

## The Manifold Work of the Son at His Incarnation

Teaching and preaching in today's evangelical churches is focused almost entirely on the atoning death of Christ Jesus. And so, Christians who depend on that preaching for their understanding of the Gospel have a woefully deficient grasp of all that the Son accomplished in His earthly work. We tend to see Jesus' work as instrumental, that is, He was merely the agent that made possible forgiveness of sins and an eternal destiny for us in the Church. There's much, much more to think about, however, probably lots more even than what comes to mind for this lesson. Jesus is the greatest and most important Person and His work the greatest and most important reality in all existence, in all human history. Let's think about it, to the extent any finite mind can do it. (The following discussion is based on Scripture even though I omit citations; it's not something imagined.)

In Numbers 14, God condemned His people Israel, saying (twice), "They despised Me." This (incredibly!), after having witnessed one astonishing miracle after another at the Exodus and on their journey. In Isaiah 53, the coming Messiah/King is said to be "despised." The Numbers 14 episode, in other words, was proleptic of the advent of the Son. Jesus is the despised and rejected personal deity of ethnic Israel, having come to His own people to bless them with the promised Kingdom. The Jews despised and rejected Jesus for no good reason. They despised and rejected Him even after they witnessed one astonishing miracle after another. Jesus was their own God and they didn't want Him; they didn't want to be with Him, didn't want His Kingdom, didn't want the blessings He put on offer. Jesus was also the embodiment of Israel; He was the nation of Israel personified. So, the cross was necessary for dealing with the wrath Israel deserved, not just for the Numbers 14 rebellion, but for the Golden Calf idolatry, indeed, for all the rebelliousness and disobediences and idolatries of that nation throughout all her sordid history right up to that moment when they cried, "Crucify Him." As God, Jesus' death had infinite value, able to atone for all human sin. All sin, from the sin of Adam and his wife on thru history. As God, Jesus' death revealed God's unique, transcendent love, a love that's selfless and sacrificial, a love that blesses even those who despise Him.

As the personal embodiment of Israel, Jesus also fulfilled all righteousness. Someone in human history had to obey God, so the Son came in the Person of Jesus to do that. He had to take on humanity and live on earth to do that. So God's holiness was expressed and vindicated on earth, in God's creation. Humanity, embodied in Jesus, thus lived out God's perfect goodness and glorified Him. He pleased God as Israel should have done, as humanity should have done.

Jesus is a unique Person. In all creation, there's no one else like Him, fully deity, and fully human. Deity without the radiant splendor of transcendent majesty, and humanity without sin. He and He alone is able to substitute for a fallen and sinful humanity to bear the wrath that mankind deserves, and to live the righteous life that humanity would not. Both His life and His death substituted for ours. Because Jesus' Person, His life, teachings and work so perfectly reflected the Father's will and Person, the Father's ideals and values, the Father's love and goodness, He was given authority over all heaven and earth, both to rule and to judge. The Father sent the Son into the world to express His glory on earth, in His creation. Why two advents? The ultimate role of the Son is to rule. And that rule has to be on earth as a human. That's creational. But to show that Jesus has the right to rule, He had first to demonstrate self-less, sacrificial love, and humility and submissive obedience to the will of God. Thus the necessity of incarnation and a first advent.

There's lots, lots more. Jesus so perfectly mirrored the Father that a totally new dispensation, a new order of things has occurred. Now, everyone everywhere must identify with Jesus to receive the Father's creation blessing. Outside of Jesus, there remains only condemnation and wrath. And those who do receive Him must mirror Him, that is, reflect His Person, His goodness, and His will. Humanity exists today in the era of the resurrected, incarnate eternal Son. Woe to the one who refuses to submit to Him!

Jesus honored the Father. He revealed the Father. He lived out the life of the Father. He loved the Father. He served the Father. And He will (hopefully, in the very near future) return to rule in righteousness. He fulfilled all that God initially created humanity for. In Christ, we become complete, perfect, pleasing to God and beloved. All that the Son accomplished was of such stupendous value that, in God's providence, it is now being made available also to Gentiles.

At the onset of human disobedience, God pronounced a dreadful curse on His "very good" creation. The curse was necessary, but temporary. The promise of an eventual future defeat, along with the animal skins that God clothed Adam and Eve with, together anticipated a future complete and perfect reversal of that curse. Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father made it possible for God to reverse that curse, and that will occur in the future when the remaining, fulfilling part of Jesus' ministry occurs, when He returns. All nature will be restored to its intended goodness on the basis of the Son's selfless, sacrificial obedience to the Father.

Evil exists in God's creation. Its source is not revealed, but that God created this cosmos to deal with it is clear from the opening verses of Scripture. God is good, and He therefore must deal with all evil. The Son entered physical creation to do precisely that. His living out His own inherent goodness and righteousness, and His loving, trusting, obedience to God's will even to the point of a humiliating and agonizing death, and His resurrection to life defeated evil. Evil is really hatred of God's goodness. Jesus' love for the Father, His love for all that's good even to the point of dying for it because it was worth an infinitely valuable death, defeated evil. That defeat made it possible for God's creation to be holy for God to dwell in it. Thus, God's holiness is vindicated and in perfect justice, all evil can be eternally disposed of.

The resurrection of Jesus not only makes new life, that is, a whole new kind of existence available, it puts on offer the very joy and peace of the Godhead to all who desire it. This goes far beyond, indeed, it is infinitely greater than the blessings of life that were available at Creation. Whatever sorrows, whatever suffering and whatever horrors people have experienced all throughout history are nullified and reversed by what Jesus' resurrection makes available. It's possible that the very reason God created this cosmos was to share His own love, peace and happiness with others. Because of sin's entry, that ideal was blocked, but the Son's advent and all He accomplished therein made that a very real offer. We don't usually think of happiness as part (if not the goal) of the Gospel, but it is what Christ works into the life of the Spirit-yielded believer. The Son came to enable God to share with us His very own infinitely great happiness. (Reader, n.b.: The pursuit of happiness and pleasure in life divorced from or without reference to the awareness and love of God and His will is idolatrous. And it's futile; we cannot make ourselves happy apart from God.)

There's yet more. It gets even better, more superlative. The Son came to do something totally radical and transformative. He came to create a completely new creation, that is, a new humanity and a new heavens and earth. Jesus is the first and chief Person in a totally new race of beings, a "new man" that will be comprised of raised and glorified followers of Jesus, in corporate unity or solidarity with Jesus. And they will dwell with God, in His very presence, in a radically new creation characterized by the effulgent splendor of God. A new humanity, a new creation, and a new relationship, thanks to the Person and work of Jesus. Paul's argument in all his letters is, we should live that future new life *now*, in this existence, thus expressing and demonstrating our faith.

And I conclude this study with this one more work of the Son. It's subtle but real, and perhaps it's the most important to us. How much do we value the will of God? *How much do we value God?* What is God worth to us? I dare suggest that most of us hardly ever think of God and His will except on Sunday mornings and/or when (and if) we pray before a meal. Jesus showed by His life: God is worth *everything*. Jesus worshiped God with His life and He not only taught us but showed us how God is to be worshiped. How? By obedience to His will, obedience that costs us. That is, by self-sacrifice. There's no true worship without self sacrifice. We worship God by loving Him with all our being. Yes, Jesus uniquely loved the Father for He was the Son. But that's the ideal for every one of us. God created us and then saved us to love, worship and serve Him. A couple of hours sitting and listening to religious music and a homily isn't worship. Pursuing pleasure or whatever interests us isn't pursuing the life we were created to live. And yes, Jesus did that *for us*, a necessary component of the atonement, effecting reconciliation on our behalf. But we must do it too. And if we're *in Christ*, we'll do it. The risen and exalted, obedient Christ sends His Spirit into our lives to enable it.

Now someone will say to me, "Thanks for all this information about Jesus. Great. But I have my life to live, and what Jesus did that affects me personally is He got for me forgiveness of sins. I believe in Jesus, so I'm saved and going to heaven when I die whether I know all this about Jesus or not." Dear reader, the most significant event in all history was the Son entering time and space to serve the Father. God did this in love, in the full expectation that His human creatures would respond in the only appropriate way, with love. Thus, the "salvation" we claim to possess is love-based, that is, love for the Savior. That means being in an intimate personal relationship with Jesus. If we understand all that He did for us, all that He means for us, our love and the relationship with Him should grow ever deeper and more transformative. Failure to respond to Jesus with love is because of hard-heartedness, which is really despising God. We must be careful what we mean when we say, "I believe in Jesus," because if that "belief" doesn't include love for Him and the obedience that comes from love within a personal relationship, our "belief" may be a self-deception.

What all this does mean to us is, Jesus must be the central focus and priority of our lives. A casual attitude toward Christianity consisting of church attendance and occasional prayer and Bible reading is absurdly inadequate. We're called to join with the Creator God in exalting the Son, and we can only do that by lovingly giving Jesus our lives. Our reward for doing this will be in the otherwise unknowable future, which is what faith (or loving trust) does. Love for Jesus, if real, will result in wanting to know Him more and wanting to be like Him. That's what we're called to do, and that's the only response to the Gospel that's appropriate. It's how we glorify God.