

Romans 1:1-7

If you have spent much time around a little child you have probably heard the question “why?” several thousand times. Well, Paul invites us today, in his letter to the Romans, to meditate on two facts: Jesus is true man and he is also true God. And I think it is fitting to meditate on why that needed to be the case.

Why did Jesus have to be true man? To this we turn to, not a little child, but the Church father Gregory of Nazianzus who says, “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed.” Jesus became man, precisely because he came to save mankind. Not an angel to save fallen angels. He became man, the last and final of God’s creations, the ones he longed to be with him forever. And since we pushed him away, he could have wiped us out, but no, he comes to us, into a broken creation. That we might be his once more. “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed.” It’s so beautiful it should be on our Christmas cards.

We see this in 1 Corinthians 15: For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Hebrews 2:16 and 17 - For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every

respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

He is true man, because he is taking your, human, place and in so doing becomes the perfect one you can go to with every trouble and worry.

Which is also why this is more than just some nerdy, dogmatic, doctrinal exercise.

Let us remember, doctrine matters. It's the very reason Paul is sending this letter to Rome and it is for this reason he says, "[His] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh." Are you not flesh and blood? Do you not have a heart beating in your chest? Do you not wonder, how, ever could it beat again after it is cold and lifeless and decomposed? How could something like me, just an overgrown bag of molecules, ever have existential value, ever be loveable, ever be redeemed, ever be raised up, ever conquer time and death? Look to Jesus. Flesh and blood just like you. Risen, reigning, victorious, gracious, and loving. Jesus, true man, for you.

Or, as Ignatius of Antioch might put it: Therefore be deaf whenever someone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who is of the line of David, who is of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, truly suffered under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died, while those in heaven and on the earth and under the earth witnessed it, who also truly was raised from the dead ... but if, as certain atheists,

that is, unbelievers, say He only appeared to suffer – they themselves only appear to be! – why am I a prisoner? Why indeed do I pray to fight with the beasts? If so, I would be dying for no reason – what’s more I would then be lying about the Lord.” Ignatius finds hope in the face of death in a real flesh and blood Savior. Real flesh and blood, real pain, real death – but overcome and victorious, just like you will be.

Which perhaps is a good segue, since we cannot conquer death on our own, to Paul’s next point. As Paul and the scriptures make clear, Jesus is not just true man. He is also true God. Paul writes: “[He] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” But why?

We turn now, to the church father, yes, father: Hillary of Poitiers: “If the evidence of God’s love is this, that he bestowed a creature upon creatures, gave a worldly being on the world’s behalf, granted one raised up from nothing for the redemption of objects equally raised up from nothing, this cheap and petty sacrifice is a poor assurance of His favor toward us. Gifts of price are the evidence of affection, the greatness of the surrender of the greatness of the love. God, who loved the world, gave not an adopted Son, but His own, His Only-begotten. Here is personal interest, true Sonship, sincerity; not a creation or adoption or pretense. Herein is the proof of his love and affection, that He gave His own, His Only-begotten Son.”

Do you see his point? “Oh hey, what’s that, oh there is a little dust up on earth, lets send the intern down to deal with it?” Is that what God thinks of us? No, he comes to us, God come down. And in that fact alone he shows his love.

And he will do what we cannot. “I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.”

Which of you have done that? Who is strong enough to bear that weight? To stand perfect before the law of a Holy God? None of us, as we confessed already. But he is. He is. Because he is the Holy One.

And he, pure and spotless, will then shed his priceless blood in our stead. Rising again on the third day. Which of us can do that? Who has the strength to go through death and then burst forth from the tomb alive again? Not the strongest of us, not the richest, the most well born. None. Only God. Jesus, true God, come to us.

Or is that too doctrinal, too nerdy, too dogmatic? Well then I ask you this: Is that how God viewed it? As something purely intellectual? As nails pierced his flesh? As he had his twelve legions of angels on standby ready to swipe and destroy anyone who dared mock, spit on, or seek to kill him? Yet out of love he holds them back and dies. Was this some cognitive exercise for him? I don’t think so.

Furthermore, I ask: Is this some boring story lost in dusty tomes that has no impact on our lives?

No, no, and no again. Real flesh split open, real blood flowing down, real cries of pain. Real sins, real punishment, real wrath poured out on him who did not deserve it. And we know that wrath is real because we've done the sin, we've seen it in the world, we know what it does to us and those we love. It's real.

And lest we despise these theological factoids. Know for certain that they matter solely because they are not just intellectual gymnastics, but they are the very realities by which God has saved us, and for good reason. And if they are realities that are really for us, well then, they matter to us. And so we might let then these theological factoids and realities break into our hearts and convince us of certain truths: God is real, he has come down for you, he suffered as you do, he died as you will, oh, but he is risen, and will grant you eternal life. And now, lets not get it twisted, we know these realities are real whether you feel them or not, but maybe if we learn and meditate on them we can stop manufacturing feelings and let these realities into our heart and we might find that something called Joy creeps up. Maybe something like comfort, too. Based on good old fashioned biblical teaching and historical reality for you.

I close with a reading from another old Christian (you may have heard of him)

Martin Luther:

Therefore it is a very precious word which we hear: "Unto *you* is born the Savior."

This birth, [the angel] would say, is not for us angels; I have no share in it, except that I am glad with you and for you, who are poor, depraved and lost men. This Child, the Son of God, is your Savior; you are to be helped from sin and death.

Now it is in itself a great and glorious thing that God has become man. But this is far more, that He is to be our spiritual and eternal Savior. Whoever would rightly believe this, could tell what true joy is. Yes, if his heart were full of this faith, he could, for great joy, not live long; for his heart could not bear the joy.

And I suspect that this old dead guy, having now fully seen the wonders of His God's salvation, has a heart full of joy, and one day, you, Child and believer in Jesus, with a heart burdened by sin and bitterness and every other darkness, one day, it will beat once more and be full as well. And may the Good news, won by Jesus, true God and man, give you a bit of that joy even now. Amen.