absolutely vital. That's why such great tomes have been written about it. That's why ancient creeds have been composed to defend and teach it.

[20:00] And although we may understandably, I have to say, find our minds stretched to grasp it, the identity of Jesus as both fully God and fully man is without doubt a vital doctrine to believe, without which we cannot call ourselves Christians.

If you think Jesus was just a great man, I'm sorry, you're not a Christian, however much you try and follow his teaching. Got to hold those two things together, fully God and fully man.

And there are some wonderful implications for this. I'll go over the same four headings again, and then I'll add one more. Firstly, it fulfills the scriptures. In the Old Testament, who is the one who

rescues God's people?

God does. Every time. He might use people like Moses, leaders like Joshua or David, but it is always God's work. Throughout the Old Testament, there are numerous passages that describe coming one day to himself, to shepherd his people, Ezekiel 34.

Coming to bring true rest, Jeremiah 31. Coming finally to judge Malachi 3. Well, take a read of Isaiah 53.

[21 : 14] Read there about the righteous one, the Messiah, suffering, dying to deal with the guilt of our sin. To fulfil the Old Testament, we need a fully divine Messiah.

It's good news for our salvation. For Jesus' death on the cross to secure our salvation, he would have to be morally perfect. There's only one being in the universe like that, and that is God himself. And his life would need to be of infinite value that he might die for the sins of the whole world. Being a relatively good man and a willing sacrifice would not be enough.

Jesus dies a perfect death, and his life is of infinite value because of who he is. That's why his death on the cross works salvation for us. Thirdly, for our comfort.

If you ever doubt God's love for you, then think of this. God loved the world so much, he loved you so much, he loved me so much, that the divine son left heaven to come to earth, to live that fully human life, to suffer and die on the cross in your place and my place, that we might be lifted up to eternal life with him.

[22 : 39] God himself was willing to do that. Can you sense the depth of love the Father has for you in that? Can you start to grasp the value that he puts on your soul?

Actually encourage and comfort us, shouldn't it? What about for our hope? Well, since the Messiah is fully divine, his words and actions rise to a new level.

His description of God, something he lived out and explained, well, we can take that as perfect truth. His description of humanity's guilt can be accepted as a true diagnosis.

His sacrifice can be trusted as sufficient and his promises to all who turn to him in repentance and faith can be relied on in their entirety. We're going to struggle very often, understandably so, to believe the adverts that we see on TV or the pronouncements that politicians make about how the world will be different if only we all voted for them.

We can trust Jesus. We can trust Jesus, not just because he is a great human being, but because he is the divine son, fully God and fully man.

[23 : 51] And here's an extra one. It gives us wonderful encouragement about human dignity. Genesis 1 tells us that we are made in God's image.

That is a great truth. But in the incarnation, that level of dignity is raised to a whole new level because in the incarnation, God takes on human flesh.

And it's as if as every part of life from the womb to the cradle to the workplace to the grave now has a blue plaque over it saying, Jesus lived here. That's why Christians have always been at the forefront of human rights, of caring for the weak and the poor, the alien, the convict, the dying and the yet unborn.

Because human life has a divine dignity because Jesus has experienced it. In the question here Jesus raises in these verses, Jesus points us to the truth that is seen across the scriptures that the Messiah must be fully human and fully God.

And as we read the scriptures, we are faced with the clear claim that Jesus himself is the son of God in human flesh, come to save, to lead, to bring us home to his kingdom, and to welcome in all who trust in his name.

[25 : 19] And that brings us back to the two questions I gave you at the beginning. Who do you believe Jesus is? Does your life back up that answer?

See, if Jesus is just a good man, if he's a great teacher, if he's a wonderful example, then I can justify picking and choosing the bits that I like and saying, okay, well I'm going to have a bit of Jesus this week.

I need to love my neighbour more. The world would be better if I loved my neighbour more. So if Jesus says that, I'm going to follow him in that. But it also means if Jesus is just that, then I can look at some of his teaching and say, you know what Jesus, I think you're wrong there.

I think this teacher over here says something better. That he's more up to date, more powerful, more helpful to me where I am right now than what you've said.

If Jesus is just a good man, we can pick and choose which bits of his life and teaching we find. But if he is not just the Jewish Messiah or the Saviour of Son, if he's not just the greatest teacher the world has ever seen, but if he is truly God in human flesh, well that changes everything.

[26 : 35] If Jesus is God, then we need to believe his words. If Jesus is God, we need to accept his diagnosis.

If Jesus is God and he says, the only way to inherit eternal life is to follow me, then we need to turn to him in repentance and faith. And if he says to us, if you are following me, this is how you need to live, then we need to do that.

not just partially, but entirely, to seek with his help to obey his commands and offer up our lives to him in humble worship and praise.

You might find it hard to get our heads around some of these big truths, but they are life-changing truths. They are eternity-changing truths. the saviour we have is fully God and fully man, worthy of our praise and honour.

Who do you think Jesus is? Does your life reflect that answer? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that in these coming days we might be able to understand more of who your son is, to grasp his glory, his humanity and his divinity.

[28 : 11] we might come as so many have done before and fall at our knees in worship. Lord, help us see Jesus.

in his name we pray.