

Is Jesus Really God Incarnate?

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Integration Question: *Do we have to believe that Jesus is God incarnate vs. a prophet or wise teacher? How would you help people see what difference it makes?*

Theological Statement

Christians stake their life's on the fact that Jesus is God incarnate. To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus and to cling to the truth of the Gospel that Jesus clung to. Mainly, that Jesus was God in flesh who came to return His presence and kingdom back with His redeemed people. All four gospels accounts prove Jesus to be God incarnate. In the opening pages of the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus is introduced as Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Similarly, in the last moments of His ministry, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees about His divinity claims. Jesus plainly asked them who they thought the Christ was (Matt. 22:41). They replied, saying "He is the Son of David" (Matt. 22:42). In response, Jesus quoted Psalms 110 in order to make the point that He was not just a prophet or merely the worldly version of the Davidic Messiah, referred to as the Son of David. Rather, Jesus quoted Psalms 110 to prove that He is actually the Lord God, Yahweh Himself, that David served (Matt. 22:43-46). Likewise, the Gospel according to Luke emphasizes Jesus as God. Luke records that Jesus wept over the people as He rode into Jerusalem for the last time "because [they] did not recognize the time of God's coming to [them]" (Luke 19:44). The pinnacle of Jesus' sadness for His people was not in His own, unjust death, but the very fact that they missed the good news that God had returned His presence and reign to the world in Him. The Gospel according to Mark opens by introducing "the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God, as it is written..." (Mark 1:1-2). Mark then begins to quote from Isaiah 60 which is about a people who are preparing for the return of God's presence, His reign and rule, with them. A couple verses later, Mark connects Jesus to preaching this very same gospel, proclaiming that "time is now, the kingdom of God has

come. Repent and believe this good news" (Mark 1:15). Jesus tells the people to repent and believe the good news, the gospel, that he had just announced- God's kingdom and presence has returned through Jesus- exactly what Mark introduced as the gospel in the opening verses.

In the Gospel according to John, John introduces Jesus as the creator God, declaring that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word become flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). John states that the Word was God, and then this Word, God, become flesh as Jesus. If that is not clear enough, John describes the Word, Jesus, as dwelling on earth. That Greek word for "dwelt," *skēnoō*, when translated into Hebrew is tabernacle. Any person saturated in Jewish literature knows that the tabernacle directly represents God personally dwelling with His people as He did via the tabernacle in the Old Testament. In other words, John is saying that Jesus is the very same God that dwelt with His people long ago. Additionally, John records Jesus referring to Himself as "I AM" (*ego eimi*), a name only used of Yahweh (John 8:58). For example, in Exodus 3, God calls Moses to free His people from Egypt. In response, Moses questions by what authority is he to try and free the Israelite slaves. God instructs Moses to tell the people "I AM (the same Hebrew word translated from the Greek word *ego eimi* that Jesus used) sent you" (Ex. 3:14). Because the Jews knew this was only a name used of God, they were to murder anyone who claimed the same, which is exactly why they tried to stone Jesus to death after He made this statement (John 5:59). Lastly, one of Jesus' disciples, Thomas, met Jesus' alive after His crucifixion, and proclaimed "My Lord and My God" (John 20:28). If there were a time for Jesus to refute someone believing His authority and status as parallel with God's, that was the time. Instead, Jesus confirms and praises Thomas' belief (John 20:29).

Ministry Application

Correctly believing that Jesus is God incarnate will help reveal the true meanings of the gospel. As noted above, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all emphasize Jesus as God because that is the key to the gospel. Gospel, also known as good news, is purely about God's presence, rule, and reign being reinstated here on earth with His people. Unfortunately, many people wrongly believe the gospel is about being forgive for their sins so that they can go to a place called heaven when they die and escape going to a place called hell. Jesus becoming God has nothing to do with that kind of story. Rather, Jesus being God in flesh has to do with the fact that God's dwells back with His people, hence, the significance of Jesus' indwelling Spirit residing in all His followers. Jesus being God incarnate also accomplished the re-establishment of His kingdom back on earth, which requires defeating the world's ruler, the evil one, and freeing God's people from spiritual slavery into His spiritual kingdom. While the gospel is not less than the forgiveness of sins (in order to get to heaven), it is certainly a lot more than that. Because Jesus was God incarnate, people do not have to wait to live in the fullness of God's kingdom, spiritually speaking, until they get to heaven. For this reason, Jesus defines eternal life in John 17:3 not as something we will experience once we die, but as intimately knowing and actively being in relationship with God and Jesus. We can walk with His Spirit, directing and guiding us, as citizens of His kingdom now. Practically, this means you can be overflowed with: joy when the person in the car behind you cusses you out because your let a car pull out in front of you even when it was not their turn; peace when your children do not stop bickering at one other; patience when your spouse takes their anger out on you; kindness when a waiter takes twenty minutes just to bring you your drinks; selflessness when your spouse asks you to change the baby's diaper, even if it is their turn to.

Not believing that Jesus is God incarnate, and consequently, not knowing the fullness of the gospel, causes people to earn their way to their desired end state. Muslims believe in a works-based philosophy that requires their good works to out way their bad ones in order to enter paradise when they die. Hinduism also is a works-based religion that requires one to appease the spirits and infinite number of gods so that one day they could reach moksha, a state of oneness in the force and flame of the universe. Both these religions believe that Jesus is a prophet (or one of many gods), rather than the Creator God Himself. As a result, these people must rely on someone or something to reach their end state. That is an endless and tiresome burden to carry. It causes its adheres to always live in fear because they do not know if they did enough, and to always be unsettled because their identity is wrapped up in what they do. On the contrary, because Jesus is God and has restored His presence (paradise, eternal life, the garden) to His people, those who believe are freed from the slavery of trying to win and earn a spot in the afterlife. They can live in the assurance that their identity is not found in what they can do, but rather, it is sealed in who they are as children of the King. This a peace that no one can ever take away.