

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SOTERIOLOGY



THE PURPOSE, PLAN AND METHOD OF GOD

Soteriology (Thiessen, 1949) is the Biblical doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ and God's plan for the salvation of mankind through His Son. This includes the entire scope of Jesus Christ, from His pre-incarnate state (before being born as a human being), His short life on Earth, through His ascension to heaven and His ultimate return.

This document continues where we left of the previous week. We saw that Jesus' mission to the Earth was to become a man and represent God the Father to a sinful world and introduce us to God so that we would repent and gain eternal life. Of course, as it turns out, not everyone believes, despite the evidence.

WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THE INCARNATION?

In what way did Jesus reveal Himself as truly God and truly man at the same time? He humiliated Himself by leaving behind the characteristic of God that He is a spirit, and took on the format and appearance of a man. In this way, He emptied Himself and became like a man. It is important to understand though that this does not mean that He forfeited His character as allknowing, almighty and present all over – we read in the gospels that He knew the minds of people He was in contact with. He knew that they were thinking. In performing miracles, He retained his omnipotence and various other encounters show that while He was in the form of a man, He was not restrained by natural forces, walking on water being one example.

That said, there were certainly in some cases examples of His divine glory being dimmed. John tells us that we beheld His glory.

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. – **John 1:14**

He was tempted with hunger, and suffered pain on the cross. He emptied Himself in the sense that for a while, He did not exercise all of these attributes so that He could still be recognised as being human. This does not mean that He did what men do – He did not sin and thus was always perfectly holy. That He gave up some of these attributes is recorded by John where we read that He prays and asks the Father to glorify Him with the glory He had before the world came into existence:

⁵And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. – **John 17:5**

Along with emptying Himself, He was made in the likeness of men. John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The glory that those who lived with Him beheld then, is but a fraction of his full glory.

Paul tells us that in Jesus the fullness of God dwells in the form of man. He was given a human body so that He could dwell with us. This never means that He took on sinful flesh. He never sinned, but took on the form, or likeness, of men who sin, not in the actions but in the appearance. In the end, the worst humiliation is that he, God Himself, became a servant to the very man He created.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

This may make us wonder what kind of person He must have been, since we today have not ever seen Him and understand but a little of what He was, through the examples the New Testament gives us. He had to become like man in order to make atonement for our sins. That He was human cannot be denied. He was born of a woman:

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, – **Galatians 4:4**

This was through natural birth although through divine conception and without any sin. He has a family line that can be accurately traced back to Adam. He is referred to as a son, mostly the Son of God, but in many instances also Joseph's son, but then by people who did not have an intimate knowledge of Him or His mission:

And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? – **Luke 4:22**

He developed as a normal man in Jewish society. We read about Him as a **baby**:

¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the **babe** wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. – **Luke 2:12**

then as a **toddler** fleeing to Egypt with His parents:

¹³And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the **young child** and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. – **Matthew 2:13**

then later as a **young boy** in the temple in Jerusalem:

⁴⁰And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. ⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. ⁴²And **when he was twelve years old**, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. ⁴³And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. ⁴⁴But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. ⁴⁵And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. ⁴⁶And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. – **Luke 2:40-46**

After that there is a gap in the narrative and we read of Him again as a **grown man** of about 30 years, ready to start His ministry:

²⁹The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the **Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world. – **John 1:29**

After His death, He was buried using the traditional ceremonial methods that applied to everyone else:

³⁹And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. ⁴⁰Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in **linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury**. – **John 19:39-40**

⁵⁹And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a **clean linen cloth**, ⁶⁰And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. – **Matthew 27:59-60**

After His resurrection, we see that He invited the disciples to touch His body to prove that He still had a human body, even though He had been resurrected:

³⁸And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. – **Luke 24:38-39**

Throughout His life on Earth, He displayed all the signs of being human.

He became **hungry**:

²And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an **hungred**. – **Matthew 4:2**

He became **tired**:

⁶Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being **wearied** with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. – **John 4:6**

He **slept**:

²²Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. ²³But as they sailed, he fell **asleep**: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. – **Luke 8:22-23**

He **wept**:

³⁴And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. ³⁵Jesus **wept**. – **John 11:34-35**

He suffered **agony**:

⁴⁴And being in an **agony** he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. – **Luke 22:44**

He became **thirsty**:

²⁸After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I **thirst**. – **John 19:28**

He was **wounded**:

²⁴But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger **into the print of the nails**, and thrust my hand **into his side**, I will not believe.

²⁶And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

²⁷Then saith he to Thomas, **Reach hither thy finger**, and **behold my hands**; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it **into my side**: and be not faithless, but believing.

And ²⁸Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. ²⁹Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. – **John 20:24-29**

We quote the entire event here because the **blood** is significant. The holes represents the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no sacrifice. For more on this, see the article elsewhere on the website that states we are saved only by the blood of Jesus Christ, nothing else.

We see something else here: Thomas said that he will not believe unless he was able to do two things:

1. put his fingers into the holes where the nails had pierced through; and
2. put his hand into the wound where the spear had pierced through.

Jesus was not present when Thomas said this and there is no proof that the disciples revealed Thomas' wish to Him. Yet, when Jesus appeared and immediately addressed Thomas to do exactly what he told the disciples he would want to do before he believed. This shows the divine aspect of His omniscience. Jesus knew in advance what Thomas' desire was, and He granted him this. The purpose was to change this barely believing disciple into a true follower. This must surely stand out as one of the most moving events recorded in the Bible.

When Jesus tells Thomas not to be faithless, but believe, and that he was fortunate to witness these events, we immediately think of what the writer to the Hebrews tells them:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. –
Hebrews 11:1

He **died**:

³⁰When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and **gave up the ghost**. – **John 19:30**

He **bled**:

³⁴But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out **blood** and water. – **John 19:34**

He **ate** food:

⁴¹And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? ⁴²And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and **did eat** before them. – **Luke 24:41-42**

and He allowed Himself to be **touched**:

²⁷Then saith he to Thomas, **Reach hither thy finger**, and behold my hands; and **reach hither thy hand**, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. – **John 20:27**

Throughout the New Testament He is referred to as a **man**. The Jews even tried, although unsuccessfully, to assign an age to Him:

⁵⁷Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art **not yet fifty years old**, and hast thou seen Abraham? – **John 8:57**

As a man, He associated with both men and women, sometimes not observing strict Jewish laws:

⁴Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. – **John 4:9**

Even now in heaven, He exists as a **man**:

⁵For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the **man** Christ Jesus; – **1 Timothy 2:5**

who will come again to **judge the world**:

³¹Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will **judge the world** in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. – **Acts 17:31**

and then **rule as King**:

²⁷For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. ²⁸Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the **Son of man coming in his kingdom**. – **Matthew 16:27-28**

This makes us wonder to what extent he was God when most of the examples above show the same limitations that we as humans have every day. The Bible is clear that despite his humiliation, he did not lose His deity. This would then seem to indicate that He was caught up in two worlds that are ultimately not reconciled. We have to note that He did not reconcile with a human person but with the **nature** of a human being. He was aware of his deity but chose not to always be both.

He is **omniscient**, yet as a young boy, He **increased** in the knowledge of the Scriptures:

⁴⁰And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. – **Luke 2:40**

He is **omnipotent**, but was tired and **weak** when He carried His cross, so much so that Simon of Cyrene had to carry it for Him:

³²And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. – **Matthew 27:32**

CONCLUSION

His deity comes to the fore when we see that He was absolutely holy; displayed genuine love; was humble; meek; perfectly balanced in His outlook towards life; lived a life of prayer; and was a continuous worker. His life on Earth gave us a perfect example of who He was and what He came to achieve. In the next part we will look at His death and the implication this had for all of mankind.

Bibliography

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.