

The Son



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:30; Dan. 7:13, 14; Matt. 11:27; Luke 5:17–26; John 8:58; Matt. 20:28.*

Memory Text: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*).

After more than two years of public ministry, Jesus asked His disciples: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (*Matt. 16:13, NKJV*). It was not difficult for them to report what they had heard people saying about Jesus. More challenging, however, was Jesus’ next question: “But who do you say that I am?” (*vs. 15, NKJV*). Now it became a personal issue. Jesus did not ask their opinions about His external appearance or about His character traits. His question, instead, went to the essence of Jesus’ very being. It required the disciples to express their individual conviction and faith.

Sooner or later everyone has to answer this same question. Each has to decide, individually, who Jesus is. It doesn’t help to repeat what other people say or believe; the answer must be genuinely our own personal belief. And, of course, on that answer the destiny of every human being hangs.

This week we will seek the answer on the basis of what Jesus Himself said and did. Our aim will be to arrive, by faith, at the same response Peter gave: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*vs. 16, NKJV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.

The Son of Man

This title, “the Son of man,” was Jesus’ favorite designation for Himself. He referred to Himself as Son of man more than eighty times. Other people never addressed Him that way. He, of course, selected this special designation for Himself with a purpose in mind.

This idiomatic expression was common in the Old Testament. With just one exception, it always referred to a human; thus, Jesus used it in order to emphasize His humanity.

Scripture presents Jesus as a true human being. He was born as a baby, grew up as a child (increasing in wisdom and in stature [*Luke 2:40, 52*]), and had sisters and brothers (*Matt. 13:55, 56*). He ate (*Matt. 9:11*), slept (*Luke 8:23*), was tired (*John 4:6*), and suffered hunger and thirst (*Matt. 4:2, John 19:28*). He also experienced sorrow and distress (*Matt. 26:37*).

To the casual observer, Jesus seemed to be a common man who walked among the people as one of the multitude. Many of His contemporaries did not recognize in Him anything more than a man (*John 7:46*). People treated Him as one of them; they laughed at Him (*Luke 8:53*), criticized Him (*Matt. 11:19*), even mocked and beat Him (*Luke 22:63*). To them, He was just another human being.

Unfortunately, they failed to perceive that there is more to be found in this title. According to Daniel 7:13 and 14, “ ‘One like the Son of Man’ ” came with the clouds of heaven “ ‘to the Ancient of days,’ ” and received eternal dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The Jews identified this Son of man with the Messiah. So, when Jesus used this title, He was revealing, in a half-concealed way, that He was also the promised Messiah, the incarnate Christ.

Read Matthew 24:30, 25:31, 26:64. What elements in Jesus’ words recorded in these verses are reminiscent of Daniel 7:13, 14?

Why is it so important for us to know that Jesus was fully human? What implications does His full humanity have for our salvation? What implications does it have for our daily lives, especially in our battles with temptation and sin?

The Son of God

The title “Son of God” was used not only by Gabriel (*Luke 1:35*) but also by several people when addressing Jesus (*Matt. 14:33, Mark 15:39, John 1:49, 11:27*). He accepted that title but was very careful not to apply it directly to Himself, lest He be stoned to death. Nevertheless, the Bible does reveal in different ways His special relationship with the Father.

The Father acknowledged Jesus as His Son at His baptism (*Matt. 3:17*); the same as at the Transfiguration (*Matt. 17:5*).

Their Father-Son relationship is unique. Christ is the only Being in the universe who enjoys that kind of relationship, because only He is of the very same nature as the Father. As believers, we have been granted the privilege of becoming children of God. But Jesus always was, is, and will be the Son of God.

What do the following texts reveal about the perfect unity of the Father and the Son? *Matt. 11:27, John 3:35, 5:17, and 10:30.*

The complete unity of Jesus and the Father includes a mutual and perfect knowledge of Each Other: a unity of will, purpose, and objectives. Moreover, it includes a unity of nature. The Son and the Father are Two Persons (“I and the Father”) but of the same nature (“are one”), a fact emphasized by the neuter pronoun *one* (*compare with 1 Cor. 3:8*).

We have to be aware, however, that because He came to live as a man, Christ while here voluntarily subordinated Himself to the Father (*Phil. 2:6–8*). This limitation was functional but not part of His essence. Jesus subordinated Himself for a specific purpose, a specific goal.

With this concept in mind, we can understand why Jesus said: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do” (*John 5:19, NKJV*); “because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (*vs. 30, NKJV*). From this functional point of view, He could say: “My Father is greater than I” (*John 14:28, NKJV*).

Jesus was fully God and fully human. What does this amazing truth tell us about the close link between heaven and earth? What comfort can we draw from this close connection?

Christ's Divine Nature: Part 1

The deity of Christ is the foundation of our faith. A human being could never be our Savior, no matter how extraordinary his life may have been. Throughout the entire New Testament, we have evidence of His divinity. We will focus on what Jesus Himself taught about this subject.

It was, for starters, not a simple matter for Jesus to explain who He was. His mission required Him to make known that He was the Messiah, God in the flesh; however, there is no record of His saying publicly, *I am God* or *I am the Messiah*. Had He done so, His life could have immediately been taken. Therefore, He chose to hint at His divine nature and indirectly led His hearers to know His deity.

As Jesus gradually revealed His divine nature, most of His hearers understood Him but refused to accept His claim because it didn't fit with their preconceived idea of the Messiah. This is evident by their request: " 'How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly' " (*John 10:24, NKJV*). Unfortunately, the context shows that their question was not sincere.

As we saw yesterday, Jesus made many references to His special relationship with His Father. This was one of the methods He used to reveal His deity. Many understood clearly that when He said that God was His Father, He was making Himself equal with God (*John 5:18*).

Read Luke 5:17–26. In what very powerful ways did Jesus here reveal His divinity without openly saying it?

"It required nothing less than creative power to restore health to that decaying body. The same voice that spoke life to man created from the dust of the earth had spoken life to the dying paralytic."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 269, 270.

Jesus claimed the divine prerogative to forgive sins. He also said that He Himself " 'will sit on the throne of His glory' " (*Matt. 25:31, NKJV*) and judge all the nations, deciding the eternal destiny of each one, something that rests on God's authority alone. How much more could He have done here to reveal who He really was?

Think about how hard-hearted some of these leaders were toward Jesus. And these men were supposed to be the spiritual guardians of the people. How can we make sure we don't become hard-hearted in our own ways, as well?

Christ's Divine Nature: Part 2

Jesus declared and demonstrated that He had the same power as the Father to overcome death. “ ‘As the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will’ ” (*John 5:21, NKJV*). Only God can state: “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

Another clear indication of Jesus' divinity is found in His assertion to preexistence. He “ ‘came down from heaven’ ” (*John 3:13, NKJV*) because the Father sent Him (*John 5:23*). Then, again, He reaffirmed His preexistence: “ ‘And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was’ ” (*John 17:5, NKJV*).

Why is John 8:58 one of Jesus' more direct and profound statements about His deity? See also *Exod. 3:13, 14*.

In contrast with Abraham, who came into being (which is the literal meaning of the Greek root *ginomai*, translated here as “was”), Jesus announced Himself to be the self-existent One. He was not only there before Abraham's birth but existed eternally. *I am* implies continuous existence. Furthermore, I AM is the title of Yahweh Himself (*Exod. 3:14*). The leaders understood, unmistakably, that Jesus claimed to be the I AM revealed in the burning bush. For them, He was guilty of blasphemy and therefore “they took up stones to throw at Him” (*John 8:59, NKJV*).

The Gospels show that Jesus, without showing disapproval, accepted worship from others. He knew very well that, according to the Scriptures, only God deserves the adoration of humanity, for He said to Satan: “ ‘It is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:10, NKJV*). Therefore, by accepting worship from others, He was revealing His divinity. The disciples on the sea (*Matt. 14:33*), the blind man healed (*John 9:38*), the women at Jesus' tomb (*Matt. 28:9*), and the disciples in Galilee (*Matt. 28:17*) all worshiped Him openly, recognizing His deity. Thomas's words to Jesus, “ ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” (*John 20:28, NKJV*) would not have been spoken by a Jew back then unless he clearly understood that he was talking to God.

Read John 20:29. What are things that you have not seen, yet believe in? What are the implications of your answer for the whole question of faith?

Christ's Mission

After considering who Jesus was, we are in a better position to understand what He came to do for us.

Satan made accusations against God. In order to meet those accusations, Jesus came to represent the Father's character and to correct the false concept that many had developed about the Godhead. He wanted us to know God, because to know Him is indispensable in order to have eternal life (*John 17:3*).

However, we need more than knowledge to be saved. We need God to provide us a Savior, which is precisely the meaning of the name *Jesus*: Yahweh is salvation (*Matt. 1:21*). Jesus described His mission in very clear terms: “ ‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). In Eden, humans lost their relationship with God, lost their holiness, lost their home, and lost eternal life. Jesus came to restore everything: He reestablishes our relationship with the Father (*John 1:51*); He forgives us our sins (*Matt. 26:28*); He gives us an example of how to live (*1 Pet. 2:21*); and, of course, He gives us eternal life (*John 3:16*).

How did Jesus define the essence of His mission? *John 10:11, Matt. 20:28.*

Why did Jesus have to die? It was because He voluntarily took our place and bore the punishment of our sin. We are all sinners (*Rom. 3:10–12*) and, as such, deserve eternal death (*Rom. 6:23*). The price for our salvation was so high that only the life of the Son of God was enough to pay for it.

“The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

Look around at our world and the fate of us all in this world. If everything ended in the grave, what hope would we have? We would have none at all, were it not for the plan of salvation. How, then, can we show our gratitude to God for what He has done for us in Christ?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Divine-Human Saviour,” pp. 1126–1128, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5.

“While God’s Word speaks of the humanity of Christ when upon this earth, it also speaks decidedly regarding His pre-existence. The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father. . . . The world was made by Him, ‘and without him was not any thing made that was made’ (John 1:3). If Christ made all things, He existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 247.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Demons knew and confessed that Jesus was “‘the Holy One of God’” (*Mark 1:24, NKJV*), “the Son of God” (*Mark 3:11*), “‘Son of the Most High God’” (*Mark 5:7, NKJV*). See also **James 2:19**. Why is this kind of acknowledgment not enough for our salvation? How can we avoid the trap of being satisfied with a mere intellectual acceptance of Jesus?
- 2** When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (*Mark 15:39*). The best place to understand Jesus is at the foot of His cross. How often do you go there? When was the last time you were there? Why don’t you take a moment, right now, to meditate on the infinite sacrifice He made for your salvation?
- 3** A good number of Jesus’ contemporaries rejected Him because they had wrong ideas about the Messiah. Unfortunately, many people today refuse to yield their lives to Jesus because they have prejudices or a distorted concept about Him. How can we help them to see Jesus as He really is? What do we have as Seventh-day Adventists in particular that could help give them a clearer view of who Jesus really is?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 20:28*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand Christ's self-identification, as well as the implications of that identity for his or her salvation.

Feel: Sense God's presence through Christ's self-sacrificing spirit, demonstrated by relinquishing His divine prerogatives and ultimately yielding His life.

Do: Personally accept God's generous provision of salvation made possible through Jesus' sacrifice.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Messiah Embodied Two Natures—Divinity and Humanity.

- A** Why was it necessary that Christ be both fully human and fully divine?
- B** How did Christ's self-identification affect His understanding of His mission?
- C** How does each of these two aspects affect our appreciation for what God has done?

II. Feel: Sensing God's Presence Becomes Easier as We Understand Christ's Complementary Natures.

- A** How does understanding Christ's humanity ease human fears of God?
- B** How does understanding Christ's divinity give us confidence that He can save us?
- C** What happens if we neglect or underemphasize either of these beliefs?

III. Do: The Action of Accepting God's Provision of Salvation Is Proportionate With the Trust We Have in Who Christ Is.

- A** How could failing to understand Christ's divine nature dissuade people from trusting Him for their salvation?
- B** How could failing to appreciate Christ's human nature cause people to ignore His offer of salvation?
- C** How does a balanced appreciation of who God is draw the human soul toward accepting Jesus as Savior?

► **Summary:** Christ's essential nature offers humanity both an understanding Friend and an omnipotent Creator capable of becoming a Divine Substitute for sinners.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 20:28*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Jesus became fully human, abdicating His divine prerogatives. In doing so, He became qualified, both as a faithful High Priest and the sacrificial Ransom through whom our salvation comes.

Just for Teachers: Scripture unveils a delicate balance between two seemingly conflicting doctrines: the divinity and the humanity of the Messiah. Wherever His divinity has been rejected or underemphasized, self-righteous or self-saving aberrations have occurred. After all, if Jesus were essentially human, why should humans not be able to save themselves by merely copying His example?

In such models, Jesus is relegated to the role of swim instructor instead of lifeguard. He “saves” us by teaching us how to swim or to live righteously. This paradigm posits that we are not helplessly drowning in our sinfulness; rather, with the right instructor, we are potentially capable “swimmers.”

But wherever Jesus’ humanity has been rejected or underemphasized, despair and hopelessness have often crept in. After all, such despairing minds reason that God is all powerful, perfectly righteous, and, therefore, incapable of understanding human temptations, frailties, and struggles. Because humans could never reach the divine standard, they might as well give up trying to live righteously. Here the road of hopelessness and erroneous thinking forks into two separate but equally destructive aberrations: (1) cheap grace—“because I cannot live righteously, I will sin freely and hope God’s grace covers those sins,” or (2) brazen sinning—“because I’m condemned no matter what I do, I’ll live selfishly and grab all I can out of life for myself.” However, when these two emphases are weighed against Scripture, their errors can be avoided and the right balance achieved.

Opening Activity: Download, if possible, and print a picture of a tightrope walker using a balancing pole. Share the picture with the class. Or if such a print is not available, ask class members to visualize the tightrope walker in their minds. Discuss what makes the tightrope walker successful and what the role of the balance pole is. Think about what constitutes the balance pole for Christians as they establish their understanding of God.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Christ’s deity demonstrates that humans cannot save themselves. A Person outside of ourselves must do that which we

could never do for ourselves. Christ's humanity demonstrates that God understands our trials and temptations. Jesus lived inside our skin. These are the fundamental concepts that must be kept in focus.

Bible Commentary

I. The Unique Blend (*Review Matthew 14:33, 24:30, 25:31, and Mark 15:39 with your class.*)

The fourth-century religionist named Arius claimed that Christ possessed no divine nature. He reasoned that only one God existed (the heavenly Father); therefore, Christ could not also be God. Rejecting the Trinitarian understanding of God, Arius apparently failed to understand the soteriological (salvation-related) implications of his position. If Christ was not divine, the salvation of humanity had been effected by just another creature. This line of reasoning suggested that created beings could save themselves.

Arius's views were interlinked with the beliefs of Lucian of Antioch, who based his Christological views on the adoptionist philosophy of Paul of Samosata, a proponent of the belief that Christ had been adopted by God as human. Arius believed that Christ was a perfect creature who enjoyed a distinctive but essentially subordinate relationship with His heavenly Father. (These views are still maintained by Unitarian Universalists and Jehovah's Witnesses.)

By A.D. 325, these distortions had divided believers, and a landmark theological convention, the Nicene Council, was assembled to answer these challenges. The assembly affirmed the unique blend that constituted Christ's nature, expressed through the theological formulation "thoroughly human, thoroughly divine."

Others struggled with the humanity of Christ. Second-century Gnostics and fourth-century Manichees (both Christian offshoots) postulated that Christ's humanity was only apparent. This heresy is labeled "Docetism" from the Greek *dokein*, meaning "to seem." Docetists reasoned from their cardinal assumption that matter is inherently evil. Therefore, Jesus' purity precluded Christ's having a real body (evil matter). (Obviously, this had implications concerning Christianity's cardinal doctrines about incarnation, atonement, and resurrection; but these topics lie outside the parameters of our current investigation.)

Another thinker of the early church who opposed a belief that Christ came in corporeal form was Marcion. His dualistic philosophy caused him to believe that Christ simply possessed a "phantom body." This view was sharply opposed by Tertullian, who rejected the thought that matter was inherently evil. Marcion, on the other hand, thought the Incarnation was beneath God, while Tertullian accepted it based upon undeniable scriptural assertions (*John 1:1–14, Col. 1:22, Heb. 2:5–18*).

Consider This: Why should Christians exercise great care when discoursing about the nature of Christ?

II. Twin Natures (Review *John 3:13, 8:58, 17:5, and Matthew 25:31–46* with your class.)

Rather than merely accepting those scriptural teachings that irrevocably taught Christ's divinity and humanity, some creative minds questioned how this integration of natures could take place. But Moses declared, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law" (*Deut. 29:29, NRSV*).

Sometimes, however, in direct opposition to this Mosaic precept, people waste hours trying to rationalize things that God has not clearly revealed. One could rightfully call this spiritual robbery—trying to purloin God's secrets through rational thought. One such advocate was Apollinaris, who struggled with the thought that the Divine Word could unite Himself with a completely human nature. He concluded that these two natures co-mingled but that Deity overwhelmed humanity during the uniting process, much as a drop of honey disappears into the ocean. While effectively rejecting Arius's heresy, he unwittingly slipped into sophisticated Docetism. His zealous support of Christ's deity resulted in an imbalanced understanding that essentially undervalued Christ's humanity. Had Apollinaris satisfied himself with accepting plainly revealed truths rather than trying to schematize the unknowns and unrevealed particulars, his aberration might never have been conceived. Herein lies a lesson everyone would do well to learn.

Consider This: How do Christians hurt themselves by trying to know too much?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Divine wisdom reveals that Christ equally possesses two complementary natures. Emphasizing one to the detriment of the other results in either human passivity (God does everything; so, why waste the effort?) or behaviorism (Christ's example outlines God's requirements, which, when followed, produces salvation). A balanced understanding of the interrelationship of deity and humanity points rather toward a cooperative relationship between God and the human race, whereby God alone provides salvation, and human beings willingly accept the gospel's transformational power. Similarly, Christ's mission may be described as twofold: (1) redemption, and (2) transformation. Christ is both Ransom and Faithful, the understanding High Priest. Through His sacrifice, our past transgressions are forgiven, and our future development is empowered. Redemption

necessarily precedes transformation. Transformation naturally follows. How will understanding the interrelationship of these two natures greatly enhance our appreciation of Christ and facilitate Christian development?

Thought/Application Questions:

- ① How does Christ's thorough deity influence His mission?
- ② How does Christ's thorough humanity influence His mission?
- ③ How does Christ's deity affect my salvation?
- ④ How does Christ's humanity affect my salvation?
- ⑤ How do Christ's deity and humanity affect my mission and sense of purpose?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Jesus' earthly mission was about restoring human brokenness. His deity provided the power whereby He could overwhelm evil and destroy death. His humanity provided understandability and credibility with those whom He desired to save. Political campaigns have been won with the lie, "My opponent's so rich he can't understand you." Satan employs the same line. However, when Christ's suffering is uncovered and we glimpse His limp body nailed to a jagged wooden cross, exposed to the elements, abandoned by His closest associates, we reject Satan's lies. Christ gains credibility, and we begin to trust this faithful Friend. Christ is no longer an aloof, otherworldly, inconsiderate intelligence but, rather, a fellow Prisoner, albeit One who has the resources to escape the cell of death.

Activity: In countries where Christians are perceived as a majority, accusations of self-righteousness, being out of touch, and irrelevance abound. Formulate plans for an activity or series of activities whereby your class can become Christ's suffering servants among the unbelievers of your community, thereby furthering the mission of Christ. Consider which activities or events would gain credibility within your community so that you might be given the opportunity of calling sinners to repentance and to experience the transforming grace of God. Projecting into the future, discuss possible steps for bridging from a suffering witness to a dispenser of hope. In other words, once your witness has gained credibility, how will you share the gospel without alienating people again? How can believers call sinners to repentance without appearing self-righteous on the one hand or without soft-pedaling sin on the other?