

He is Different

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight we are continuing our study that's called Flesh and Blood Jesus.

And in this series we've been reminded that not only is Jesus God the Son, he is also the perfect human. In Jesus we see the glory of God revealed, but we also see everything that humanity is meant to be.

Our title tonight is He is Different and we can read again from Luke chapter 9 at verse 28.

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray and as he was praying the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white.

This passage as I'm sure many of you know is known as the transfiguration, an astonishing moment when Jesus' appearance changed, when Moses and Elijah appeared alongside him, when the cloud of God's glory overshadowed them and when the Father spoke from heaven and his voice was heard.

[1 : 17] And in many ways this moment makes us think of the fact that Jesus is God. It shows us his divinity and it's right for us to think about that.

Peter, James and John saw the glory of God radiating from Jesus' face. And I think if any of us had been standing on that mountain with them I don't think any of us would have been left with any doubt at all that Jesus is God the Son.

But having said that, it's crucial that we remember that even in the heavenly splendour of this moment Jesus does not stop being human.

On the mount of transfiguration he is still flesh and blood. And that's what I want us to think about a little bit tonight and we're going to just ask three simple questions.

What does this teach us about Jesus? What does it teach us about humanity? And what difference does it make for us? So first question there, what does this teach us about Jesus?

[2 : 32] Well there's so much that we could say looking at this passage. But I want to briefly focus on three key words or concepts that I think are highlighted here.

Each of these three reveal a key aspect of who Jesus is and in each of them there are very strong connections to the Old Testament that I hope that we'll be able to see.

So the first three key concepts is holiness. Now holiness basically means to be set apart and it's very much linked to the idea of purity.

So the opposite of holiness is to be profane, unclean or even just common to be holy is to be set apart, unique, undefiled and pure.

And throughout these verses there is a profound sense of holiness. The appearance of Jesus' face changes, his clothing becomes dazzling.

[3 : 35] In verse 31 and 32 speak of his glory and then in verse 34 you have the cloud descending upon this mountain and all of this is powerfully echoing the Old Testament.

If you think back to some of the key events in the Old Testament, when the Israelites left Egypt it says that the Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way.

Then when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments it says, the Lord said to Moses, behold I'm coming to you in a thick cloud. And then later in the Old Testament when the temple was completed we have the verses that we read at the beginning that when the priests came out of the holy place a cloud filled the house of the Lord.

So the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud because the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. In the Old Testament the cloud indicated that they were in the presence of the holy God.

And that same awesome holiness is here on this mountain as well. The disciples were dazzled, they were afraid, they were overwhelmed.

[5 : 04] Second key term is righteousness. Now when you hear that word righteousness you should be thinking of God's standard. If you imagine if you could have a graph setting out God's standards, righteousness just sets everything at the highest standard.

God's standard is just at the highest level. Righteousness is the standard that God expects and that applies to everything.

Attitude, conduct, morality, duty, obedience to be righteous is to conform to the standard that God sets. And that's emphasized throughout the Old Testament here's an example, a very clear example from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 25.

It will be righteousness for us if we're careful to do all this commandment before the Lord or God as he has commanded us. It's basically saying that to be righteous is to be all that God expects of us. And of course that means that righteousness is very closely connected to God's law. It's the law that tells us what is righteous and what isn't, the law reveals God's standard.

[6 : 20] And in the Old Testament there's one person who is particularly closely connected to the law and that of course is Moses.

And he of course is the one who appears at the top of this mountain alongside Jesus. When God revealed the law to Moses it was at the top of a mountain as you may remember.

He came and appeared in that cloud and there he gave Moses the Ten Commandments. And Jesus as he has said earlier in his ministry, he has come to fulfill that law.

And when we say that Jesus was without sin which is what we've emphasized several times in this series that's exactly what we mean. That he never failed to conform to God's righteous standard. But the link between the transfiguration and the law and Moses is made even stronger by a hidden clue that we have here in verse 31.

[7 : 35] Because it says here behold two men were talking with Moses and Elijah who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure. Now that word there is a hidden clue because literally in the original language that is the word Exodus which of course is pointing us very very powerfully back to what happened with Moses.

And I think what that tells us is that the Exodus in the Old Testament is pointing us towards what Jesus has come to do on the cross.

Jesus is going to accomplish that Exodus in Jerusalem. He's going to redeem his people from slavery and he's going to lead them into a new life of freedom.

All of this is emphasizing that Jesus has come to fulfill what the Old Testament is pointing towards. In other words he is going to reach that righteous standard that God expects.

And then the third key concept is knowledge. So knowledge in the Bible I think refers to two key things.

[8 : 53] At one level it refers to the fact that we are rational reasoning beings. So when we think of knowledge we think of reason or rationality.

The fact that we can understand things, the fact that we can learn and we can thus grow in our knowledge. And that's what we tend to think of when we think of knowledge. We think of learning stuff.

But knowledge in the Bible also refers not just to reason but also to relationship. And that's an immensely important thing to remember.

When the Bible talks about knowledge it's talking about it also is referring to being in a relationship someone where you know them, you speak to them, you listen to them and you grow closer.

In fact this is the language that the Bible uses to describe the most intimate of relationships. And the two things, both reason and relationship are being emphasised in Luke 9.

[9 : 53] There's an emphasis on understanding because the voice from heaven tells us to listen to Jesus. But behind that lies a deep relationship.

The voice also says this is my son. And of course the starting point for this whole event is the fact that Jesus has gone up on this mountain to pray.

And that knowledge is again reinforced by the second Old Testament figure that we see. And that's Elijah.

Elijah was a prophet so he spoke God's word to the people. And by listening to him people could grow in their knowledge of God.

But at the heart of Elijah's message wasn't just intellectual knowledge. There was also a call to the people to return to their relationship with God.

[10:50] In the days when Elijah lived the people had been very unfaithful to God and he was calling them to repent. And the key moment when he did that was at the top of Mount Carmel when he confronted the false prophets.

And again all of this is pointing us forward to what Jesus has come to do. Jesus is the greatest prophet of all. He is speaking the word of God.

But his message is a call to repentance, a call to return to relationship with God. So on the mount of transfiguration these three things are being emphasized.

Holiness, righteousness and knowledge.

Now in many ways these are great divine qualities, aren't they?

[11:55] God is holy, God is righteous and God is the ultimate ground and source of all knowledge. And so as we said at the start the transfiguration is leaving us in no doubt at all that Jesus is the Son of God.

Of everyone who has ever lived, Jesus is different. But that possibly leaves you all thinking well okay but what does that have to do with us?

Well that takes us to the second question. What does this teach us about humanity? Well you might be thinking well not very much because it all seems so heavenly and divine and if anything the only lesson about humanity seems to be in terms of inadequacy because Peter, James and John don't really know what to do or say.

But what I want us to see is that the transfiguration is teaching us something about humanity. It's teaching us something incredibly important. And the key to recognizing that is to remember that at this moment Jesus is still flesh and blood.

And the point I want to emphasize is that when we see these three words holiness, righteousness and knowledge, Jesus doesn't have those things just because he is divine.

[13:30] He also has them because he is the perfect flesh and blood human. How do we know that?

Well if you ask the question what is a human, the fundamental biblical answer to that question is that a human is the image of God.

But what does that actually mean? Well at this point I want to refer you all to the shorter catechism. The shorter catechism is a list of 107 questions and answers to do with the Bible and Christianity. And it's a really helpful resource because it gives us a very, very helpful summary of some of the key questions and key issues that we need to face.

So question 10 of the shorter catechism asks how did God create man, or today we would tend to say how did God create humanity?

[14:32] And here's the answer. God created man, male and female, after his own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness with dominion over the creature.

Did you see what that's saying? It's saying that the three key ways in which humanity bears the image of God is in terms of holiness, righteousness and knowledge.

The transfiguration isn't just telling us that Jesus is divine. It's telling us that he is the perfect human, the perfect image of God.

And I think that's crucial for us because it means that on this mountaintop we don't just get a glimpse into heaven, we get a clearer view of what it means to be human.

At the heart of our humanity there should be holiness, righteousness and knowledge. All of this is showing us that God and humanity belong together.

[15:54] And I think that's such an important thing for us to remember because sometimes we can think that God and humanity are almost like polar opposites. And of course it's true that God and humanity are not identical and there's a sense in which God is utterly beyond us.

But that does not mean that God and humanity are complete opposites and they are therefore incompatible. That's not true at all.

The truth is humanity is like God. We reflect God. We're similar to Him. We bear His image.

And I think one of the simplest ways to try and think about that is just to think of a photo. You are at the top of a Monroe on a beautiful day and you take a photo. That photo is the image of the majestic scene that's in front of you.

And you can show that photo to other people and they can look at it while it's not quite the same as standing on the top of a Monroe. It does give you a glimpse of what it is like to be at the summit of that hill.

[17:00] It's the same with humanity. You should be able to look at a human and there you see something of what God is actually like. And of course, there's no one of whom that is more true than of Jesus.

As the perfect human, he is the perfect image of God. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

It's all reminding us that God and humanity belong together. And it's really important to think about that because it's raising an incredibly important point because it's showing us that if we think that we can be human without God, then we are making a huge mistake.

So a lot of people think that we can eliminate God from our lives and still be perfectly human. But it's not true. When we abandon holiness, righteousness and knowledge, we don't just rebel against God, we actually compromise our humanity.

But that is exactly what we've done. And we have traded our holiness, our righteousness and our knowledge for counterfeits.

[18:25] So we have traded holiness for individualism. So instead of a humanity being a united community, one that's set apart with a unique specialness, one that stands out from the rest of creation, our individualism means that we've become a very divided and hostile entity where each individual is competing for specialness.

And that individualism means that instead of saying we are unique as a humanity, we cry, I am unique. And therefore my expectations need to be met.

And we've replaced the holiness of the whole with the sacredness of the self. And the consequence of that is that instead of humanity collectively reflecting the beauty and purity of God, we now have conflicting and competing ideas of what beauty and purity really are.

And the result is very messy. One of the ways to maybe think about that is to imagine a big orchestra. So in an orchestra, you have a single conductor, an amazingly diverse set of musicians and a single piece of music that brings everything together in wonderful harmony.

But if every musician wants to be their own conductor, or if everyone wants to be the soloist and if each musician corrupts the music in front of them according to their own ideas, the result is not beautiful.

[19:57] It's a derby chaotic mess. In an orchestra, each individual is crucial, but individualism is destructive and exactly the same is true of humanity.

We've also traded righteousness for mediocrity. We've been saying that righteousness is God's standard, the highest standards of all.

But we have dismissed those standards and we've replaced them with our own. But the key point is that our standards are far too low. We have replaced righteousness with mediocrity.

The result is that we are perfectly willing to accept things that in reality are nowhere near good enough for humanity.

So for example, we live on a planet with abundant resources. But we don't seem to mind too much about the fact that half of humanity lives in poverty with barely enough to eat.

[21:11] Even though humanity is made for community, even though we all know how much we need family and friends, we just accept the fact that even in our most populated cities, thousands of people live in horrible isolation.

We're quite happy to sit in front of a screen and be entertained by the gifts of others without even thinking about how we might display and develop the gifts that we have ourselves. We think a good weekend is one where we forget about our problems rather than one where we actually address them.

We think nice house, nice job, nice family, a good life of about 80 years is pretty much as good as it gets. We think that possessions are the primary goal, that sex is the highest pleasure, that money is the ultimate dream, and that if we get these, then we've made it.

But in the name of God, we need to recognise that you are made for far higher standards than that. You're made to bear God's image, to be a stunning, dazzling display of the goodness, wisdom, creativity, wonder and beauty of God Himself.

[22 : 29] And so to go back to the illustration of the orchestra, often we find ourselves thinking, oh, well, if I could just be a member of the audience, then that would be great. When all the time God is standing at the conductor's podium looking over at you saying, what on earth are you doing over there?

You belong right here in the orchestra because you are made to be part of this. But whether it's in our friendships, our relationships, our work, our availability to help others, the fact that we are willing to replace righteousness with mediocrity means that we are falling way short of realising just what humanity has created to be.

So we've traded holiness for individualism, we've traded righteousness for mediocrity, and we've also traded knowledge for assumptions.

So one of the key things that makes humanity unique is that we're capable of receiving, understanding and articulating the truth. That's why it's humanity and not the animal realm that's made scientific discoveries.

So we're the ones who learned that the earth goes round the sun. That's why it's humanity that makes moral judgments. We're the ones who have a criminal justice system.

[23 : 52] That's why it's humanity that appreciates beauty. We're the ones with theatres, art galleries and concert halls. We have the capability of learning and appreciating the truth.

But all too often we have traded that knowledge for assumptions. So in terms of life, humanity today has, well certainly in the western world, humanity has made the massive assumption that death is the end.

In terms of others, we make assumptions about people all the time. So we decide if we like someone or not on the basis of their ideologies or their political views or their sexual ethics or their race.

Long before we ever get to know people, we make judgmental assumptions about them. And we even make assumptions about ourselves, sometimes positively.

So sometimes we assume that we're always right, always noble and that our conscience is clear. But probably more frequently we look in the mirror and we make negative assumptions.

[25 : 07] We see ourselves as someone who's ugly, worthless and a waste of space. And all the time God is saying you are not made for assumptions.

You are made for knowledge. You are made to know the truth. But our willingness to trade knowledge for assumptions means that today when it comes to the biggest questions of life, far too many people are quite happy to just shrug their shoulders and say, I don't know.

In an orchestra, you don't sit before the conductor and make assumptions. You accurately learn and follow the music in front of you. And if you think of God's word as a musical score, one of the great truths of the musical score of God's word is telling you is that you are so not a waste of space. And the key point I want to highlight is that all of these counterfeits are destructive. Each one of them, I should have drawn my line there.

They're the good ones. The counterfeits over here. These are the ones. These are all destructive. So individualism makes us competitive, hostile, aggressive and it leads humanity into war.

[26 : 33] Humanity makes us numb to suffering and it makes us tolerant of things that really aren't right. And assumptions leave us walking blindly down a road that leads to hell.

All of this is why humanity without God is a humanity that is gradually destroying itself. And I think that we can prove that all of this is the case by looking at the richest man in the world who I think at the moment or certainly as of a month ago was Elon Musk.

Elon Musk, as many of you may be seen in the news, owned Tesla, cars and SpaceX and numerous other things. And he became the richest man in the world earlier this year.

And I saw this really interesting tweet from him. If you can see, let me just turn the screen around so you can see it more clearly. There it is. Here he is talking about his money and all 200 or a billion of it or whatever it is.

He says, about half my money is intended to help problems on Earth and have to help establish a self-sustaining city on Mars to ensure continuation of life of all species in case Earth gets hit by a meteor like the dinosaurs or World War III happens and we destroy ourselves.

[27 : 54] So half of his money is to solve problems that we have either created or exacerbated on Earth.

And the other half is in case we destroy ourselves. The richest man in the world is well aware that humanity is at risk of self-destruction.

And it all comes down to the fact that we've forgotten the fact that we are made to be the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

So to go back to the orchestra illustration, we're not made to be our own conductor of our own little solo orchestra. We're not made to watch from a distance and we're not made to guess what the music should be, we are made to play beautiful harmonious music to the very highest standard. So when we see Jesus on this mountain, we see that he is holy, that he is so special, so beautiful, so glorious.

[29 : 09] We see that he is righteous. He's going to accomplish all that God wants him to. He's never going to compromise on God's standard. He's going to achieve amazing things. And we see that Jesus has true knowledge.

He is the source of truth. He is the one who has this beautiful relationship with his father. But the incredible truth is that Jesus is not just showing us what God is like.

He's showing us that we are made to be like that as well. In a world where humanity has lost its identity, Jesus is different.

Last question, I can't quite see it there. Last question is, what difference does it make for us? Passages like this and sermons like this can, I think, simultaneously be inspiring and depressing. We can be really inspired as our minds are stretched to think about Jesus in all the glory of his divinity and in the fullness of his humanity.

[30 : 18] But we can just as easily be depressed and discouraged when we see how far humanity has fallen. And all this can seem like a great ideal, but it seems a long way from reality.

So we can marvel at Jesus and say he is so different. But at the same time, we look at ourselves and we look at our world with sadness and we see a wish it was different.

And maybe that's exactly how you feel. Maybe you look at your flesh and blood life and your long or something different.

Maybe you look at all the corruption, exploitation and horribleness and sin in the world and think, I wish it was different.

It's no wonder you feel like that because that longing is a longing for holiness. Maybe you look at the injustices in the world.

[31 : 20] Maybe your life feels unfair. Maybe you feel like you've never reached your potential and you think, I wish it was different. That longing is a longing for righteousness.

And maybe you look at fake news and broken promises and all the confusion in the world around us and in our own hearts and think, I wish it was different. That longing is a longing for knowledge.

And you might be thinking, well, maybe Jesus is different, but what difference does that make for me?

Well, the amazing truth of the gospel is that Jesus hasn't just come to show us that he is different. He's come to transform us into something different as well. And this is where I hope we can see where it all comes together because here in this passage, Jesus is standing at the top of this mountain.

[32 : 23] And on that mountain, he's showing us what humanity is created to be. And so in many ways, the Mount of Transfiguration is kind of a culmination of many mountaintop moments in scripture.

All the way back in Eden, humanity was created. And Eden, one thing, we don't know exactly where Eden was, but one thing we do know about Eden was that it must have been at the top of a hill because a river flowed out of it.

And in Eden, humanity was created in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. But as we've seen in our morning services recently in Genesis 3, we fell from that.

But throughout the narrative of the Old Testament, there are various mountaintop moments. You've got Sinai with Moses when the law was given. You've got Mount Carmel with Elijah where people were called back into our relationship with God.

And then we come to this mountain of Transfiguration where we see Jesus in the fullness of his glory and humanity.

[33 : 37] And we could easily think, you know, all that's in the Old Testament is pointing forwards to Jesus here at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration. We see Jesus in all his glory and we can

just stand over here and we just admire him from a distance.

But the amazing thing is that the Bible is not saying to you that you should admire him. The Bible is saying, join him.

And what we are seeing is that here at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, we're not just seeing that Jesus is a wonderful human. We're seeing that Jesus has come to create a wonderful new humanity.

And the message of the Gospel is not, oh, stand and admire him and watch him. The message of the Gospel is join him and be part of that humanity as well.

That means that Jesus is not the ideal that we admire. He's the pioneer that we follow. In other words, he's calling us into a new humanity, into a humanity of holiness where we are part of something incredibly special where every individual is a precious part of the beautiful whole.

[35 : 02] He's calling us into a new humanity of righteousness where everyone matters, where standards are high, where great things are achieved. And he's calling us into a humanity of knowledge where we find knowledge that we can rely on and where we meet the God who we can always, always trust.

The Mount of Transfiguration is showing us that Jesus is offering us all a new future, a future where we can be part of a new humanity that's been restored by God, a humanity of holiness, righteousness and knowledge.

And at one level, that future lies in eternity when the new humanity will be in the new creation where we will be conformed to the image of God the Son.

That new creation will be our holy city, a place where righteousness dwells, where we will know God fully just as we are fully known ourselves, but we must never forget that that future actually starts now.

If you are a Christian, or if you become one, then you are part of that new humanity tomorrow morning. So what does holiness look like tomorrow morning?

[36 : 15] Well, holiness in a Monday morning is being ready to be different, to stand out from all the harshness, cruelty and selfishness of our individualistic world.

What does righteousness look like? Righteousness on a Monday morning means never settling for mediocrity. Instead, by God's grace, you give your best, your best friendship, your best words, your best tone, your best attitude.

What does knowledge look like tomorrow? Knowledge on a Monday morning means going into every situation knowing that Jesus is with you, that he's given you a firm truth on which to build your life, and he's given you a wonderful message to share with others.

The Mount of Transfiguration is absolutely amazing because it shows us that Jesus is different, and it shows us that Jesus has come to make us different as well.

And in many ways, you would think that this Mount of Transfiguration, you'd think that it would be the main focal point of the Christian faith, because this is where we see how great Jesus is.

[37 : 23] We could easily think that Christianity is all about admiring Jesus and trying to reach his level. And many of the world's religions are like that.

They present us with an individual in all his greatness and say, you need to be like that, but yet again, Jesus is different.

Because although the Transfiguration is showing us where Jesus will take you, it is not where Jesus will meet you.

Because Jesus is not waiting at the top of this mountain as though you need to climb up to his level in order to match up to him.

The place where Jesus will meet you is not at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration. The place where Jesus will meet you is at the cross.

[38 : 26] And at that meeting place, all you need to bring is your empty house. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are so different and that you show us everything that humanity has created to be. We thank you that you have come not just to show us that you're different, but you've come to make things so different for us as well.

And we thank you for that so, so much and ask and pray that in every way you would lead us closer to you, that we would know you and love you more, and that we would be different tomorrow morning and every day of our lives, that we would be all that you have created us to be.

Please lead us in your ways and may we be filled more and more with knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Amen. Amen.