

## Jesus' Deity Displayed

By David Feddes

There's more to some people than meets the eye. You may think you know someone and yet not see who they really are or what they're able to do. Someone who grew up on your street becomes a famous author, and you exclaim, "I didn't know she had it in her!" Someone you knew as just another kid in your college dorm ends up running a giant corporation, and you say, "Wow! I'd never have guessed it!" If you grow up with people or see them a lot, you feel you know them, and you tend to think they're pretty ordinary. Even when they do astonishing things, it may still be hard to believe they're all that great.

If it's hard to believe that someone you're familiar with turned out to have hidden talents, how hard would it be to believe that a guy who grew up in your hometown is actually God?

Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth. His neighbors thought they knew him pretty well. They thought they knew his family pretty well. They saw him grow up with the other kids of the town. They saw him working with wood in a carpenter shop.

But about the time Jesus turned thirty, he left his quiet, ordinary life in Nazareth and began preaching and doing miracles in some of the towns nearby. Stories about Jesus began drifting back to his hometown, and the people of Nazareth were shocked. They must have thought, "This man Jesus, a brilliant teacher with miraculous powers? Come on! How can that be? We've known this guy since he was in diapers! We've watched him play. We've heard him cry. We've seen him sawing wood. He had sweat on his forehead and dirt under his fingernails, just like anyone else who works with his hands."

It was hard to believe Jesus was anybody special, but rumors about his preaching and marvelous miracles kept floating back to Nazareth. Then one day Jesus came back. The local people were eager to find out if the hometown boy was really as great as the rumors claimed. They crowded into their meeting place, the synagogue, to hear him. When he spoke, they were amazed. He really surprised them—they had to admit it. But then their old mental habits and their feeling of familiarity took over.

"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.

"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't his sisters all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they were offended at him (Matthew 13:54-56).

The people of Nazareth knew exactly what Jesus looked like, and his looks didn't impress them. They knew his family, and his family didn't impress them. "No doubt about it," figured the hometown folks. "This man Jesus is as human as any of us; he's nobody special." They were right that Jesus is as human as anyone. But they were wrong to think he's nobody special. They were so busy seeing Jesus as one of them that they couldn't see him as anything more.

The people of Nazareth weren't the only ones who had trouble recognizing Jesus as God. For a while his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5), and his disciples weren't always sure what to make of Jesus. They saw something special in

Jesus, but it didn't sink in right away that this man they loved and admired so much was actually God as well as a man.

Once, when Jesus was talking privately with his friends, he said, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:7). That statement baffled Jesus' friends. They had often heard Jesus speak of God as his Father, but what could he mean by saying they already knew the Father and had seen him?

One of the disciples, Philip, blurted out, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8). Philip was asking for a direct display of who God is. "If only we could see him, if only you'd show him to us, then we would know God."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me" (John 14:9-10)? Jesus was saying, "You're asking me to show you God? Open your eyes! Don't you recognize me? *If you've seen me, you've seen God.*"

But, you might wonder, how could the disciples be expected to recognize God in the face of this carpenter/teacher? And how can we be expected to recognize Jesus as divine? Jesus pointed out two kinds of evidence that should make it obvious: *his words* and *his works*. Jesus said, "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:10). Jesus' words aren't just a man's words but God's words. So we ought to believe Jesus is God on the sheer authority of what he says. And if we don't sense the divine authority of his words, we still ought to see him as God on the basis of his miracles and the divine power displayed in them. Jesus said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (John 14:11).

Nobody who met Jesus had any doubt that he was completely human. And yet... and yet... there was something more than human about him. He went around saying things only God could say and doing things only God could do. The truth about Jesus is this: Jesus is just as human as you or I, and at the same time he is just as divine as God the Father.

That's the truth, but not everyone back then believed it, and still today, not everyone believes it. Some folks don't pay much attention to Jesus or see anything special about him. Others, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims, think Jesus was a special man but don't think he's God. Even some supposedly Christian people may view Jesus as a great man and a superb example but can't accept that Jesus is God. If you're one of those who don't see Jesus as God, or if you ever talk with others who think that way, keep reading. We'll see how the words and works of Jesus show him to be God. Jesus seemed like just an ordinary man, but he talked like God and acted like God. His words rang with divine authority, and his works displayed divine power. Let's take a closer look, first at his words, and then at his works.

## Talking Like God

There was something striking about Jesus' words, about what he said, how he said it, and the impact on his listeners. Jesus could speak shrewdly but simply. He had amazing insight into deep truths, yet he could teach these things in simple words and

gripping stories. When highly educated experts tried to question him and stump him or trap him into saying something foolish, he always had the perfect answer. The smartest people couldn't outwit him, yet the simplest people could benefit from his teaching. Jesus' simple brilliance left people scratching their heads in amazement. Even those who didn't like him had to wonder, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15)

Whenever Jesus spoke, people were stunned by his intellect and insight; they were also amazed by the sheer authority of how he spoke. He wasn't like other teachers who were constantly debating the fine points of religion. Those people spoke as specialists and scholars. Someone has defined scholars as people who learn more and more about less and less until they know almost everything about almost nothing. By that definition, the religious teachers of Jesus' day were scholars indeed. They specialized in trivia and knew almost everything about almost nothing. They didn't see the big picture, and when they spoke, it wasn't with any true sense of authority. If they wanted to prove a point, they usually just piled up quotes from other scholars.

How different when Jesus spoke! The Bible says that when Jesus finished preaching his great Sermon on the Mount, "The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:29). Jesus didn't base his teaching on scholarly opinion; he did the opposite. "You have heard it said [by your experts]," Jesus would say as he introduced a subject, "but *I* tell you"—and then, *on his own authority*, he would declare the real truth of the matter. Over and over Jesus contradicted prevailing opinions and declared what God really was saying. As Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, his voice rang with the same authority as the voice that had thundered out the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. It was the voice of God.

Jesus' brilliant teaching and his sense of authority were enough to astonish even those who didn't quite know what to make of him. Once the chief priests and Pharisees sent some security guards to arrest Jesus while he was speaking in the temple. But the guards—those tough, no-nonsense enforcers—were stunned by Jesus' wisdom and air of authority, and they couldn't bring themselves to arrest him.

"Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

"No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared (John 7:45-46).

No one ever spoke as Jesus spoke, and no one ever dared to say the things Jesus said. Once Jesus was having dinner in the home of a religious man when a woman who had lived a very sinful life came into the house. Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests in the house were shocked. They said among themselves, "Who is this that even forgives sins?" (See Luke 7:36-50)

Good question! "Who is this that even forgives sins?" No mere human can forgive sins committed against other people. That sinful woman had probably damaged a number of marriages by her immorality. She may have spread sexually transmitted diseases. If she had children, they undoubtedly had been harmed by her evil behavior. But whatever marriages she wrecked, whatever men she infected, whatever children she neglected, whoever else she hurt, what did that have to do with Jesus? If Jesus was not the one she wronged, then he was not the one to forgive her. How could he

say, “Your sins are forgiven”? He couldn’t—unless he is the main one offended, the God whose law is broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. Jesus’ words of forgiveness were words that only God could speak.

Jesus went around talking like he was God. His deity was implicit in all his words, and Jesus was also explicit in saying he was God. Jesus told his friends, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). He told his enemies, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). When he said that, his enemies picked up stones to kill him, complaining it was blasphemy, “because you, a mere man, claim to be God” (John 10:33). These people were wrong not to believe Jesus, but they were certainly right that he was openly claiming to be God.

That’s the first reason we should believe Jesus is God: because he says so! His words—his superhuman insight, his stunning authority, his amazing claims to forgive sins and to be one with God—ring with divine authority.

### **Acting Like God**

Jesus didn’t just talk like God; he acted like God. Jesus told his friends, “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” Jesus said much the same thing to his enemies: “Why do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? ...[Even] though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:36-38).

“Believe the miracles!” Have you ever simply read through the New Testament gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? If not, do so. Look at the things Jesus did. Look at the sheer number of miracles and the difficulty of those miracles. How could anyone but God do such things? Jesus drove out demons and walked on water. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, movement to the paralyzed, life to the dead! Even before any careful study of the meaning of each individual miracle, the overall impact of seeing the things Jesus did is an overwhelming sense of supernatural, divine power.

If the overall impression of Jesus’ works still doesn’t convince you that he’s God, then take a closer look at some details. Look at a few specific miracles of Jesus in the New Testament gospels, and notice how they match the work of God Almighty described in the Old Testament.

The gospels tell of a time when Jesus and his disciples were out on a lake in a small boat. A furious storm came up, and waves were sweeping over the boat. Jesus’ friends were terrified. They feared that they were about to drown. But what did Jesus do? He spoke to the wind and the waves and said, “Quiet! Be still!” The storm hushed and the sea became calm. Jesus’ disciples exclaimed, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:37-41)

Who is this? For the answer to that question, look in the Old Testament. Psalm 89:8-9 says, “O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? ... You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.” Only God Almighty can still stormy seas. So if Jesus stilled a stormy sea, who is he? He is God Almighty!

Or look at two other well-known miracles of Jesus in the New Testament gospels. Once, when Jesus was a guest at a wedding, he turned water into wine (John 2:1-11).

On another occasion, Jesus changed five loaves of bread into enough food for a multitude of thousands (Mark 6:34-44).

What does this say about Jesus? In the Old Testament Psalm 104 says, “O Lord my God, you are very great” (104:1) and speaks of God’s work in creation. Among other things, Psalm 104 mentions specifically that the Creator provides “*wine* that gladdens the heart of man ... and *bread* that sustains his heart” (104:15). So when Jesus turned water into wine, and when he miraculously gave bread to a crowd of more than five thousand, what did it mean? It meant he is the Maker of heaven and earth and the great supplier of all food and drink.

Let’s look at another example of a miracle of Jesus that fits the way the Lord God is described in the Old Testament. Psalm 103 says, “Praise the Lord, O my soul ... who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases” (103:2-3). Only God can forgive all sins. Only God can heal all diseases.

The New Testament gospels tell of Jesus forgiving sins and healing diseases. One particular story makes this especially clear. Some men came to Jesus carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. Jesus was in a house, and it was too crowded for them to get in, so they climbed up on top of the house, tore a hole in the roof, and lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw the faith of this man and his friends, he said, “Son; your sins are forgiven.”

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Psalm 103 praises God “who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,” so the religious teachers had a biblical basis for saying that only God can forgive sins. When Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven,” he was saying what only God could say. When his opponents challenged him, Jesus responded by doing what only God could do: he healed incurable paralysis. Jesus showed that he is the God who not only forgives sins but also the God who heals all diseases. His work of healing confirmed his word of forgiveness, and both confirmed his identity as God.

You might wonder if the Bible exaggerates Jesus’ miracles, but it does the opposite. The Bible doesn’t exaggerate; instead, it leaves out most of Jesus’ miracles. The miracles described in the Bible are stunning, but they’re only a sample. “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book” (John 20:30). The biblical authors didn’t write all the amazing things Jesus did. But under God’s guidance, they wrote enough to get the main point across and show that Jesus is God. “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

## Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?

Jesus talked and acted like God. So you can't just think that he's an inspired prophet or a wise teacher. You either have to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, or else you have to reject him as wicked or wacky. It's all or nothing. C. S. Lewis writes,

There is no half-way house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him 'Are you the son of Brahma?' he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, "Are you Allah?" he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, 'Are you Heaven?', I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.' The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question... We may note in passing that Jesus was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.

These days, however, some people do express mild approval of Jesus. Maybe that's your reaction. You don't adore and obey Jesus as God or trust him as the only one who can save you from sin and hell. But you don't really want to say anything bad about Jesus either. So your reaction to Jesus is mild approval. You say he's a wise prophet or spiritual teacher or brave rebel. But if that's what you say, you're simply ignoring what Jesus himself says.

Suppose I introduce myself to you and say, "Hi, my name is David Feddes. I was educated in a seminary, and now I'm a preacher." You say, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Lettuce. I'm glad you're dedicated to a cemetery where flowers are a feature. We need people like you to keep our graveyards beautiful." At that point, I'm not going to say, "I'm glad you appreciate me." No, I'm going to say, "You didn't hear me right. My name isn't Lettuce, it's Feddes: F-E-D-D-E-S. And I didn't say I'm dedicated to a cemetery where flowers are a feature. I said I was educated in a seminary, and now I am a preacher."

A misunderstanding like that may sound silly, but it's no sillier than hearing Jesus claim to forgive sins and to be God with us and then saying, "Glad to meet you, Jesus. You say you're a good teacher with some helpful spiritual ideas? I think that's great, and I may even want to use a few of your ideas myself." At that point I can almost hear Jesus saying, "Did I say I'm just a good teacher? No, I claimed authority to forgive sins. Did I say I was offering you some helpful ideas about God and that you can pick and choose which ones you like? No, I said that I am one with God and that I give eternal life to all who believe in me." Let me quote C.S. Lewis again:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us

not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus leaves no room for half-baked thinking, no room for half-hearted action. You must make up your mind and then act accordingly. The Lord Almighty has lived and walked among us. Believe Jesus' words. Believe his works.

Believe the most stunning word and the most stunning work of all: Jesus first said he would rise from the dead, and then he did it! Who but God could speak such a word? Who but God could do such a work? Who but God is stronger than death?