

Luke 20:41-44
David's Son and Lord

That Jesus of Nazareth existed is beyond question. That there once lived a person named Jesus, who taught and preached in Palestine in the early 1st century AD, who was reputed to have performed miraculous works, and was tried and executed for His crimes against the Jewish faith by the Roman government is all beyond doubt. Both sacred and secular sources alike affirm these truths. There is hardly any thinking person who argues that there was never any such person as Jesus of Nazareth.

But while there is almost universal assent to the fact that there *was* a person named Jesus, *who* He was is an altogether different question. A small minority believe that He is the Son of God, sent by God the Father to redeem mankind. Most do not. Many believe that He was a good teacher, or a wise philosopher - something along the lines of Confucius or Buddha. Others think Him a charlatan, a trickster, a con-man, who overextended Himself and ran afoul of the local authorities.

Some examples. Mormons argue that Jesus is the brother of Satan, and that both are merely two of the millions of created spiritual beings that eventually become gods. According to Mormon teaching, you and I can do the same. Jehovah Witnesses believe Jesus was the archangel Michael before He was incarnated, and that He lived His life as a perfect man, but only as a man. Muslims believe Jesus was a great human prophet, in the line beginning with Abraham and continuing through to the final prophet, who received the final and authoritative revelation from God, Muhammad. They argue that all of these prophets taught the same basic truths. Christian Scientists believe Jesus came and died to “uplift faith to understand eternal Life, even the allness of Soul, Spirit, and the nothingness of matter” [*Beliefs and Teachings*, Christian Science website]. Those of the Bahá’í faith believe Jesus is one of many manifestations of God. Buddhists believe Him to be an enlightened teacher. Finally, the beliefs of modern Jews range from Jesus being a good teacher to a false prophet.

At the time He lived, Jews believed that the Messiah, Who Jesus claimed to be, would restore the lost tribes of Israel to their rightful place among the nations of the world. The Roman oppression would end and Jews from around the world would return to Jerusalem. God’s kingdom would be restored to the status it held during the reign of King David. The enemies of the chosen people of God would be vanquished. It was a large task, especially considering the Roman occupation of Palestine, but the Messiah was God’s Chosen One.

But of all the things expected of the Messiah, the claim to be God was not among them. The Jews were, and remain, a rigidly monotheistic people. Their theology has no place for something like the Trinity. To a Jew, there was one God and one God only. The great praise of Israel, the *shema* proclaimed, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

But Jesus claimed to be God. To Jews, that in itself prohibited Him from being the Messiah. He was instead only a dangerous blasphemer. He was worthy not of reverence and obedience but of death. His teachings about the kingdom of God, His reputed miracles, His rising support among the people all

combined to make Him increasingly dangerous to the religious establishment charged with guiding and protecting the chosen people of God until the true Messiah revealed Himself.

Now in Jerusalem, during Passover week, Jesus was teaching in the temple and confounding those sent by the Sanhedrin to challenge Him. The scene described in this passage took place probably late Wednesday of Passion Week. Having tried to discredit Jesus by trying to make Him assume the role of a political instigator or embarrass Him with questions about the resurrection that He was not supposed to be able to answer, the religious leaders among the Jews had become frustrated. But Jesus was not yet done with them. Turning things around, He asked them a question.

The Question

One might wonder why Jesus kept the conversation going. Having finally silenced His opponents (both the Pharisees sect and the Sadducee sect), one might wonder why Jesus did not just say “anyway . . .” and go on with His teaching. The answer can only be that He once again felt it imperative to assert His true identity.

Mark’s narrative of the encounter offers us more insight. Apparently there was a part of the conversation that Luke chose not to include in his gospel. After refuting the Sadducees, another question was asked. “One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘what commandment is the foremost of all?’” (Mark 12:28). Jesus answer by quoting the *shema* mentioned above. The scribe then affirmed the truth of what Jesus said, insisting that total and complete obedience to God was better than any religious sacrifices. “When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, ‘you are not far from the kingdom of God’” (Mark 12:34). It was then that Jesus began to remind the crowds of His deity.

We must begin by asserting that Scripture teaches without question the deity of Jesus of Nazareth by affirming His unity with God the Father. Furthermore, Scripture also teaches that no one is acceptable in the eyes of God who denies that truth.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’” (John 14:6).

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“²²Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:22-23).

“¹⁰The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:10-12).

In Matthew’s account “⁴¹while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴²‘what do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘the son of David’” (Matthew 22:41-42). It was then that Jesus followed up with the passage recorded in Luke, when “He said to them, ⁴¹How is it that they say the Christ is David’s son? ⁴²For David himself says in the book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, ⁴³Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’” ⁴⁴Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord,’ and how is He his son?” (41-44).

One Answer

The Pharisees had answered correctly. Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, *was* the son of David. This had been taught for a thousand years. When David had offered to build a temple for God, the prophet Nathan had relayed to David God’s answer that he was not to build a temple, since he had been a man of war. The temple was instead to be built by David’s son, Solomon. But, speaking for God, Nathan continued “¹²when your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men” (2 Samuel 7:12-14). David wanted to build a house for God, and God establish David’s house forever.

This promise of God was affirmed throughout the Old Testament,

“³I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David My servant,
⁴I will establish your seed forever
And build up your throne to all generations . . .
⁵Once I have sworn by My holiness;
I will not lie to David.
⁶His descendants shall endure forever
And his throne as the sun before Me.
⁷It shall be established forever like the moon,
And the witness in the sky is faithful” (Psalm 89:3-4, 35-37).

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David,
And wall up its breaches;
I will also raise up its ruins
And rebuild it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11).

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2).

That the Messiah would be the son of David was common knowledge to the people of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. The crowds had asserted His claim to the title based on this very fact. Remember the blind man, Bartimaeus, whom Jesus encountered on His way to Jerusalem, “³⁷they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. ³⁸And he called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ³⁹Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Luke 18:37-39).

As His reputation spread, even Gentiles understood His claim to be of the line of David. “And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, ‘have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed’” (Matthew 15:22). During His entry into Jerusalem, the crowds had shouted.

“Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9).

The claim of Jesus to be a descendant of David was acknowledged even by His opponents. Temple records would have verified the fact. That Jesus was the son of David was indisputable. But there had been countless sons of David in the last thousand years. That, in itself, was no claim to Messiahship.

A Better Answer

Jesus answered His own question. He reminded His listeners that “⁴²David himself says in the book of Psalms,

“The Lord said to my Lord,
‘Sit at My right hand,
⁴³Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’”

⁴⁴“Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord,’ and how is He his son?” (41-44).

Jesus found this assertion of David in Psalm 110. This had long been considered a Messianic psalm. Ancient Jewish texts referred to it as such. Peter, Paul, and the writer of the book of Hebrews all referred to it in that context. Interestingly, with the completion of the canon of Scripture, Jews no longer considered it as a Messianic psalm, instead arguing that it either referred to Melchizedek or Judas Maccabeus.

In Psalm 110, David clearly acknowledged the authority of his son. He called Him, ‘Lord.’ He had Him sit at his right hand. He pronounced that His enemies will be vanquished. It was reminiscent of a scene depicted during the conquest of Canaan, when after the victory over the five kings at Makkedah,

“²⁴they brought these kings out to Joshua, Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, ‘come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings. So they came near and put their feet on their necks. ²⁵Joshua then said to them, ‘do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies with whom you fight.’ ²⁶So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees until evening” (Joshua 10:24-27).

The question, if David called Him his son, then how was He his Lord was too much for the minds of the Pharisees and Sadducees. If the person was indeed the ‘Lord’ of the king of Israel, he could only be God. No human could outrank the king. The person to whom David referred, must be God. The Messiah, must be God. The religious leaders had tried to stump Jesus, but He had stumped them. They were humiliated. It was then that they retreated. It was then that they stopped challenging the authority of Jesus publically.

Implications

It is a profound truth, not fully understandable to our finite and fallen minds, but still clearly taught in Scripture, that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

“Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3).

“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

“²⁸Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘my Lord and my God!’ ²⁹Jesus said to him, ‘because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (John 20:28-29).

“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus possesses the attributes of God.

He is eternal. “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

He is omnipresent. “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:20).

He is omniscient. “Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God” (John 16:30).

He is immutable. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

He is sovereign. “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’” (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus performed the works of God.

He created. “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

He gave life. “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes” (John 5:21).

He forgave sin. “²⁰Seeing their faith, He said, ‘friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ ²¹The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’ ²²But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, ‘why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³Which is easier, to say, ‘your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘get up and walk?’ ²⁴But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ - He said to the paralytic - ‘I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home’” (Luke 5:20-24).

Christians have had great difficulty understanding this over the years. There have been many errant theories as fallen man has tried to comprehend the inscrutable God. But it is important to get it right. It is important that our theology be true. We must not only believe, we must believe in the right things.

Some in the early Church believed in adoptionism, that Jesus was born fully human and then became God when the Holy Spirit descended on Him during His baptism. Others believed in Arianism, that Jesus was divine but still a created being. Still others believed in docetism, that Jesus was not fully human and His body was merely an illusion. Jesus, in this system, only *appeared* to die at Calvary.

Sabellianism was the belief that Jesus is human and divine but at different times; He was never both at once. Think of water which can be either solid, liquid, or vapor. In other words, there were three distinct characterizations of one God, but not three persons. The opposite of this was Nestorianism, which argued conversely that Jesus had two distinct nature, one divine and one human.

Takeaways

It is important to have right thinking about God. We cannot simply believe as a child might, for we are no longer children. It is difficult, but *ad astra per aspera*. Part of the Christian walk is the struggle against our flesh. Part of it also is the struggle to have right thinking. May God give us the grace to work out the truth of our salvation by understanding Who Jesus Christ truly is as a member of the Trinity.