

If God Became a Man - 2

In December, malls and shops suddenly become interested in deep theology. As we walk, we hear these words being played over the sound systems:

“Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.”

Of course, the malls are not seriously interested in the lyrics of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”, but it is ironic that such powerfully theological words are played happily by unbelievers during the Christmas season. Those words by Wesley, ignored by busy shoppers, are saturated with meaning. Veiled in flesh – the Godhead see, Hail th’incarnate Deity. Wesley believed that Jesus was nothing other than the God-man. Deity incarnate – God become flesh. As the next line says – ‘Pleased with us in flesh to dwell’ (or as some versions have it) ‘pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. God among us’.

The Christian claim that God became a man is a staggering claim. It's the kind of claim you either ridicule and laugh out of court, or the kind that you tremblingly accept as true. But many do not accept it to be true. So last week, we asked the question, what if God became a man. Before we superimpose Jesus on our thinking, we did this thought experiment – what if God became a man. Last week, we asked this question, and we considered three things we would expect if God became a man. We would expect Him to enter the world unusually. We would expect Him to exercise power over creation. We would expect Him to speak the wisest words ever spoken.

As we considered people who have claimed to be God, we saw they kept being disqualified on each of the points. Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones, Roman emperors, Isaiah Shembe, and others showed no power over creation, entered the world like everyone else, and spoke words that were often absurd, odd, or even dangerous. Only one candidate kept passing the test – Jesus Christ. Jesus entered the world unusually, by being born of a virgin. Jesus displayed power over creation in his many miracles, healing all kinds of disease and deformity, controlling weather, food, fish, even time. Jesus spoke the wisest words ever – no one else's words have been as quoted, analysed, memorised or loved like His. Even His enemies were bewildered by His words.

Those were three tests we applied to the question – what if God became a man. Today, we'll consider three more. Once again, we'll see if any of the claimants to deity passed that test. We'll consider what the Bible says about Jesus.

If God became a man:

I. We would expect Him to be without sin

Almost anyone who believes in one God who created the world, believes that such a God must be holy. That is, He must be the perfection of all the morals we expect others to live by. After all, if all human beings have a conscience, then all human beings have some innate sense of good and evil. We all expect others not to steal from us, not to cheat us, not to lie to us, and we expect others to live by the same standard. We get angry when they don't because we assume they have the same knowledge – the same conscience. Where did that come from? When we've eliminated unlikely

answers like biological instinct, or social expectations, the most likely explanation is that God made all people with that conscience - that sense of right and wrong.

If the Designer included in our design a kind of alarm system that goes off when we do evil, what does that say about the Designer? What must He be like? He must be one who does only the good, who is perfect in His ways.

If He became a man, how would He act towards His own laws? How would He live? If He gave us a conscience to treat your neighbour as you would want to be treated, would He do any less? Would the Creator become a man and do the very things that He hates and instructed us not to do? That would not make sense. If God became a man, we would expect Him to be without sin.

When we think of the many who have claimed to be God, how have they done, by this standard?

David Koresh, who claimed to be Messiah, cohabited with underage girls in his cult's compound. Apollo Quiboloy leads a church in the Philippines and claims to be the Son of God. He lives in a huge mansion, and is being sued for holding someone's daughter against her will. As we saw last week, Hulon Mitchell renamed himself Yahweh ben Yahweh, and was convicted and sentenced for conspiring to kill white people as part of his movement. In western Kenya, a man who calls himself Jehovah Wanyonyi claims to be God and has said he would punish the nation of Kenya if they did not give him around \$3.8 million. He has 25 wives and 95 children.

Indeed, we don't have to dig very deep into the lives of those who claim to be God to see how hollow it is. But what about Jesus? Consider the challenge He once laid at the feet of His enemies?

John 8:44-46 ⁴⁴ "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. ⁴⁵ "But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?

How many people could look their enemies in the face and say, find the sin in my life and tell me what it is? Convict me of sin. If there is anything, no matter how small, you enemies will be only too happy to do that! But Jesus' enemies were silent. Oh, they had accused Him of breaking the Sabbath, of dining with sinners, of not obeying laws about the washing of hands. But Jesus answered these accusations and showed that He was no Law-breaker. He was the Law-giver, and rightly applied the spirit of the Law.

Throughout His ministry, though He taught others to ask God for forgiveness, to ask others for forgiveness, we never once see Him confessing sin or repenting. This from a man whose humility and meekness was unquestionable. There is not so much as a hint of any knowledge of sin within himself. If He allowed His friends to think that He was sinless, when He actually was not, it would be one of the worst sins of deception.

Remarkably then, those who had been with Him for almost every day of His public ministry wrote of His life. Peter said of Jesus that He was "*a lamb without blemish, and without spot*". In chapter 2:22, he writes "*who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth.*" John write in 1 John 3 "**1 John 3:5** ⁵ *And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.* Even Judas, after betraying Jesus, returned the money, saying, "*I have betrayed innocent blood.*"

These words are from men who ate with him, stayed with him in the same houses, walked long

journeys with him, and saw him being persecuted, reviled and under the severest pressure, which is when even the best sinners crack, and show their evil hearts.

We find even His enemies unable to pin charges on Him. At His trial, false witnesses arose, who could not agree among themselves. Pontius Pilate said, "I find no fault in Him". The other thief on the cross said, "This man has done no wrong." The Roman centurion said, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

Wilbur Smith said, "Fifteen million minutes of life on this earth, in the midst of a wicked and corrupt generation - every thought, every deed, every purpose, every work, privately and publicly, from the time He opened His baby eyes until He expired on the cross, were all approved of God. Never once did our LORD have to confess any sin, for He had no sin."

If God became a man, we would expect Him to be without sin. Of all the claimants, only Jesus has a legitimate claim to have lived a sinless life.

If He became a man:

II. We would expect Him to solve man's spiritual problems

In the seventeenth century, the philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote that the human heart is like an infinite abyss that can only be filled with an infinite God. All around us is the evidence that people are spiritually restless. They are unfilled, dissatisfied, and in the dark as to what will satisfy them.

If God became a man, He would know. He would have a perspective that the most brilliant philosopher could never match. Like a helicopter pilot who can see what the cars in a traffic jam cannot, like a doctor with an X-ray who can see what the patient cannot, God would know what man's problem is; what the solution is. As the Designer of man, He would be able to explain what we were meant for, where we went wrong, and how to put it right. And we would expect that everyone who believed and listened to the God-Man would find his spiritual hunger satisfied; his spiritual problems solved; his spiritual vacuum filled.

Consider the results of those who followed others that claimed to be God. Hong Xiuquan was a religious leader in China in the 19th century who claimed to be the brother of Jesus. He ended up leading a rebellion against the Qing dynasty that claimed thousands of lives. Hong himself committed suicide. Had you followed Hong, would it have solved your deepest spiritual problems. Or consider those who followed Jim Jones, who claimed to be the reincarnation of Buddha, Jesus, and many other religious figures. After telling his followers that the authorities would soon come to get them, he persuaded 909 people, 303 of them children, to drink cyanide in grape juice, and they all died. Jim Jones did not solve anyone's problems, he led people into a spiritual desert, there to die.

Indeed, the followers of Sun Myung Moon, Sai Baba, and others are still searching. Many of those claiming to be God have been careful not to claim to be able to satisfy the spiritual hunger of people, lest people turn around and prove them wrong. But consider the claims Jesus made:

John 4:13-14 ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

John 6:35 ³⁵ And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and

he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 7:37-38 ³⁷ *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

John 10:10 ¹⁰ *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

John 14:27 ²⁷ *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

You cannot mistake Jesus words. He tells Person after Person that He Himself is the spiritual solution. He is the bread. He is the water-giver. He is the life-giver. He is the peace-giver. Everyone who comes to Jesus, and believes what He says about Himself, about His Father, will find spiritual life, satisfaction fulfilment.

Once again, when someone makes this kind of claim, he has claimed something staggering. When people make promises of this magnitude, they had either keep them, or else we will prosecute them. People who claim to be able to give you millions, if you only give them your life savings are criminals. People who tell you to place all your hope in them, when they know that they have no answers are not well-meaning, sincere people. They are evil. If Jesus was not God in the flesh, then He was either a pathological liar, who had come to believe His own exaggerated claims, or a madman. If so, He is not a good man to be remembered fondly.

But what have those who have taken Jesus at His word found?

1 John 4:14-16 ¹⁴ *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

Blaise Pascal, that philosopher who spoke of the abyss in the human heart that could only be filled by God died in 1772. "A few days after Pascal's death a servant felt by chance something hard and thick under the cloth of his doublet. Ripping the seam in the neighborhood he found a folded parchment, and within this a folded paper. These both bore writing in Pascal's hand, the words of which are those here given.

Translated into English, some of the words are as follows: "The year of grace 1654, Monday, 23 November, From about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past twelve, midnight, FIRE. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers nor of the Wise. Assurance, joy, assurance, feeling, joy, peace. GOD OF JESUS CHRIST, my God and thy God. ... Just Father, the world has not known thee but I have known thee. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy...This is eternal life that they should know thee the only true God and him whom thou hast sent. JESUS CHRIST—JESUS CHRIST. I have separated myself from him; I have fled, renounced, crucified him. Let me not be forever separated from him. One is saved only by the teaching of the Gospel....

Everyone who has placed his or her trust in Christ can agree - that day brought life. It brought joy. It was an opening of eyes. Peace, meaning, assurance, and life. Who else has claimed to be God and brought these things to those who believe?

If God became a man, we would expect Him to solve man's spiritual problems. Everyone who has believed Jesus' words has found that He does just that.

If God became a man:

III. We would expect Him to be undefeated by death

Anyone who believes in God believes that God created life. To be great enough to create life, you must possess life yourself. In fact, the Creator must possess life in a way which makes Him self-sufficient. If He is the author of life, then He does not derive His life from anyone else. He owns life. Life is within Him. The idea of God dying is like talking about God beginning. God must be immortal and eternal.

So, when it comes to every claimant to deity, the final and greatest test of deity is that we would expect that if God becomes a man, He would not die. Or, if He did die, death would spit Him back out.

So, to take some of those whom we have mentioned before. Antiochus Wphiphanes – died 164 B.C. Jim Jones – died 1978. David Koresh – died 1993. Yahweh ben Yahweh – died 2007. Hong Xiuquan – died 1864. Sai Baba - died 2011. In fact, though there are lots of claims that such and such a person lives on in a new realm, none of those who have claimed to be God in the flesh demonstrated any kind of power over death. What about Jesus?

By contrast, Jesus not only predicted His resurrection, but staked His credibility on it. He said that the ultimate sign of His ministry would be that He would rise after three days. Jesus made the extraordinary claim that He had the power to claim His own life back from the dead.

John 10:17-18 ¹⁷ "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

What happened? Jesus truly died on the cross: He did not merely swoon or faint. He was buried. On the third day, the tomb was empty. No one denies this. Even the enemies of Christianity could not deny that the tomb was empty. In fact, Matthew tells us of a lie that was developed to explain the empty tomb.

Matthew 28:11-15 ¹¹ Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. ¹² When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' ¹⁴ "And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Of course, the lie is patently ridiculous. How would sleeping guard know who stole the body? If they had slept, they would have been put to death, not around to tell others that the disciples had stolen the body. Why would a bunch of timid disciples, who had fled the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was still alive, suddenly risk their lives to steal His dead body?

Instead, the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus rose from the dead. Five hundred eyewitnesses saw it. The church went forward and faced persecution on the fact of it. Baptism and the Lord's Supper signified it. Sunday worship began to remember it. Henry Morris said, "The fact of His resurrection is the most important event of history, and therefore, appropriately, is one of the most certain facts in all history."

If Jesus was God, and Jesus died as a substitute for us, then it is not possible that He should remain dead. Consider what Peter said about the resurrection:

Acts 2:22-24 ²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know -- ²³ "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

It was not possible that He should be held by it. Why not? Because death is the penalty for sin, and He had not sinned. It was not possible that He should be held by it. Why not? Because death is only possible for creatures, not the Creator. He died according to His human nature, but being both God and man, the Person of Christ could not remain in death.

Jesus is the only figure in history, with verifiable eyewitness testimony, who died, but came back from death. Death did not have the last word. In fact, hypothetically, he could have remained on the earth, living immortally among us, but that was not in the plan of redemption. He ascended, so as to act as our High Priest, send the Holy Spirit, and await His day of final rule over all.

If God became a man, we would expect Him to be undefeated by death.

Six simple tests: if God became man, we would expect Him to:

- enter the world unusually
- display power over creation
- speak the greatest words ever
- be without sin
- solve man's spiritual problems
- remain undefeated by death.

If we had tried to invent a story of a God - man, we could not have invented the account of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The virgin birth, the miracles, His sermons and parables, His sinless life, His spiritual answers and His resurrection, are beyond the storytelling capability of even the most gifted writer. Jesus is so far beyond us, that when we read the Gospels, we know we are reading an account, a record of God becoming man.

If God has come that near, and become one of us, then we are responsible to respond. No longer can we say, God is so invisible and beyond us that none of us can truly know who he is or what He wants from us. No, that ignorance God will no longer overlook. Now that God the Son has come and dwelt among us, we are forced to choose. We will either bow the knee to Him, accept Him as the way to the Father, accept His provision on the cross, or we will turn away and go our own way.

The message of Christmas is much more than feel good and be giving. It is God has become one of us to reconcile us to Himself. Will we believe it and receive it?