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December 15, 2018

God's Glory Denied

December 16, 2018

Prayer: *Father, I just want to thank you for your grace, I thank you for the gifts that you have given to us as a congregation, including the gift of yourself, the greatest gift of all. And Lord, this morning we're going to again be looking at what it is that you've given up in order to be with us, in order to be our Emanuel. And again, we pray for your Holy Spirit's presence, Lord, these are just words without your Holy Spirit, and so we pray that you would infuse and give life to these words and that maybe they may be of permanent value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well again, we're looking this Christmas season at glory. We are kind of working our way up to Christmas by looking at three different aspects of God's glory and we looked first last week at glory defined. And to sum up that entire message, we claimed that God's pursuit of glory was not out of some desperate need on his part but because glory given to God is at first an accurate description of who God is; and secondly, it's an appropriate response to who he is; and thirdly, it is a gift from God to us.

And we learned that we are creatures designed by God for the express purpose of giving glory to him and that God's pursuit of glory is really the pursuit of the very best there is for us. As John Piper so aptly put it, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."

Well, this morning we're going to be looking at the second part of that series which is the essence of what Christmas itself is, God having left heaven itself to assume the very flesh and blood that you and I have. It was such a monumental denial of the glory that God had from all eternity that we can and will spend the rest of eternity marveling at it. My contention is the more that you know exactly what it is that God gave up to enter into human flesh, the more you will see the wonder of Christmas.

So this morning we're going to looking at glory denied, and we're going to look at it in order to understand the glory that God denied himself at the incarnation. And in order to do that, you have to look first at the very last book of the Bible which gives us a picture of the glory and honor that belongs to the Son of God. And so we go to *Revelation 5*, starting at verse 11. It says: *Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. They said*

with a loud voice: The lamb who was slaughtered is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the one seated on the throne, and to the lamb, forever and ever! Power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. And that's seven.

Seven is the number of completeness, and seven is also the number of the specific qualities that these thousands of thousands who are gathered around the altar are all proclaiming that Jesus is worthy of. Well, they also represent seven different areas of glory that Jesus denied himself by coming to earth as one of us. And so we look at the first one which is power. Power denied. *Romans 1* says this: *For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made.* Well, the first part of the glory that God denied himself in becoming flesh was power. God describes this power as being understood through what he has created, what he has made, but first we have to understand who he is. I mean, I know growing up, I had an extremely limited understanding of who Jesus was and what role he had in creation. I mean, I had absolutely no idea that the babe in the manger was the very same one who was responsible for everything that has come into existence. I mean, really the idea that I had before I came to

Christ is that Jesus himself began his existence on Christmas day 2018 years ago. I mean it never occurred to me that the Son had existed for all time along with the Father and the Holy Spirit and that approximately 2018 years ago that Son left heaven itself, took on flesh and became the baby that's known as Jesus of Nazareth. He later became known by his title which is "the Christ," which means Anointed One. I know for the longest time I thought that Christmas morning marked the beginning of the existence of a person whose first name was Jesus and last name was Christ, and that's how I understood it. And now if your baseline thinking was anything like mine, then you would be as shocked as I was when I read in the Bible that Jesus, who I actually thought was just a man named Jesus Christ, was known by another name and that name was "the Word." When I first came upon the statement in the gospel of John about Jesus being "the Word," I was shocked that it identified him as the author of everything in creation. But I read in *John 1*, it said: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has not been created.* So when I first read that this Word was there, I saw that he was uniquely with God as well as being God. Once again that only makes sense if there's more than one God or if God has more than one person, I should say. I mean, you can't be with you and be you unless there's more than one you. We

understand that God is not two but three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Well, here was God saying that in the beginning he was and that this Word was there with him at the beginning and was also God, and that the Word was clearly the author of everything that's been created. And it was only when I got down to verse 14 that I realized that this Word was another name for Jesus. There it said: *The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* So the Bible says this Jesus, this Word become flesh, spoke the universe into existence by the strength of His power. That's power that makes the big bang look like a firecracker. It's not harder to believe in the claims the materialist naturalist who says the universe simply blew itself into existence out of nothing. What I find much harder to believe and much more worthy of glory and honor is the fact that Jesus went from speaking the sun and the moon and the stars and the oceans and the birds and the animals and all of nature into being to a place where he couldn't even speak. I mean, on Christmas morning, the Son of God found that the voice that had so much power that had brought into creation every single thing that has existed had now reduced itself to the squalling of a baby, unable to even mouth words. Jesus denied his own personal power to the extent that all he could do was coo and cry, like the baby he was willing to become in order to fully enter into the life that you and I live. We

started as babies and so did he, denying himself the power that belonged to him.

Well, next is riches, that is, riches denied. I mean, how do you measure wealth in a person who is the author of every single thing in the created universe that wealth itself is created through? I mean, I own the property that I live on but I own it simply because I have a piece of paper stating that I bought it from such and such a party some 40 years ago, and that's really a convenient legal fiction. You see, 40,000 years ago that property belonged to Jesus Christ and 40,000 years from now it will still belong to Jesus Christ for one reason: He created it out of nothing. The same can be said for virtually every single thing in the material world from the mud under your feet to the Hope diamond. As creator and author of the material world, Christ's wealth doesn't rank with anybody else's because virtually every ounce of wealth of every person stems from something previously owned by Christ, and something that in the end will be recognized as belonging solely to Christ. Just picture owning everything the universe has to offer and then being willing to deny yourself to a place that Jesus reduced himself to when he said in *Matthew 8*: "*Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*" You see, the poverty that Jesus lived in belied the fact that by far he was actually the richest man who has ever lived. *2 Corinthians*

says: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.* You see, Jesus denied himself the riches that only he was entitled to and he did that to freely identify with us.

Next is wisdom denied, and this is truly stunning. We're going to spend a good deal of time looking at this. You have to understand that God is the source, he's the fountainhead of all wisdom. He says in *Isaiah 55*: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways."* This is the LORD'S declaration. *"For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."* And *Psalm 50* says: *You have done these things, and I kept silent; you thought I was just like you. But I will rebuke you and lay out the case before you.* See, I think *Psalm 50* is exactly why so many people go so far astray from the truth. We think God is just like us, I mean, maybe a little bit bigger, maybe a little scarier. James says: *This is not wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* Now, just for a minute I want you to consider what Jesus did when he left heaven to become a baby, unable to speak or move and certainly incapable of expressing the wisdom that he once possessed. You've got to understand Jesus was no genius baby who spoke like Einstein from the crib but was instead someone who had to gain and learn wisdom the hard way, just like you and I have to.

I mean *Luke 2:52* says: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.* Now consider the source of all wisdom voluntarily denying himself the wisdom that he had had from eternity past in order to identify with us. I mean, you got to think about this for a minute. You got to just kind of meditate on it and just roll it over in your mind. Understand, Jesus started from scratch. And he started from scratch using the same process for gaining wisdom that you and I have. The human nature that Jesus embraced had to learn how to crawl, how to walk and how to talk just like we do, and he learned wisdom all the while veiling his human nature from his former wisdom and knowledge. See, the scripture says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and that he learned obedience through suffering. It paints a portrait of Jesus voluntarily choosing to discover his mission the very same way that we gain God's wisdom, by understanding what the Spirit revealed through the scripture, by having to discover on his own through the scriptures -- the same scriptures that we have -- the full extent of his identity as Messiah. I mean, just let that sink in for a minute.

You know, a while back we did a series on the servant songs of Isaiah, and they're a series of prophetic songs, they're kind of buried deep in the old testament that speak very clearly that the role Jesus would have as Messiah. And I said back then and I just

repeat, it's entirely possible that the Father used the servant songs of Isaiah to instruct his Son in the role that he would have as the suffering servant. I mean, that means if that's so, that Jesus would have had to have grown in wisdom the hard way, by applying himself to studying the scripture. But this much we know thanks to one little story about Jesus's adolescence, and that's Jesus at age twelve had already discovered through the scripture his unique relationship with his Father and the role that he would have in reconciling the world to himself. In fact, this understanding that he had, this caused a substantive break with his earthly parents over his true father. I mean, if you remember in Luke 2, there's this story about the boy Jesus in the temple. And as the story goes, Mary and Joseph and Jesus had gone up to the Passover ceremony in Jerusalem, and somehow or other in the confusion of the caravan, Mary and Joseph both left, each thinking that the other had Jesus with them. This is a young boy at age twelve, so it describes three days of absolutely panic as they're looking for Jesus and can't find him, and they return to the temple and what do they find? They find Jesus as a young boy of twelve instructing the great leaders in the law. Just to back up a little bit, Jesus had been attending this Passover celebration and it clearly meant so much more to him than to the Jews who were attending it, because Jesus, by the power of the Spirit through the scripture, had recaptured the wisdom to understand exactly what the

Passover was about. I mean, the Jews thought that they were just remembering their escape from Egypt, you know, it was an escape preceded by the worst of the ten plagues, when the angel of death swept into Egypt, killing the firstborn but passing over all those who were protected by the blood of the lamb smeared on their doorposts. They didn't realize they were picturing the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross whose blood alone could save them from death itself, but understand, young Jesus got it. And it was said during the Passover celebration that the stream that ran past the temple turned completely red with the blood of the lambs that were being slaughtered and only the twelve-year-old in that temple understood that all of that blood represented his blood. It represented his blood that would be shed for sins to be paid. You see, by the time Jesus had reached the age of twelve, his wisdom had so grown that he's fully come to grasp the enormity of who he was. That's why he would say to his earthly parents in *Luke 2:49*: "*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. They, that's Mary and Joseph, they didn't understand but Jesus at the age of twelve did. See, he fully understood that twelve years earlier he had left heaven itself to enter the womb of a peasant woman to be born in a barn in Bethlehem. Jesus had come to fully realize that he was the Messiah come to earth and that he had had the very mind of God now inside a

twelve-year-old boy. Just let that sink in.

You know, Solomon was considered the wisest man who ever lived and we have Michelangelo, da Vinci, Einstein, maybe Stephen Hawking, these are folks that the world considers to be extraordinary geniuses. Understand that their minds were merely a thimbleful compared to the limitless ocean of wisdom that was in the mind of this twelve-year-old boy. See, thousands of years earlier this boy's mind had confronted Job when Job sought to question his wisdom and how he created and ordered the world. *Job 38 says: Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements -- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"* See, the mind who had originally laid that cornerstone was now in the flesh in the temple in this twelve-year-old boy. That same mind had gone on to ask Job in verse 8: *"Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, Thus far you shall come, and no*

farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'? Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this." Here's what's astounding. That twelve-year-old boy could declare it because it was he, who thousands of years before, had done it. And again, he asked Job: *"Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness? Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on earth?"* Well, this adolescent boy could and did. Remember that he had denied himself this astounding wisdom to become a little baby, a baby who had to learn how to crawl and to walk and to talk. See, we humans can't begin to imagine just where this young man had come from. Colossians says: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him.* See, this twelve-year-old boy in the temple understood that it was he who had said to Job thousands of years before: *"Can*

you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? See, this Jesus so denied himself his abundant wisdom that he went on to live a completely obscure life as an infant, as a child, and as an adolescent. I mean, understand, young Jesus had the religious leaders, the great leaders of Israel hanging on his every word. I mean, he could have begun his ministry right then and right there at the center of Jewish thought and culture, and you know what? He would have been instantly famous. Scripture says he did otherwise. It says: *Then He went down with them -- that's mom and dad, that's Mary and Joseph -- then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart.*

And once again we just marvel at Nazareth. I mean do you remember Nazareth? Do you know anything about Nazareth, where Jesus went? Jesus is first calling his apostles, he first finds Philip and Philip finds Nathanael, and Nathanael is appalled to find out this Jesus that he's heard of, he's from Nazareth. Listen to what John's gospel says. It says: *Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!" "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him. "Come and see," Philip answered. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*

John Gills wrote a commentary over a hundred years ago. He said this, he said: "The whole country of Galilee was had in contempt with the Jews; but Nazareth was so mean a place, that it seems it was even despised by its neighbors, by the Galileans themselves; for Nathanael was a Galilean, that said these words. It was so miserable a place that he could hardly think that any sort of good thing, even any worldly good thing, could come from thence."

So instead of staying in his father's house, the boy Jesus, returns to this appalling place called Nazareth with his stepparents, Mary and Joseph, and you know why? I go back to the servant songs buried in the Old Testament in *Isaiah 42*, it says: "*He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.*" You've got to understand, this twelve-year-old boy was the most brilliant genius the universe has ever known. He was astounding the greatest teachers in Israel and yet even though his mother and Joseph didn't understand him, he decides to leave the temple, the place that could have been a launching place for worldwide fame, power and ministry, and he goes back to a life of complete and absolute obscurity in Nazareth, working in a carpenter's shop for his stepfather. Because *He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street.* And so for 18 more years, Jesus submits to and serves his earthly parents. The one whose wisdom laid the cornerstones of earth itself is measuring and cutting

boards for his stepfather. I mean the creator of Orion and the chain of Pleiades is doing household chores for his mother. Just consider the glory of Jesus's infinite wisdom denied.

Next we have strength denied. Strength and power are often seen as synonymous, and for our purposes we can look at the power, we already looked at that, that Jesus denied himself in all that he created, but the strength we can look at as something that he denied himself personally, as something that he gave up that was personal to him. Jesus went from possessing a greatest strength the universe has ever seen to a personal weakness that was such that as a newborn, he couldn't even lift his head or speak or sit up. But we know that this voluntary strength was temporary. It was just like we are. This kind of strength that we have, we knew that Jesus grew both in wisdom and in stature but then again, we return to Jesus giving up his strength at the very end on the cross, where He is in complete and utter weakness. And so we go to the cross to be reminded of the extent of the strength that Jesus denied himself.

There was an incident that took place in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was about to be arrested. Let me just take you there.

This is *John 18*. It says: *So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests*

and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," They replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Now Jesus, of course, knew exactly who they were after but he also knew that the disciples were in grave danger as well. And so he stated the question emphatically, not once, but twice, in order to make certain that the soldiers would narrow their focus specifically on him. And after identifying himself as the specific one being targeted, Jesus repeats the question once more, isolating himself to protect his disciples. Verse 7 says: Again, he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." See, so precious were the disciples to Jesus that even though they were about to all scatter like sheep and abandon him, he was thinking specifically of them for two reasons: Number one, he deeply loved them; and number two, he knew they were gifts from his Father and so he was not about to lose one. And we all know what happened next, I mean, Jesus surrenders himself to the authorities and immediately they began beating and mistreating him.

But when we consider Jesus denying himself strength, I want to go back to this incident in the garden and re-examine what can easily be overlooked. It's again, *John 18:3*. It says: *So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.* Now understand, a detachment of soldiers could range from anywhere upwards of 600 soldiers which is what a cohort was down to what a lot of people suggest was actually the number that was in the garden which is about a hundred. There's plenty of argument as to how many people were actually there in the garden, but one thing is for certain, these were heavily armed men who were sent to address what the Jews had presented as an incredibly grave threat and they were many in number. One way to understand it is one commentator said is at very least this was the equivalent of a SWAT team that was coming to take Jesus into custody. And Jesus used that opportunity to very subtly demonstrate the strength that belonged to him that he was willing to deny for us. See, the scripture says: *When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.* I mean it's a detail given in the narrative that seems so minor it's easy to overlook, but understand what's being said here, Jesus had the power to flatten an entire detachment of soldiers simply by opening his mouth. That's a measure of strength we very seldom consider.

There's another different type of indicator of the strength that Jesus had available to him that occurred also in the garden when Peter cut off one of the soldier's ears. Jesus said in *Matthew 26*: "*Put your sword back in its place,*" Jesus said to him, "*for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?*" You want to talk about strength denied, I mean, a legion is six thousand. There was twelve legions. Jesus just kind of casually states that there are 72,000 angels just waiting with bated breath for a sign from Jesus, and if they get that sign, they're going to make Judas and this cohort of soldiers regret that they were ever born. I mean, at the strength of Jesus' command, he could have unleashed creatures who this world is only going to see at judgment day. There have been some cases where we've seen little tastes of an angel's fury. I mean, consider the ancient ruler Sennacherib. He was a great ruler who mocked God and attempted to annihilate the Jews, and the night before he was to attack, he got to experience the fury of just one of God's angels. *2 Kings 19* says: *That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning -- there were all the dead bodies!* Sennacherib's army was destroyed for mocking God's people. Here's God himself, he's about to be mocked and stripped and

crucified and yet for our sakes Jesus denies the strength that could have stopped it completely.

Next we have honor denied. You know, time and again Jesus performed miracles, and instead of deserving and receiving the honor that those miracles were due, he was flat out denied it, either through the greed of the crowd who simply demanded more food, more miracles, more shows or in the case of those who were closest to him, including his family, who were genuinely offended by who he was. I mean, the sting of this particular denial was the more worthy of honor Jesus was, the more intent on denying him that honor were those who were closest to him. Matthew describes one of Jesus's response to that. And he says in *Matthew 13: They took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."* There was no one more worthy of honor than Jesus, and yet he found himself time and again profoundly without honor among those he was closest to.

And next we have glory denied. At the end of Jesus's three-year public ministry, we find him pouring out his heart before his Father in prayer, and we have that prayer preserved for us in scripture. And we find one of Jesus's heartfelt requests of his father was for the honor and the glory that he once had to be

restored. In *John 17* Jesus prays: *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* And so we ask what was that glory like? And again, we only have tiny little snippets to inform us. Well, one such snippet was described by the prophet Isaiah, who was at one point caught up literally to the throne of heaven. He described what he saw in *Isaiah 6*. He says: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and the thresholds shook and the whole temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* Now you have to understand that Isaiah was arguably the holiest man of his entire generation, and yet in the presence of the glory of God, he's so aware of his uncleanness that he finds himself disintegrating. I mean Christ, the flawless Son of God, was quite at home in the presence of that glory, and he traded it all for a manger in a barn in Bethlehem as he denied himself that glory.

And finally we have blessing denied. The Bible tells us that not only did Jesus deny himself the blessing that he was in and of himself but that for us he was willing to become a curse.

Galatians 3:13 says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."* R.C. Sproul in an article entitled "*Jesus Became a Curse For Us*," he makes the case for Christ voluntarily denying himself the blessing of himself by recasting probably the most famous blessing in all of the Bible. It's the blessing that we find in Numbers 6. You've all heard it before. It says: *The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*" This is what Sproul said. He said: "The hardest thing about being a Christian is serving a God you have never seen, which is why the Jew asked for that. But my purpose here is not to explain the blessing of God but its polar opposite, its antithesis, which, again, can be seen in vivid contrast to the benediction. The supreme malediction would read something like this: "May the Lord curse you and abandon you. May the Lord keep you in darkness and give you only judgment without grace. May the Lord turn his back upon you and remove his peace from you forever." Here's where the wonder of Christmas comes from. You see, the wonder of Christmas is that from the very start God knew that this curse was precisely why he would leave heaven itself to enter into

a place of absolute darkness that hated the light that he was and become that curse for us. I mean, Jesus's mission was to glorify his Father by ransoming and rescuing his sheep, and to do that he not only had to live a perfect life among us as one of us but he also had to offer that life up as payment in kind for the sin debt that every one of us has. So that by faith in his sacrifice we can claim Jesus's righteousness as our own and stand before God, no longer clothed in our sin, but now clothed in his perfection. 2 *Corinthians 5* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, to that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

I mean, is it any wonder that all of heaven marveled at the glory of glory denied? You see, Christmas is really a story of power denied when the power of the one who spoke the world into existence could no longer speak. Of riches denied when the creator and owner of all the wealth that has ever existed for our sakes became a man with no place to lay his head. Of wisdom denied when the author of wisdom itself denied himself that wisdom, choosing instead to learn who he was through his study of scripture, and when at the age of twelve, he recognized his purpose, he still willingly came under the authority of his stepparents for another eighteen years.

Christmas is also the story of strength denied when the very one whose voice could flatten a cohort of soldiers, whose angels could slaughter an army in one evening when he gave up that strength and

voluntarily became weak for us. Of honor denied when Jesus himself said that the prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown. Of glory denied when Jesus finishes up his ministry by crying out to his father to restore to himself the glory he has forsaken. Of blessing denied when Jesus literally becomes a curse for us. *Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* It's a passage that all of us are familiar with, and wonderfully it's followed by a "therefore," and the "therefore" should be our takeaway this Christmas season. The "therefore" is this, it says: *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.* See, our takeaway this morning is the biblical principle that was summed up by Jesus himself in *Matthew 23*. He said: *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* Jesus perfectly humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, denying the glory that was his alone.

Now it's been said the practical test of whether or not you and I have a servant's heart like Jesus had is how we respond when we're

treated like one. Jesus responded perfectly. And all heaven itself exalted him. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands plus thousands of thousands. They said with a loud voice: The Lamb who was slaughtered is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! And the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. Let's pray.

Father God, we praise you for the gift of your Son. We praise you for the incredible emptying that he did. We praise you for all that he forsook in order to identify with us. We praise you for who he is. And we ask you this Christmas season to give us the ability to enter into just what it is he gave up, just what it is he denied to be part of us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.