

Introduction

There's an old joke that asks a question, "**When is a door not a door?**" The answer is, "**When it's ajar.**" It's a play on words that means a door is no longer a door when it's something else. Let me ask a related question. When is a gossip no longer a gossip? It's when he or she is something else. What does that have to do with Christmas? It explains why Jesus came and that's what I want us to think about today.

Jesus Like Us

I begin with verse 6, which reveals the defining fact about Jesus. He "**existed in the form of God**" and "**did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.**" Those clauses teach us the He is God. That means that He possesses all the attributes of God. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present, and so on.

But notice what Jesus did, according to verses 7-8. He was "**made in the likeness of men**" and was "**found in appearance as a man.**" That means that He became like the human beings He had created, like us, in the essential aspects of our humanity.

First, He became like us in our physical makeup. Consider these facts about our bodies. We have 9000 taste buds. We blink 6,205,000 times every year. We lose between 40 and 100 strands of hair every day. Our kidneys filter 100,000 gallons of blood every year. And a non-statistical fact: We aren't capable of tickling ourselves.

That is true of our bodies and, as verses 7-8 reveal, it was true of Jesus' body as well. He had 9000 taste buds. He blinked 6,205,000 times every year. He lost between 40 and 100 strands of hair every day. His kidneys filtered 100,000 gallons of blood every year. And He wasn't able to tickle Himself. His body, in its organic nature and function, was just like ours is.

Jesus became like us in a second essential aspect of our humanity – in our psychological makeup. Our psychological makeup consists of three

components or parts. The first is our mind and its thoughts. By thoughts, I mean memories, perceptions, beliefs, and what we refer to when we say we're thinking of something. The second is our mind and its feelings. By feelings, I mean sensations, desires, and emotions. And finally, the third is our heart. By heart, I mean our volitional processes – our capacity to choose, to originate things. Those three components define what our psychological life is. We think, feel, and choose.

And so did Jesus. We have fond childhood memories, for instance, and so did he. We believe something about taxes and so did He. We laugh at jokes and so did He. We have our favorite foods and colors and so did He. We choose to marry or not to marry and so did He. You get the idea. We think, feel, and choose and so did Jesus.

That then is the grand and glorious message of Christmas as Paul explains it in Philippians 2. God, in the person of Jesus, became like us in the essential aspects of our humanity – in our physical and psychological makeup.

We Like Jesus

But why did He? That's the million-dollar question. The answer is, **"That we might become like Him."** That is the real meaning of Christmas. Jesus became like us so that we might become like Him.

I identified two ways that He was like us. But there was one way that He was unlike us – in His inherent nature. Because the Holy Spirit conceived Him, He was born with an utterly righteous mind and heart. He was always disposed in His thoughts, feelings, and choices to be selfless and good. But you and I were born with a fallen mind and heart. We inherited it from our parents who conceived us. We're disposed in our thoughts, feelings, and choices to be routinely selfish.

Children in antiquity played games like hockey, wrestling, and even a form of baseball. Picture Jesus playing one of those games with His brothers as they were growing up. I know from experience (my own and that of my sons and grandsons) how brothers playing games goes. It's in their dispositions to get mad when they're beaten and to quarrel or even

fight as a result. But that simply wasn't the case with Jesus. It was in His disposition to feel glad, not mad, when his brothers beat Him.

There's no doubt about it. Jesus didn't have a selfish disposition but we do, which explains why He came. It was to make our dispositions like His. I'd explain what I mean by that this way.

Think of our lives in terms of feelings and actions. There are three possible levels of response in that regard. #1 - Destructive feelings and destructive actions. #2 - Destructive feelings and constructive actions. And #3 - Constructive feelings and constructive actions.

Her mother-in-law said to a young Christian mother, "**I think you're spending too much money on Christmas gifts for the kids.**" To which she curtly replied, "**It really isn't any of your business.**" Let's analyze that transaction in terms of feelings and actions. Level #1 - The young mother feels anger about the advice, wants to tell her mother-in-law off, and does, which was the case. Level #2 - The young mother feels anger about the advice, wants to tell her mother-in-law off, but being afraid of her or knowing it's sinful, doesn't. She holds her tongue or even insincerely thanks her for giving it. And finally, level #3 - The young mother feels gratitude not anger about the advice, sincerely thanks her mother-in-law for giving it, and considers whether or not it's true.

That helps us understand why Jesus came. He never once functioned at levels 1 and 2. He always functioned at level 3 instead. And that's why He came - to change us so that we would too. Don't get me wrong. None of us are perfect and always function at level 3 as Jesus did. But we can become enough like Him that level 3 is usual and levels 1 and 2 are unusual for us. Almost all people usually function at levels 1 and 2. But we can usually function at level 3.

With Jesus

But becoming like Jesus isn't something we can do on our own.

Most people think it is. Get on the Internet some time and index "personal transformation." A host of websites will come up if you do that claim to teach how we can be changed into a profoundly better person.

One, for instance, reveals “Five Principles for Personal Transformation”: (1) Appreciate your success; (2) Learn your lessons; (3) Shift your limiting beliefs; (4) Live your values; and (5) Set and track your top ten goals. I went through the first 30 sights I found under “personal transformation” and not one mentions Jesus. Each assumes instead that we can transform ourselves and advises accordingly.

But it’s a farce because we can’t transform ourselves, not as I’ve defined it at least. There’s only One who can transform us that way and it’s Jesus. Listen to the words of C.S. Lewis: **“The real son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to ‘inject’ His kind of life and thought, His Zoe (life), into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man.”** That quote captures the essence of why Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose from the dead. It was to turn you, me, and everyone else **“into the same kind of thing as Himself.”**

But He must be **“at our side”** in order to do that. You and I, in other words, must be in an interactive relationship with Him. We enter into that kind of relationship with Him by making and carrying out a decision. It’s to learn how to engage Him and His kingdom at hand and then to arrange all of our affairs around doing that. He of course engages us as we engage Him, which gradually turns us into the same kind of thing as He is. It makes us like Him. Dallas Willard calls what I just explained, **“a quietly transforming friendship with Jesus.”**

Conclusion

I’d sum it all up by going back to the question I asked at the beginning of the sermon. When is a gossip no longer a gossip? It isn’t just when he no longer gossips. It’s when he no longer desires to expose people’s faults but to conceal them. A gossip is no longer a gossip when he’s something else, not just outwardly but inwardly as well. Well, that explains why Jesus came. It was to transform you and me into something else – something profoundly better than we are in our natural state. So, become a familiar friend of His and let Him do just that.