

The Humanity of the Risen Christ

Hebrews 2:18, 4:14-16

I'm one of those persons who – generally speaking – doesn't have a problem asking people for help. I'm aware that some people have a hard time asking for help, but for some reason I usually don't. This is especially true when I know two things: first, when I know that the person is willing to help me, and second, when I know that the person is able to help me. If somebody is willing and able I'll ask them to do almost anything.

A couple of months ago I needed to get just east of Topeka to pick up some hard maple I'd ordered. I needed to borrow a pickup truck. I didn't ask a stranger in the parking lot at Home Depot, "Hey, I notice you've got a pick-up truck there . . . how about we take a quick trip over to Topeka?" He would have been able to help but probably not willing. And I didn't ask my friends without trucks to help out. Rather, I called a friend who had offered to let me use his truck in the past; he was able and very willing to help me out.

I'm always in need of something, so I'm always asking willing and able people to help me out. "Brian, can I borrow \$4 to go get into my son's basketball game?" I recently asked my brother Tommy, "If we make it out to Boston this summer, can we mooch off of you for a week?" It's great knowing people who are willing and able to help out.

But there are some occasions when nobody else in this world can help me. Even if they're willing, they're not able. Sometimes I face things internally – whether fears or temptations or weaknesses – that require more than the most willing person can give. I need someone who is not only *willing* but *able* to address the deepest needs of my heart.

I suspect that you would say the same thing. Close friends and family are great, but there are some needs that even they cannot meet. Some needs are so deep that we don't understand them ourselves, much less another person.

On this Easter morning we are going to discuss how the Risen Christ is both willing and able to meet the deepest needs of the human heart. He is uniquely qualified to do this because of His humanity. As we'll see from Hebrews 2 and 4, because of His humanity Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and temptations and give us exactly what we need at the right time.

Last week Brian taught from Hebrews 2. We saw that it was essential that Jesus become "fully human" in order to pay for the sin of humanity. He didn't become an angel to die for the sins of fallen angels; He became a man to die for the sins of humanity. And so the humanity of Jesus qualified Him to die on the cross as payment for our sins.

Today we are going to see that Jesus' humanity also qualifies Him to lead us through this life. Jesus not only died as a human; He lived as a human. The book of Hebrews emphasizes that

Jesus' human experience in this world in some way enhanced His ability to identify with us in the midst of our struggles in this life. Today on Easter, let's consider the importance of the humanity of Christ in His ongoing ministry as our resurrected Lord.

Jesus' humanity uniquely qualifies Him to help us in time of need. (Heb. 2:17-18, 4:14-16)

Hebrews 2:17 reads:

17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

As Brian explained last week, Jesus ***had*** to become one of us in order to become a merciful and faithful high priest. The high priest represented the people before God, offering prayers and bringing sacrifices. In the old covenant, the high priest brought animal sacrifices for the people. Lambs and goats and bulls had to be offered year after year because such animals couldn't pay for the sins of the ***humans*** in a permanent way; they could only atone for sin temporarily. By contrast, in the new covenant Jesus as our high priest sacrificed Himself. His sacrifice paid for our sin once and for all because He was sinless and ***fully human***. He was the human sacrifice for human sin.

But notice that the author of Hebrews said that "He had to be made like His brethren ***in all things***." As we'll see in chapter 4, the only exception is sin; Jesus was like us in every respect with the single exception of sin. Jesus did more than merely take on a human body. Jesus was made like us in all things: He took on humanity in all its fullness.

Quite honestly, we have a hard time believing this. We tend to think of Jesus as superhuman, not a human who like us "in all things." This idea has even crept into songs that we sing. In the Christmas carol, *Away in a Manger*, there's the line, "The cattle are lowing the baby awakes, the little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes." I know it's just a song, but you might be left with the impression that Jesus was such a perfect baby that He didn't cry when the cows woke Him up.

The gospels depict Jesus as someone who experienced human life the way ordinary people do. Luke 2 tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." Jesus grew in wisdom; as He experienced life He grew wiser. He was never foolish, of course, but He grew in wisdom. We're told in Hebrews 5:8 that Jesus "learned obedience" through the things He suffered. He was never disobedient, of course, but His obedience deepened as He went through life. We are told in the gospels that Jesus was tired, hungry, and thirsty – all human experiences. Jesus wept over the death of a friend. And here in verse 18 we are told that Jesus – like us – was tempted.

18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

This is a rather amazing thing to ponder: Jesus Christ was actually tempted during His earthly life. Temptation is not sin. Sin is saying “yes” to temptation. Temptation is the offer of sin. Again, if you don’t really believe that Jesus was fully human, you might think, “He wasn’t really tempted like we are . . . temptation was like a gnat that He just flicked away with no effort. Since He was God in the flesh, sinning wasn’t a live option for Him.” Well, that may be a logical inference in some sense, but that’s not the impression we get from the gospels. We aren’t given a psychological analysis of what Jesus was experiencing, but we are left with the impression that He agonized over situations that He faced and that He wrestled with the temptations He faced. His temptations were real – just like ours.

The emphasis here is that since Jesus was tempted (past tense) during His earthly life, He is able to come alongside those who are *being* tempted (present tense). In other words, the help that Jesus offers isn’t merely “book knowledge” or hearsay; it is knowledge borne of personal experience. Before Jesus lived in this world as a man, He didn’t have this type of experiential knowledge of our temptations. This doesn’t mean that before becoming a man Jesus was in any way deficient or lacking; it’s not that He had no idea what we go through before the incarnation. It simply means that experiential knowledge is only gained by experience.

Jesus brings His experience of humanity to bear when we come to Him for help. It’s a staggering thing to realize that Jesus didn’t merely experience humanity for 33 years and then return to His pre-incarnate existence. Rather, Jesus maintains an exalted humanity for all of eternity. Jesus’ humanity is different from ours in that He was raised bodily from the dead; He is now experiencing perfected humanity. But He is fully God and fully human for all time. Jesus maintains His humanity for eternity. Charles Hodge put it well: “The supreme ruler of the universe is a perfect man as well as a perfect God.” We have “the advantage of God still clothed in human nature.” [For more on the continuing humanity of Christ, see Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, pp. 542-3, “Jesus Will Be a Man Forever”.)

Let’s see what Hebrews 4:14-16 adds to our understanding. Here the author of Hebrews encourages those who are wavering or doubting to continue to cling to their faith in Jesus.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest
who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things
as we are, yet without sin.

What you think about it, just having someone who can sympathize with our weaknesses isn’t enough. Prisons are full of people who could sympathize with every weakness imaginable; but you wouldn’t necessarily go there for wise counsel and help. You not only want someone who can sympathize with you; you also want someone who has wisely negotiated the situation you’re dealing with. You want someone who has lived that aspect of his/her life *well*.

Jesus can not only sympathize with our weaknesses because He was fully human; He also negotiated all the temptations of His life successfully (without sinning). This makes Jesus uniquely qualified to help us in time of need. He is not only willing . . . He is able. Notice how verse 16 puts it:

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Drawing near to “the throne of grace” means drawing near to God Himself. God is a King who operates exclusively through grace. You can’t buy His services; you cannot earn His services; you can’t barter for His services. God operates exclusively through grace, meaning that He gives things away to people who don’t deserve it.

The book of Hebrews emphasizes that a person can have this confidence to approach God and His throne of grace because of Jesus’ sacrifice. Those who accept Jesus’ sacrifice for their sin can enter in with confidence – not on the basis of what they’ve done, but on the basis of what Jesus has done. Earlier Melissa described how 10 years ago she accepted Jesus sacrifice for her sin and received forgiveness and this full access to God Himself.

The author of Hebrews is telling us that since Jesus is there in the presence of God at His throne of grace, we should draw near with confidence “so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Again, in some way Jesus’ humanity makes Him uniquely qualified to help us in time of need. He can sympathize with our weakness and He gladly gives us the help we need.

Consider this example of human weakness: we all have a limited amount of time and energy; we can’t do it all. We often find ourselves staring at an overwhelming list of responsibilities and obligations. I recently found myself overwhelmed with personal, work, and family responsibilities:

- phone calls to make, emails to return, writing projects, a couple of unresolved relational issues to address, several reference letters to write, appointments to keep, committee/board meetings to attend, decisions to make on a couple of issues
- night meetings and activities to attend
- unfinished projects around the house

Of course there are ongoing family responsibilities and relationships that need time and energy. There are friendships that shouldn’t be neglected. The list goes on and on.

What’s so remarkable about my list is that it’s so unremarkable. Most of you have lists that are just as long and oppressive or more so. Some people become overwhelmed by all these responsibilities – to the point of being paralyzed. Others shift into high gear and redouble their efforts. Either way, the tendency is to think, “If I don’t do everything on my list and meet the expectations of everyone in my life, I’ll be a failure. I need to be superhuman. I need more energy and more efficiency than any human being has ever possessed.”

Jesus faced this same thing. He knows exactly what we're going through. Mark 1 describes an especially hectic day in Jesus' life (in Capernaum). Jesus ran hard from morning to night teaching, healing, and casting out demons. Early the next morning Jesus went to a secluded place to pray. Peter and the others searched for and found Jesus, interrupted His time alone to tell Him that people were looking for Him. But Jesus didn't go back to Capernaum; He sensed that God wanted Him to go to "towns nearby." It is very instructive that Jesus left needs and expectations unmet in Capernaum. As a man on earth, Jesus had limitations on the number of people He could talk with and heal. Jesus often didn't meet others' expectations. On one occasion, the people tried to make Him a king! But Jesus would have none of it. Jesus had a sense of what God wanted Him to do and what He wanted Him to leave undone.

Jesus understands our hectic pace of life. And if we ask, He will help us live within our human limitations. Jesus will teach us how to live in this world as human beings; He can teach us how to let go of the desire to be omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent (i.e., the desire to be God). Jesus can teach us how to be content with our human limitations. He lived within such limitations and perfectly fulfilled the will of God for His life. Jesus can teach us to invest ourselves fully in the things God *does* want us to do. He can teach us how to sacrifice and give and serve without fear of failure and with confidence that He'll give us everything we need. And He can teach us how to let go of the unrealistic expectations that others put on us; He can help us entrust people and needs to God that we can't meet. In short, Jesus is uniquely qualified to help us fulfill God's purposes for our lives in this world – no more and no less.

That's just one example. Remember that Jesus understands *all* our temptations and weaknesses. Look again at verse 15:

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

We don't have a record of Jesus experiencing every individual temptation that we might face – whether it be lust, greed, sloth, or pride. But Jesus certainly experienced the essence of every temptation we face: taking the easy path instead of paying the price to do the will of God. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus was actually the "pioneer" of our faith. He blazed the trail for us, showing us what it looks like to have faith in this world. And He found that when He perfectly obeyed the will of God, it led to joy. He wants to lead us into that same experience of the joy of obedience to the Father's will.

What are your temptations? What are the weaknesses and limitations that you face in your life? Jesus can sympathize and even empathize with what you are facing. The risen Christ is uniquely qualified to come to help you in your time of need. He is both willing and able.

Perhaps you are here today and have never put their faith in Jesus Christ saying, "I accept Your payment for my sin. I believe that when You died on the cross, You took the punishment that I

deserved.” The thing that I want you to know is that if you trust in Jesus in this way you will enter into an ongoing relationship with God. Not only will all of your sins – past, present, and future – be wiped away. You will now begin to experience the ongoing empathy and help that only Jesus can give. Where else are you going to find someone like that?

It’s not like a loan for which you have to qualify . . . you don’t have to prove that you’re good enough to receive all these benefits from Jesus. Quite the opposite: the only thing you have to do is admit that you could never qualify and that you could never be good enough on your own to deserve what Jesus is offering. God is offering this gift to everyone who will receive it. Salvation is through faith – which means that we accept it, trusting solely in what Jesus has done on the cross. When we receive the gift of salvation by faith, we enter into this amazing relationship with God in which Jesus says, “I not only became a man to die for you. I experienced everything you experience and can empathize with you. I will help you in your time of need so that you too can please God with your life.”