

Rag n Bone Man's "I'm Only Human" tells a fascinating story of a broken relationship. Or rather, it *implies* that story, since to listen to the song is to feel as though we're listening to one side of the end of a long, painful conversation.

Again and again, he insists that, whatever happened, "Don't put your blame on me... I'm only human."

I'm sorry I couldn't solve your problems. I'm only human.

I'm sorry I couldn't figure it out. I'm only human.

I'm sorry I couldn't be honest. I'm only human.

I'm no Messiah. I'm only human.

The song expresses a sentiment we're all well-acquainted with: we're not God. We can't save the world - we can't even save ourselves. So be careful not to put too much faith in me.

There's some truth to that. We do often tend to put too much faith in other people, which can lead to a lot of heartache.

But that's not what this song is about. This song is a person who has let someone else down. A person who doesn't believe in *himself*. A person who says, "I'm only human."

Rag n Bone man believes that to be human is to be a failure. To be human is to let other people down. To be human is to be limited, small, insignificant, unworthy of trust or faith.

When's the last time you let someone down? Maybe you didn't return that phone call, or didn't make it to their house. Maybe like me, you live far away from family and couldn't make it back for a holiday. Or you failed to keep a promise.

We've all been where Rag n Bone man is - feeling the weight of our human limitations. We've all wanted to shrug and say, "Don't put your blame on me! I'm only human!"

Friends, I want to offer us a word of encouragement today. To be human is to be finite, yes, but when we shrug our shoulders and say we're "only human", we're lying about what it means to be human.

Today, we're going to explore what it means to be human, and we'll see that while to be human is to be limited, it is not to fail. We'll see that to be human is a sacred calling, and that God wants us to live tall and proud to be human.

To be human is to represent God in the world. That is our sacred calling. There's nothing "only" about our humanity.

Our series this summer is called "BELIEVE". We're exploring the Apostles' Creed, one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. We're working through statement by statement, each time asking why this belief matters. How does this belief shape us as a church and us as individuals today?

We began by confessing God as the creator, the shaper of our lives. Last week, we explored the first statement about Jesus - "**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.**" We saw that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity. At the beginning of John's story of Jesus, he ties in God the creator and Jesus as God:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. -- John 1:1-4

This week, the creed goes on to say more about Jesus:

**Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate...**

This week, we're talking about Jesus the *human*. Jesus who is the Second Person of the Trinity, fully God, and yet was born as a baby and who suffered under Pontius Pilate. (I was going to devote a week just to talk about Jesus' virgin birth, but we did that sermon right before Christmas. So if you missed that one, if you have questions about what it means to say Jesus was born of a Virgin, you can get that sermon from Dec 18 last year... we'll share a link to it in the discussion guide and on our Facebook page.)

Since Jesus was first raised from the dead, we have been puzzling out what it means that he is both God and human. The theological term for this is Incarnation (it comes from Latin and literally means "to become flesh"). We take it from a few verses later in John 1, where he tells us that Jesus, the divine Word of God,

"Became human and made his home among us." -- John 1:14

Jesus, the Word of God, became human. He took on flesh. And not just any flesh. He became a baby. Today, we talk about giving birth as something beautiful, but in the ancient world, even among God's people, a woman was unclean after she gave birth. Many religions find the idea that a god would consent to be born to a human mother offensive (even the Greek gods were usually born in other, more fantastical ways).

But Jesus was born to a human mother. He was fully human in every way.

Which we miss. We think that Jesus wasn't fully human but *superhuman*. One of our favorite Christmas carols is "Away in a Manger", which talks about baby Jesus as a supernaturally peaceful baby who is so godly he doesn't even cry and even the animals are gathered around in awe.

Which is ridiculous.

If Jesus was fully human, then he cried as a baby and had some terrible twos. Since the Bible never really mentions Joseph, his earthly father, most scholars think Joseph died when Jesus was a teenager, which means Jesus knew the pain of the loss of a parent, would have shouldered the burden of caring for his single mother and younger siblings. He also had to walk away from that around 30 when God called him to begin his preaching and healing ministry.

That ministry is what we like to focus on. Jesus the miracle worker who fed thousands, healed hundreds, exorcised demons and walked on water. The Jesus who announced good news to the poor, freedom to captives, justice for the oppressed and challenged the religious leaders.

No wonder we think he's superhuman. His life on Earth truly did seem miraculous.

Except that, toward the *end* of John's story, Jesus makes this statement:

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. -- John 14:12

Jesus says, "All that stuff I've done? It's only the *beginning*. There's lots more to do and *you're going to do it.*"

We hear him say that and want to start singing Rag n Bone Man. Woah, Jesus! Don't expect too much out of us! We're not God like you are. We're only human!

The problem is that Jesus is human too. Fully human. And core to the Christian confession about Jesus' humanity is the confession that *everything Jesus did we can do*.

Another way to say it is like this: When we see Jesus at work in the Scriptures, we're not seeing what God can do. If Jesus were just doing whatever God can do, he wouldn't have needed to become human. He could've just stayed in heaven and done it. Or he could have sent an angelic messenger (which happens a lot in the rest of the Bible).

No, Jesus became human to *show us what it means to be fully human*. Whatever we see him doing, we can do.

You want to say, "But we *don't* do that."

I beg to differ. When Amanda and I moved here to join the Catalyst family, about twenty of you met us at our home on a Friday morning to unload our moving truck. It was unloaded so fast that most of you stuck around and helped us unpack. By the time everyone left shortly after lunch, most of our house was already moved in.

You've moved before. You know that is a literal miracle. I can tell you it make us feel incredibly welcomed at Catalyst.

Already this year, our C-Groups have packed hundreds of boxes of food at LifeMessage - which has enabled them to feed hundreds of families in our community. You ask anyone who's ever needed a little help feeding their family and they'll tell you that's miraculous.

We've had a lot of sickness and suffering in our community just in the last year. From Leroy and Elizabeth Sims, who constantly pray with us when we're in the hospital to all of you who provide meals and comfort for those who are healing and grieving. Your kindness and sacrifice has provided dozens of meals for others in this community. That's miraculous.

My favorite thing about Jesus is that, wherever he went, people who had felt rejected by God experienced welcome. They heard his teaching as good news: that God was with them, that the way had been cleared for outsiders to be insiders. This is my favorite thing about Catalyst, too. How many of you, the first time you approached this building, were afraid? Afraid because of what had been done to you or said to you in the name of Jesus? Convinced that whatever was happening in here wasn't any different from what you'd experienced out there?

And yet, like me, you found welcome here. You found a place that was free of judgment, a place where you were loved and welcomed as you are, for who you are. You found it was safe to let your defenses down a little, to begin to trust that maybe God really *is* for you, that God really *could* love you and call *you* to receive this new life.

Friends, you already know that is a miracle. And yet it's played out week after week in this Church, among these people who are God's people.

We want to push back, to say that's not a miracle. But what is a miracle if it's not God breaking into our ordinary world? And that happens again and again. You are God's agents in this world. You welcome, you pray, you give, you serve, you love.

We want to push back, insist that we're only human. But look at what humans are when we simply be the people God called us to be. Look what we accomplish when we do the next thing God calls us to do.

When we say we're 'only human', too often we are allowing our sin, our brokenness, our failure define us. Those are real problems (we'll talk more about them next week when we talk about the cross). But they are not the first truth about who we are. The first truth is that humanity was created in God's image. Genesis 1 tells us

God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." -- Genesis 1:26-28

God created us in his image and appointed us rulers of the world. This is where our story begins. This is fundamentally who you and I are. Yes, sin and brokenness enter into the story. No we cannot ignore them.

But when we say that Jesus became human, we are saying that he came to restore us to this place. Theologians call him the Second Adam. Because where the first Adam failed, Jesus succeeded.

But he succeeded *at being fully human*. When we look at Jesus, we don't see a Superman who is better than we could ever be. We see exactly who God created us to be, who we can be with God's help.

When we fail, when we let someone down, when we come face to face with our own limitations, we want to hide in our shame, hide behind the excuse that we're 'only human'.

This is a paradox: we are limited, but we are not 'only' anything. One of my favorite pastors, Andy Stanley, has a powerful motto that has helped me navigate this in my own life:

Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.

In other words: you can't save the world. Even Jesus didn't heal everyone, fix every problem. Because to be human is to be limited.

But don't let that paralyze you. Do *something*. Do for one. You can't be friends with everyone? Befriend one person. You can't be there for everyone? Be there for someone.

To be human is to be limited, but not powerless. And when each of us is living into the new life God gives us through Jesus, when each of us is committed to doing what we can, doing for one even though we can't do for everyone, then God works miracles among us, through us.

That is what it means to be human.

When we allow ourselves to be human, those who are lost find a home.

When we allow ourselves to be human, the hurting find comfort.

When we allow ourselves to be human, the anxious find peace.

When we allow ourselves to be human, the oppressed find justice.

When we allow ourselves to be human, the hopeless find a reason to believe things get better.

When we allow ourselves to be human, the outsiders find welcome.

When we, as a Church, say we believe in Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin and suffered under Pilate, we are in part confessing that God became human. Not that he looked human or that he was superhuman but that Jesus was fully human in the way we were all created to be.

We confess that when we see Jesus, we see who we are called to be. We insist that no one is 'only human' because to be human is to be made in God's image, to be called to rule the earth as God rules.

Communion + Examen

To be human is to be faithful to God, even when it costs us. We follow Jesus to the Cross and he makes us fully human.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Assignment

Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.

