

# OpenTheo

## #75 Qs about Jesus

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Would Jesus have used miracles to make life easier for himself? Are some of Jesus' words too harsh? Could Jesus have sinned? Tom answers questions about Jesus by listeners.

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### Transcript

the ask nty anything podcast. Hello and welcome along to this week's edition of the show. I'm Justin Briley, Premier's theology and apologetics editor bringing you the show as ever with Premier, SBCK and NtRight online.

Always lovely to hear what people have to say about the show and people are kind enough to leave ratings and reviews wherever they get their podcasts from. This one from A Listner said, "I appreciate the wisdom but appreciate even more the deep compassion Tom has for everyone's struggles and his keen eye to see God at work in the struggles and questions of ordinary believers leading ordinary lives." That's what I love about this show as well. We connect Tom with ordinary people who have appreciated his work and who want to ask him questions.

We've got your questions on Jesus this week from people like Aiden and Jonathan and Paul, some very interesting questions about the person of Jesus on this week's edition of the podcast. Now, very excited to announce as well that we're going to be running a competition between now and September. We would love you to put your name in the hat to win one of five signed copies of Tom's book Broken Sign Post.

It's an excellent book. I can highly recommend it. It's really all about how Christianity makes sense of life.

If you'd like to receive or be in the running at least to win one of those five copies of Broken Sign Post signed by Tom himself, then do make sure you are registered for our newsletter over at [askntright.com](http://askntright.com). As long as you're registered, as long as you're one of the people who has signed up there, then you will be in the running. We'll pick the names out of a hat and you'll have a good chance of being in with a chance of winning the book. So, yeah, do make sure that you're registered.

AskNTright.com is the place to go. And of course, by registering, you also get the link to be able to ask a question yourself plus access to the regular newsletter and more besides. So that's exciting running a competition.

For now, let's get into your questions. Well, today on the show, we're going to be putting some of your questions specifically about Jesus to Tom. Tom, you've spent a lot of time thinking about Jesus traveling with Jesus through the gospels in many ways.

And rather than sort of looking specifically at the historicity of the text, in this sense, I tried to draw out some questions from people about the person of Jesus and maybe where our imagination might take us as well with who he was and the way he thought and taught. Let's start with Aiden in Orpington. And I thought this was a fun question to start with.

Firstly, do you think Jesus enjoyed being a carpenter? And I'd be interested in your thoughts of whether he was a carpenter. And as an apprentice, do you think he ever used a cheeky miracle to cut short and afternoons back? So what I would do, but it wasn't the how Jesus is a divine nature affected his human mind. So firstly, the whole carpenter thing.

I mean, don't tell us do you think Jesus was a carpenter as he's traditionally conceived? Yes, the Greek word is tectone. And a tectone is what we would call a builder. And of course, one of the main materials of building houses and so on, then as now was timber.

So a tectone might well do everything from putting together a roof trusses for a big building a hall or something, right down to making chairs and tables and stuff to go in a house and anything in between. It's also quite possible that a tectone would work in stone as well as wood. So it's not just somebody at a traditional modern carpenter's bench.

But I suspect it would cover a range of skills that there wouldn't be that much specialization. You could just turn your hand to whatever needed to be done. Did Jesus enjoy it? I think probably yes, I think in so far as we understand what it was like to be Jesus, which is kind of treading on holy ground a bit.

But Jesus was and is a fully human being. Then I think he relished it. I think he will have relished the joy of creativity.

And that's part of my answer to the next bit as well. Would he have used a cheeky miracle to cut short and after his work? I suspect not because part of God's creation is making things where the things then make themselves, you know, God creates trees which bear fruit, etc. God doesn't cut short and say, I'll just make another tree.

You don't need to bother about being fruit bearing this year. It's as though there's something organically right about the way God creates things. And if Jesus was making a chair or building a house, I think there'll be something organically right which he would relish about making it such as it should be.

And who knows? But there's something about the goodness of Christ. Why then does he not do that when he turns the water into wine? Why does he shortcut that creative process? Well, that's a very specific. I mean, yes, you could say, just wait another year till the present, as has done its course.

But you know, this is a social disaster about to happen. Yes. And Jesus obviates it.

It's such a wonderful story. And I could tell you stories about it, but I'm not now. But I think, I mean, but it's very interesting that Aidan then says, I wonder how Jesus divine nature affected his human one.

I really do want to say to Aidan and anyone else who thinks like this, we only know what the words divine and human really mean when we look at Jesus and see that they fit together perfectly. They're not, oh, will he's divine and then oh, will he's human as though, oh, what a shock how can that possibly be something about the mystery of humans being made in God's image has to do with the fact that if God is going to become anything, then a human being is the obvious thing for him to be. He will be able to express himself fully as a human being, which means not cutting corners.

Well, yes, water into wine, but normally going with the grain of the good world that the father had created in the first place. And of course, then you get miracles of new creation. C.S. Lewis's book *Miracles* is awfully good on this miracles of the old creation where you're patching up or healing things, miracles of the new creation like raising Lazarus or water into wine or whatever, where suddenly we get a glimpse of something which is in continuity with the present creation and yet leaps forward into the new world which God is already starting to make.

And that is happening not because Jesus is divine with the divinities of overriding the humanity, but as much because he is the genuine human being, the human being. Think of Psalm 8, you have made him little loath in the angels to crown him with glory and honor putting all things in subjection under his feet. That's what said of human beings.

And the New Testament picks that up and says, that's true of Jesus, ultimate human being because he is the incarnate son of God. This remains the great mystery of the incarnation, the appropriate and perfect coming together of human and divine. Let's go to Jonathan in Littleton Colorado who says, when reading the Gospels, I often find myself cringing the seeming harshness of Jesus's words.

For example, in Luke 9, before healing the boy with the unclean spirit, he says, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?" He almost sounds exasperated, sick and tired of his mundane ministry, almost like a spoiled kid ready to go home from a missions trip. What am I to make of moments such as these asks Jonathan? I love the image of the spoiled kid ready to go home on a missions trip. Yeah, all sorts of things, precisely because Jesus is a real human being living in a real world.

We can hear things he says transposed into our world and then we think, "Oh dear, if somebody said that to me, I wouldn't be too impressed by that." But when you look at the whole of Luke's gospel, the whole of any of the Gospels, what you see constantly is Jesus doing and saying things which open up this glorious, healing new world and then people aren't getting it and people are preferring to do things their own way and people are grumbling and mumbling and wanting to say he's demon-possessed and so on. Of course, that's frustrating. Of course, he is bound to think and say, "Where is your faith? Why can't you see what God is doing?" And Jesus' analysis of the problem is that that generation had indeed got everything twisted, everything out of kilter.

Jesus did most of his mighty works in those towns in the north end of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Bethsader, etc. But he turns around and says, "I've done all this stuff and you still are charging off in your own direction," which turns out to be getting ready for national rebellion against Rome and all that, rather than being the light of the world, rather than being the sort of people we see sketched in the Sermon on the Mount and so on. And so there's a deep sorrow there.

And from Jesus' point of view, that sorrow sounds to us like frustration, like this boiled kid or whatever, that doesn't worry me in the same way it worries Jonathan, because I guess I've spent a long time looking at the first century Jewish world and trying to understand what Jesus was doing in the middle of that. And I think it's the same sorrow as when he says Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who stones the prophets and so on. "I've longed to gather you like a hand gathering her chicks under her wings and you would not.

Now your house is left to you, Dessarless." I think it's almost as though sometimes we have this sort of expectation that Jesus will be this sort of haloed character who floats above the ground and is constantly just peace and love and peace and love. Jesus had all the emotions that we have and he expressed them, I suppose, is the point, isn't it? He got... Yes. I can imagine he did get exasperated when he was people who simply didn't

understand or follow.

Yes. And I think there was a hardness and I have experienced just little bits of that where sometimes been working with people and you just almost see it on their faces. They just don't want to know this stuff, perhaps, because they realize just where the challenge would come.

And then I wouldn't personally say to somebody, "Oh, you're all faith is an artless." But then I haven't been faced with the kind of... But if you're Jesus and you're doing this thing, which is the outflowing love of God, and then to see the hardness of people's faces, they don't want your stuff. They've got their own agendas and you're actually a disturbance and a distraction, even if there's some poor kid who needs healing right now and which is what's going on there, the boy with the unclean spirit. So yes, we have to be careful of saying the full range of human emotions, because for us human emotions tip over into selfishness, into petulance, or into bossiness, or into bad temper.

And I don't think we see that in Jesus, or quite sure we don't see it in Jesus. I know that, oh, years ago Bertrand Russell wrote a book, "Why I'm Not a Christian?" And among the things he cited were Jesus cursing of the fig tree. He said, "That's just petty and stupid and how can you possibly follow somebody like that?" Missing the point entirely of what's going on in the fig tree incident as Jesus comes to Jerusalem and sees again the city in rebellion against his message.

And the fig tree becomes a sign of what God is going to do to the temple rather than just petty petulance. Though it's always open to people to misinterpret. Part of incarnation is God laying himself open to misunderstanding.

We've got finally Paul in Boulder, Colorado. And this is sort of an old chestnut theological sort of question here. But apparently Paul and his father have been at loggerheads on it, because Paul asked, "Could Jesus have sinned in my mind?" The answer is, "Yes." But he didn't, and he wouldn't have.

But my father says, "No." And he didn't, because he couldn't have. And we've actually had this debate for over a decade. I'd love your insight.

Let's just keep it on that question. What do you think? Could Jesus have sinned, but he didn't? Or was it impossible for Jesus to have sinned because of his nature? Yes, I want to say you're both right and you're both wrong, which is a kind of solomonic judgment, I suppose. Augustin has these categories of human beings in a natural state, can't not sin.

Then in our present redeemed state, we are capable of not sinning. And then in our final redeemed state, we will not be capable of sinning. And the question is, "Is Jesus already in that final state?" As it were.

And I want to say, and I see that Paul goes on with this in his second paragraph, "The

temptations are real temptations." And think about how the temptations work in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. And then similar things coming back when Jesus is in Gethsemane and on the cross. He is tempted to doubt and to say, "My God, why did you abandon me?" And just as the enemy says in Matthew 4, "If you are the son of God, do this or that or the other." Now this, why don't you just try and prove it and come out of these stones to become bread? And then on the cross, the people who are mocking him say, "If you are the son of God, come down from the cross." And it's the same thing. And there is a sense in which Jesus could have done that.

Otherwise, the temptations would have just gone by him, wouldn't have been real. What seems to be going on in Gethsemane and on the cross is very, very real. But to doubt is, to doubt at that point in Gethsemane, Jesus says, "Maybe I've misread the signs, maybe there's another way." But that is not to sin.

To doubt is not to sin. But it's when doubt then turns into sin that you've got the problem. Now, I was trying to think of an example of this, I read the question.

There are lots of things which I could in principle do. I could, there's a shop just up the road. I know the people there.

They're often not at the desk when I go in. I could quite easily reach round, help myself to what's in the till and walk out of the shop. And I don't think anyone would be any of the wiser until they counted the cash at the end of the day.

Would I do that? Well, actually, no. I wouldn't. Even if my children were starving, God willing, I wouldn't do that.

No doubt there are many other things which I'm tempted to do where I do sin. But I just give that an example. I could do it, but I wouldn't do it.

That's very trivial. And Jesus' temptations are not trivial. They're very real.

They're to misunderstandings of what Messiahship might look like because there are many models of Messiahship in Jesus' day. And it looks as though he's being faced with different options. And he knows he has to stay on the straight and narrow.

But he must have longed to be the kind of Messiah that so many people wanted. He saw his people in desperate trouble, wanted to help them the way they wanted. And he ends up dying on a cross, which was not what they wanted.

So I think these are real temptations. But there again, we're in the mystery of the divinity and the humanity and the fact that we only discover what divinity and humanity really mean when we look at Jesus and not least when he's dying on the cross. It's been great to spend some time with you again, Tom.

Thank you very much for answering these questions about Jesus and look forward to connecting with you again next time. Thank you. Thank you.

Great to have you with us on the show today. Thanks for being with us. And next time on the show, we're looking at questions on heaven and whether we will see our loved ones there and some of the questions that often arise around that.

Tom will be tackling those at the same time next week. Just a reminder that we'd love you to register over at [askentwright.com](http://askentwright.com). If you registered there receiving our newsletter, then you will also be in the running to receive one of five signed copies of Tom's latest book, *Broken Sign Post*. It's an excellent book signed by Tom himself.

You'll be in the running for one of those five signed copies. As long as you're registered, again, that's at [askentwright.com](http://askentwright.com). For now, thanks for being with us. See you next time.

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