

Happy Incarnation: a Sympathetic God

Hebrews 4:15-16

We are kicking off week two of our Happy Incarnation Series. Last week Andrew did an amazing job laying out the Logical Foundation of the doctrine of incarnation. At its core we learned that:

- **“Jesus Christ is one person with two distinct and complete natures—human and divine.”**
- **“The Logos is the rational soul of Jesus—which is possible since mankind is made in the image of God.”**
- **“The divine aspects of Jesus Christ were largely subliminal during the Incarnation— which is necessary for Jesus to have a typical human experience.”**
- **“Jesus ceded the privileges of being God without relinquishing the position of being God.”**

This week we are going to look at one of three important elements rise up out of the incarnation. Today’s sermon is titled Happy Incarnation: a Sympathetic God.

Before we can get to the text today, I want to do some clarification.

VIDEO – Do you know why this clip compelling?

How many of you know that sympathy and empathy are not the same thing? Good because so many people use these words interchangeably and as a result we often miss the depth of what each word means.

Empathy is the ability, and the process of, putting oneself into another’s shoes, so to speak. Empathy allows someone to tap into another person’s worldview and see things through their eyes, and it allows them to better understand another’s thoughts, feelings, desires, and motives.

Empathy is a higher level functioning ability, and research done on brain development has connected the capacity for empathy to the development of the corpus callosum.

The corpus callosum is the thick band of nerves that connects the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The earliest age a child is capable of empathy is between 11 and 13. Several factors can stunt the corpus callosum’s growth, such as trauma. The result of an undeveloped and underdeveloped corpus callosum is that the individual cannot empathize.

God is fully capable of empathizing since he knows all, is part of all, created all, and sustains all things.

When we think of Empathy there are three types:

- Cognitive Empathy (the ability to see through someone else's eyes)
- Emotional Empathy (when a young child gets sad when others are sad)
- Compassion Empathy (feeling someone else's pain and taking action to fix it) (This is in essence actually better understood as compassion and its closely linked to sympathy as it leads to action).

Sympathy is feeling compassion, sorrow, or pity for the hardships that another person encounters. Sympathy, at its core requires the person sympathizing to have a shared experience.

Sympathy is the less cognitive and more emotionally driven than empathy. Sympathy is more about connection on a base level. It is the means by which a group of people can unite for a cause.

Throughout history dynamic leaders were able to tap into the sympathy they felt through shared suffering with their people and motivate them to keep pushing forward.

Hebrews 4:15:

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

In your NIV the word *sumpatheó* (soom-path-eh'-o) is translated empathize. I want you to cross that out and write sympathize.

The Strong's Concordance defines *sumpatheó* (soom-path-eh'-o) to have a fellow feeling with, to sympathize with.

You might ask why I am making a big deal out of this and the answer is two-fold.

- The Bible actually says sympathize.
- There is an important distinction between the meaning and function of these two words as I have already described above.

God has always been capable of empathizing with humanity, but when Jesus took on the “**likeness of human flesh**” He became capable of sympathizing with us, and this is good news.

“**For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses...**”

This means today that we serve a God who shared in our suffering, as one of us. Tell what other religion can make that claim. What other “so called” god can make that claim. Jesus felt what we feel.

Listen to Hebrews 2:18: “**For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.**”

Jesus is coming to our aid this morning as a direct result of His incarnation. He suffered alongside us, as one of us. He is not some far off, hands off God. He is the intimate personal triune perfect holy Lord of all.

Jesus suffered alongside us through temptation and yet He did not sin.

I see three implications in verse 15:

1. Jesus can **sympathize** with our weakness in the flesh.
 - Do you this morning that you are not only in your suffering? Do you know this morning that not only are those in this room suffering what you are suffering, that God himself, after “**emptying Himself and becoming nothing**” suffered with you as well.
 - Jesus knows what you are going through, He can empathize, but He also has felt and can feel what you are feeling. That has to bring us comfort today.
2. Jesus knows what it feels like to be tempted.
 - Temptation isn't sin, giving ourselves over to temptation is sin. Remember God's warning to Cain.
 - “**6Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”** Genesis 4:6-7

- Jesus knows and has felt the pull of temptation. He won't shy away from you He came to release you from the slavery and corruption of the flesh so you can say no to temptation.
3. Jesus handled the same temptations we do but never gave in, and as a result set a blueprint for us to overcome sin.
- In Luke 22:42 as Jesus prays in Gethsemane He prays “**Not my will, but yours, be done...**” This is the blueprint to saying no to temptation. We pray and in that prayer we give ourselves over to God's will rather than our sin.
 - In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul writes, “**No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.**” Jesus being fully man was subject to the temptations common to man yet as Paul suggests here, Jesus escaped the temptations of this world through the way provided.

Hebrews 4:16:

“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

I see three implications in verse 15:

1. Therefore, or **as a result** of the fact that Jesus in the flesh, Emmanuel, was, as the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:3, “**He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him,**” we can now draw near, with confidence, to God's throne and that throne is a throne like no other ever seen before.
 - It is a throne of **GRACE**. It is a throne of **GRACE**. It is a throne of **GRACE**.
2. We are looking to receive mercy.
 - As we approach God's throne we can now expect to receive mercy, meaning we can expect that God according to His word, will not punish us as we deserve to be punished.
 - That's good news this morning.
3. We are looking to find grace.

- As we approach God's throne we can now expect to find grace, meaning we can expect that God according to His word, will give us the good we don't deserve.
- That's good news this morning.

No of these things we've talked about this morning would be possible without Jesus' incarnation. So when we greet one-an-other and those outside these doors with Happy Incarnation remember what His incarnation really means.

This morning we have only covered one important element of the incarnation and it's a simple but profound truth, Jesus can not only empathize with us because He is fully God, but He can also sympathize with us because He became fully man.

Remember this morning:

- Jesus can sympathize with our weakness in the flesh. Jesus knows what it feels like to be tempted. Jesus handled the same temptations we do but never gave in, and as a result set a blueprint for us to overcome sin.
- We can now draw near to the throne of God, which is described as "the throne of Grace" with confidence. Looking to receive mercy. Looking to find grace.

If you need prayer, if you need to confess, if you need to join with Christ in death through baptism this morning, please don't leave without reaching out to someone.

We will please stand as we sing.