

## **May We Have Life in Jesus' Name** *The Gospel of John*

### **Jesus Cleanses Our Humanity** *Theme Study on Jesus as God's New Humanity*

#### **Introduction: Healing My Nature**

Ever since my junior year of college in October of 1992, when a girlfriend and I mutually decided to stop dating, one of my most frequent prayers has been, 'Lord Jesus, save me from my own self-centeredness. Can you help me rise above this?' I was 20 years old then, and it's been a long, slow journey. There were quite painful times where I reflected intensely on my relationship with my parents. There were other times when I felt like Jesus was asking me to put my self-interest aside. But it's been worth it. When I was 32 years old, I was at a friend's house, taking a look at their basement. I was walking down the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs there was a rolled up carpet. I stepped on it and it rolled, and my right ankle twisted with it. Now because it was the bottom of the stairs, all of my weight was coming down on my right ankle. Normally I would have just fallen to my side or onto my hands so that my ankle wouldn't have to take all of my weight. But I had my daughter Zoe in my arms. She was 16 months old at the time. It is amazing how some things happen in slow motion. There were some thoughts going through my head in a split second. I thought, 'I can't let her go. I have to just come down on my ankle.' So that's what happened. It was the worst sprained ankle I've ever had. I tore a ligament. It took 10 months just to get to the point where there was no longer any pain. I saw my doctor and he said that I should not run or play basketball anymore. That was really a bummer for me. Obviously I'm disappointed that this happened. But as I've thought about it, I've become really thankful. Given that it did happen, I'm really glad that Zoe wasn't hurt. But I'm the most surprised that my first thought was not for myself. It was for my daughter. That is something to praise God about! My first instinct in a moment of crisis was to think about someone else – that is Jesus' healing in my life.

#### **Relevance:**

What is healing? How does Jesus heal us? Obviously it is not by protecting us from everything and anything bad that could happen. In fact, his healing is shown by the way he carries us through those things.

If you've been reflecting at all about why are you the way you are, why you run from intimacy or run towards intimacy too fast, where your desire to bring justice to this world is rooted in some pain in your past that you're trying to resolve, you do need to allow Jesus to bring healing to you. But how? How does he do that? On what basis? From a secular standpoint, inner healing or emotional healing comes about when you decide to rewrite the script of your past. Or, in the cognitive behavioral school of thought, you just rewrite the script of your immediate reactions to things. But in the Christian view of the person, while those methods might be helpful to some degree, it's not just our memories that need to change, but our nature.

There is a recent book called *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives* by Cordelia Fine, a researcher at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. She says our brains are vain, immoral, and bigoted. That's a strong case! But she shows that the brain distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, in a survey taken several years ago, all incoming freshman at MIT were asked if they expected to graduate in the top half of their class. Ninety-seven percent responded that they did! What happens when they don't make it? An optimist who fails at something then edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior, while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light. The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality. Our brains bias memory and reason, selectively editing truth to inflict less pain on our fragile selves. 'Never forget,' Fine says, 'that your unconscious is smarter than you, faster than you, and more powerful than you. It may even control you. You will never know all of its secrets.'

So I think every other theory of healing human brokenness just doesn't cut it. Because every other theory doesn't take into account our capacity to deceive ourselves. Thus, every other theory places the

fundamental problem somewhere else: our parents, other people who oppress us, our government. Now I think those issues are serious and we need to deal with them appropriately also. But what if the fundamental problem is us? What if it's humanity? What if, by ourselves, we are capable of evading appropriate responsibility and will twist circumstances to whatever suits our purpose? What if humanity itself needs to be transformed? Then we need a radical encounter with Jesus.

### **Context:**

We are in the Gospel of John. Earlier, Warren Chiang spoke on John 2, the event where Jesus began his miracles. He turned water into wine as a symbol of newness he was bringing. In particular, I want to make the case that the new human nature, the new humanity, he is bringing. So I want to back up and place that miracle and all the others into the larger framework of what John is writing about. At the start of John's Gospel, we have the phrase, 'In the beginning,' just like in Genesis 1:1 where God started creating everything. At the end of John's Gospel, we have Jesus breathing his Spirit on human beings, just like in Genesis 2:7 where God put His finishing touch on Adam by breathing on him. In between, John narrates seven miracles, seven discourses, and seven 'I am' statements. That is just like the seven days of creation in Genesis 1. So John's Gospel is a direct comparison of Genesis. Why? God is making a new humanity, renewing humanity into who we were always meant to be. And at the center of this story is Jesus.

### **He Became Flesh and Tabernacled: v.14 – 18**

Part of John's introduction of Jesus is this statement: 'He became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth...For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.' (1:14, 16 – 17)

If this were a rap song, it would be sampling from an older beat: the freedom song of the Exodus when God rescued Israel out of slavery, to heal them and bring them back into the Garden Land. God led Israel through the wilderness when He was in the tabernacle of a tent. He revealed His glory in the form of a pillar of light and fire. He said, 'I am the LORD, abounding in loyal love [that is, grace] and truth.' (Ex.34:6) But what John is saying is that whereas the Law was given to Moses at that time, and it was a good thing, when Jesus came he upped the ante. God's grace and truth were fully realized in Jesus. Because he did not take to himself a tent in which to live. He took to himself human flesh. That is the new song layered on top of the old.

'Flesh' (sarx) is usually not a nice word. Paul said, 'I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh' (Rom.7:18). Here, as with most of the NT usage, I think the meaning is negative. It's not just that our soul, our character is tainted, but our physical being, too. There is no division, ultimately, in the biblical view of people. So flesh is not just bones, tendons, and tissues, although it includes that. And it's not just that human bodies are awkward. Yes, our bodies fart, smell, and give off all kinds of weird fluids. But it's more than that. In our bodies, woven into our very existence, is something that resists the love of God. 'Flesh' stands for our whole being, which was originally pure good but is now tainted and stained with self-centeredness. That is what Jesus took on, what he became. He became *flesh*. It's like fine wine becoming rotten fruit. This is the self-expression of God becoming the flesh that obscures and resists God. When we read 'the Word became flesh,' the question we need to ask is, 'So, who won???'

Illus: In the movie Matrix Revolutions, there is a scene where Neo takes into himself Agent Smith. He becomes Agent Smith in the matrix. But because he remains his true self, he breaks through Agent Smith from within and then frees all the other people who had been taken over by Agent Smiths. Watch this: [www.dailymotion.com/video/x45rbg\\_the-matrix-revolutions-neo-vs-smith-shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x45rbg_the-matrix-revolutions-neo-vs-smith-shortfilms)  
9:20 to 12:44 (the end)

What Jesus did was to take to himself this flesh-thing, this thing that was like Agent Smith. He was swallowed up in our material. Here's one way the metaphor breaks down, though. Over the course of his life, Jesus lived as that material, in that body of fallen human nature, forcing it into compliance with his own will. It was as if Neo lived for 30 some-odd years within that one Agent Smith, but constantly battling it from within in order to help people, physically heal people, be nice to people, serve people. This is what John means when he says, 'And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.' In every other case, human beings in our humanness blocked God's glory. We didn't

reveal the love of God. We revealed the selfishness of humanity. But with Jesus, we beheld his glory shining through the human flesh he became. It was amazing!! To see God's Son revealing Himself through and even in spite of the humanness he wore.

And in the end, Jesus forced it to explode in a sense because he pushed so hard against it, against its selfish nature. He killed it. But Jesus didn't disappear, and he didn't stay dead. He rose from the dead as a new kind of humanity, a fresh kind of God-drenched humanity that had no internal resistance to God. And now he shares the Spirit of his new humanity with us, so that from within we can be set free from within from the evil that is also in us, so that we can battle it, and have some victory. John says, 'For of His fulness we have all received.' Jesus filled his humanity to the full with the love of God, the character of God, and now He shares that with us from within us. That is the beginning of our healing. And we can be assured that there is hope that God is remaking and renewing humanity en toto. One day we will all be resurrected physically and be completely set free and be completely healed if we share in Jesus' victory.

If any of you have ever had an organ transplant or know someone who has had that done, or if you know what happens in a blood transfusion, it's an act of healing. Someone needs a new organ. I think that's a good parallel because all of us have a poison in our bodies, a disease called sin, evil or self-centeredness. We need healing from it. The reason why God became a human being named Jesus was to ACQUIRE our disease. Second, it was to have a human body in which to DEVELOP THE ANTIDOTE to the disease. In the physical body of Jesus, God resisted every shred of self-centeredness living in that body, pushing it all the way to its death. He CLEANSED THAT HUMANITY from within. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God gave Jesus a fresh, new humanity perfectly fused with the divine. And God made Jesus into an organ donor and blood donor spiritually. By connecting us to the resurrected Jesus spiritually, God can now place in us a cleansed spirit, a new spiritual heart, the beginning of a fresh new humanity that is just like Jesus because it comes from him. To sum up: In Jesus, God worked out the healing to our disease so that we could all share in that healing. Let me flesh out three implications of that.

#### **Jesus Heals Our Character, Our Ethical Life**

The first implication is for our character, our ethical life. I'm not going to go into depth about this, since I already mentioned one example of this at the beginning, with falling and spraining my ankle. But for each of us, we need to allow Jesus to transform our character. This is why God's first way of doing social justice is evangelism: It's to bring people to Jesus, because in Jesus, God is victorious over human evil, and He shares the Spirit of Jesus with us so that we can deal with our own evil. Evangelism is the foundation and starting point for social justice, and social justice must include evangelism as one of its aspects, because humanity must come to Jesus.

#### **Jesus Heals Human Emotions, Our Emotional Life**

The second implication is for our emotional life. Jesus heals human emotions in himself. And then, by a connection with us by his Spirit, begins to heal our emotional life as well. How? Well if Jesus was fully human and *truly* human, then the way he dealt with his emotions is the *true* way for any of us to deal with our emotions.

There are many ways that we don't deal appropriately with our emotions. Sometimes we hide our emotions, even from ourselves. We stuff them deep down because they're too painful, too awkward, or too inconvenient. When I was younger, I tried to stop feeling things because my parents were going through their arguments and divorce, and so I devalued people. I protected myself from feeling like I was affected by anything or anyone. That's one reason why, when I was younger, it was hard for others to relate to me. I was becoming less human. Others of us swim in our emotions. We feel our emotions very deeply. We feel them before we feel anyone else's emotions, and it's as if our emotions were the only fundamental reality around. We become narcissistic about our emotions. We get stuck in them. We use our emotions as power and leverage and collateral over others.

But Jesus, as a human being, opened his own emotional life up to his Father. And he became transparent to the Father, so that his emotions were always appropriate emotions. He was not shut down, a grit your teeth and bear it, eat the cze ku if you're Chinese or han if you're Korean, and swallow the bitter pill and get on with your duties. No. So for example, in John 11, by the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus wept. He was not stuffing his emotions aside. He didn't train himself to look past the moment and say, 'Hey, I'm going to

do the miracle and call the young man back to life – what’s the big deal?’ He didn’t ignore the fact that he would also have to die and be laid in a tomb just like that one. He didn’t say, ‘Well, everyone will be resurrected one day’ so he could ignore the present pain. He felt it *fully*. He cried. He was fully present to the tragedy of human death, to the pain of Lazarus’ sisters Mary and Martha, probably to the death he himself would die, and about death in all its forms as the general consequence of human sin. But neither did he sink into self-pity. He did not wallow. He didn’t say, ‘Oh, you just don’t understand what I’ve got to go through in a little while on the cross. Why can’t *you* just understand *me*?!’ No he didn’t do any of that emotionally. Instead, Jesus revealed the healthy and whole human response to life.

Illus: There was a time when my best friend Andrew got married where I started to learn this. We were 24 years old. We were in Northern California. He and his girlfriend had been dating since college. I had been friends with her also since her freshman year through the Christian fellowship we were part of. At the rehearsal, Jeanny’s dad was late, so I stood in for him. We ran through the sequence, and when the pastor said, ‘Who gives this woman to be married to this man,’ I felt this lump rise in my throat, because I felt really proud of Jeanny and Andrew and the challenges they’d faced together. Later that night, when Andrew and I crashed at his place and we were talking about the next day, I said, ‘Hey, so, I guess I can’t call you whenever so we can hang out at any time. I guess our friendship has to change, huh?’ Then I full on cried! See, some guys do feel that kind of thing, too! Plus, I felt sad for myself because a few months ago I had had a Define The Relationship talk with a girl I liked who didn’t feel the same way about me, and I wondered, ‘When am I going to meet the one?’ But I was also really excited because he was excited. On the wedding day itself, I was aware that I was feeling these things. But I also felt thrilled, because this day was about them, because the sermon was awesome and there were non-Christian parents and friends in the audience that we had been praying for, and because we got to celebrate. The next morning, I prayed for them and I cried for me...for many reasons I just described. But looking back, I think that was one of the most emotionally healthy weekends, because I was consciously bringing each emotion to the Lord and allowing Him to respond to me or help me focus on what was appropriate at the time. I didn’t use my emotions as a reason to get someone to talk to, because that day was not about me.

For many of you, this is a live issue. Most of you are single. You either suppress it, don’t properly deal with those fears and sense of loss with God, so you lack character. Or you wallow in your bitterness, and when the time comes for you to rejoice with your friend who does get married, your predominant emotion is self-pity. In general, God calls us to ‘rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep’ (Rom.12:15). That is actually harder than it sounds because we can use our emotions for the wrong purpose. Maybe you lost your job and you’re trying to celebrate your friend who’s found a job. You can also grieve for yourself, but jealousy is wrong. Why? Because jealousy of that sort doesn’t exist in God. God doesn’t have any self-protective or self-aggrandizing emotion.

And Jesus reveals that. Because God made humans originally in His own image, and because God wanted to reveal Himself through humanity, and because God does so perfectly in and through Jesus, that means that Jesus reveals God’s own emotions. God has, in a sense human emotions. And we, in a sense, share in the divine emotions. In John 11 in particular, Jesus reveals that God weeps for particular human beings. Not just humanity in general, but particular ones. For you, because of that abuse you endured. For you, because of the pain you bear. He weeps for the consequences of sin, be they general consequences that we all face because we live in a fallen world, or particular consequences for particular sins we do. He weeps for all forms of death. God is not a distant machine in the way He relates to us. Jesus relates all his emotions to the Father, so that our human emotional life might also share in God’s emotions.

Now this is a larger topic, because God actually does not feel certain emotions that we do, like fear or any form of self-preservation. So I’m not saying that all our emotions have a counterpart in God. But there are a number of times in the Gospels where Jesus feels a fierce joy or deep compassion or sadness, or the narrator tells us that he has an emotion. Paul in Philippians 1:8 talks about Jesus as being affectionate, and how Paul shares in those affections for the Philippians. And so on. Jesus helps us share in God’s own emotions. God’s desire is to heal us so that we reflect the appropriate emotional response to the world around.

### **Jesus Heals Our Concept of God**

This dovetails into the third implication: Jesus heals our concept of God. I would argue that we always start with a wrong concept of God, because it is never intuitive for us to think that Jesus reveals all of who God truly is, in terms of His character. We start off thinking that Jesus reveals only a part of who God is, and that there is a more unpredictable and sinister part of God lurking behind the back of Jesus. For various reasons, I'm going to focus on a specific misconception we get when we read the Old Testament. I think you'll be able to generalize a bit from there. Now the misconception we can have when we read say Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy is that the God of the Old Testament has a bloodthirsty side and wanted a sacrifice to appease His anger. This is something popular atheists like Richard Dawkins attack. So God apparently kills an animal instead of a human being, symbolizing how, in the New Testament, He would kill Jesus instead of human beings to appease His anger.

First of all, that's not what's happening in the Temple. The Jewish Temple was not symbolizing a legal and penal system. It symbolized a purification system. In Leviticus 6 – 7, there were three basic types of sacrifices you could offer, and what made them different was who ate them. You could offer a peace offering, which you would eat (Lev.7:11 – 15). You could offer a burnt or grain offering, which God would eat, symbolically by consuming it with fire (Lev.6:8 – 13). Or you could offer a sin offering, which the priests would eat (Lev.6:14 – 18, 25 – 26). Symbolically what was happening with all this eating and sacrificing was that God was communicating to Israel how He would deal with human sin. He would let you eat the peace offering. You get to swallow, eat, or internalize peace from God. But with regards to sin, if you were Jewish, you would lay your hand on the animal or the offering, symbolically saying that it was your sin, and God would suck it from you. He would eat it. Even in the case where the priests 'ate the sin' symbolically, they accumulated it in themselves as a group, and then the High Priest would send the sin to God once a year during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

God is symbolizing the fact that He is the sin eater. He takes our sin into Himself, which He did in the physical body of Jesus. And He ate it. He cleansed it through the human choices of Jesus to never, ever sin. Like Harry Potter had to die to kill that piece of Voldemort's soul in him, Jesus had to die to kill the 'flesh' he had become, and to rise as a new kind of human being, a God-soaked human being who has been purified, cleansed, and healed. The western legal system does not really care about rehabilitation. So if we are seeing God through the lens of the western law-giver, we are getting a wrong picture of God. God is not satisfied by just making Jesus pay the penalty for our sin, while leaving sinful people still sinful. It would be as if God resolved His own anger issue, but left the criminals armed and dangerous. Is that an accurate picture of God? No way!! God is only satisfied by purifying people of sin and transforming them into health. It is as if God were a Doctor who sucked into Himself a lethal disease so He could give back the antibodies and defeat the disease!!

Thus, second, not only does the Old Testament show that if we read it carefully, but because Jesus said he's the new Temple and was purifying humanity. Jesus said that he is the new Temple. Here's how: Already in the beginning, we read that Jesus became flesh and 'tabernacled' among us (1:14). The tabernacle was a canvas version of the Temple. The problem was that God never really wanted to live in buildings. He always wanted to live in human beings. So God came in the person of Jesus to start that process. Jesus said he is the new Temple of God, the place where God dwelled. 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days' (2:18 – 21), referring to his own body and his own death and resurrection. He came to take its place.

So as we look back through Jesus, we see that Jesus shows that the Temple sacrifices were symbolic of purification, not punishment. In John 2, there are literary and conceptual links made between the miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the Temple. (1) At Cana, the miracle of water to wine happened on the third day. At the Temple cleansing, Jesus points to a miracle yet to happen on the third day. (2) Both occur in the joining of two: marriage joins two people, Temple joins God and humanity. (3) In both cases, something good is being made into something better. (4) Both involve stone instruments of purification: the stone jars of purification at Cana, and by implication, the stone Temple at Jerusalem. (5) At Cana, the stone jars of purification are ruined by being filled with wine, as they could no longer be used to hold the waters of purification. At Jerusalem, Jesus implies that the Temple is ruined because its purpose has been fulfilled by him; he is the new Temple containing the presence of God. (6) Thus, in both cases, something depleted or exhausted by being transplanted by something full. I would argue that this link between the stone jars and the stone Temple is intentional in John, and it substantiates my argument that the Temple sacrifices were not

'penal' in their symbolism. They served as symbols of 'purification'. The Temple sacrifices did not symbolically pay the human side of sin's penalty; they symbolized the cleansing of humanity God would enact in Jesus.

Once again, if you think about God through the lens of the western legal system which is satisfied by punishing lawbreakers, or even through the lens of your demanding parents, it's possible for you to get the impression that God is just demanding and distant and kind of arbitrary. In a broken world, what other concept of God would we naturally get? So when you think about healing, it's possible for you to think of healing as just one more thing a demanding God wants from you. And then that false concept of God becomes your excuse for not dealing with Him. But if you look at Jesus, and see how Jesus reveals who God is, completely and totally, then Jesus heals our concept of God. God is working in a very precise way, in a very just and totally good way, to transform humanity and heal us. And He does so by becoming one of us, and then becoming one with us. He comes closer and closer and closer. He heals us by His intimacy, by His strength, by joining Himself to us. That is the fundamental problem of humanity that cannot be healed any other way but Jesus. We became separated from God and put up all kinds of illusions and excuses to maintain that separation. But Jesus knocks it all down.

### **Jesus is the Source of Human Healing**

So Jesus heals our character. Jesus heals our emotions. Jesus heals our concept of God. He brings about a new humanity, what humanity was supposed to be from the very beginning. He first does it in himself, then he shares that with anyone who comes to him. No other way of healing human brokenness goes as deep as this. Only Jesus heals humanity itself.

What is the next step for you? If you don't know this Jesus, perhaps your next step is to ask more questions about him. Or maybe you're ready to come to him, so I would encourage you to do that. Come to him. For others of us, there may be some aspect of your life that you know needs healing. You need the transformation Jesus has. So I would encourage you to entrust that area of your life to God. You may have had the wrong concept of God before, and thought that if you do that, then He will be violent with you. But no: He will deal kindly with you as He gathers that aspect of you to Himself. And He will continue to take what He has perfected in Jesus and pour it into you. 'For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace.' Amen.