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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Christmas '22. The Costliness of the Incarnation**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, we do thank you and praise you for the gift of Christmas. We praise you and thank you for the immeasurable gift that you've given to us in the gift of your Son. This morning Lord, we want to look into in some depth just what that entailed and we are again praying for the presence of your Holy Spirit to open up our eyes, our ears and our hearts to be able to take in all that you have to give to us. And so Father, I pray you would give us the grace, strength, and wisdom we need to make this of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well the measure of a gift is not its cost, it's its costliness. If a gift is supposed to represent the expression of the love of the gift giver toward the gift receiver then the measure of the value of that gift has to be rooted in the effort made to provide it. I can give you a gift that has great cost but little value if it cost me nothing to provide it. I mean you might think a beautiful diamond ring has an inherent value as a gift, but if I owned a chain of jewelry stores and at the last minute I just

grabbed a diamond off the shelf and handed it to you, I've not really given you a valuable gift regardless of how much it was worth because it cost so little in terms of time and effort.

I once did a Christmas message based on O'Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi". This is a story that was written at the turn of the century, it involved a couple named Della and Jim. And they both deeply want to give a gift of great value to each other but they have very limited funds. So Della decides to cut her luxurious hair and to sell it so she can buy a gold chain for Jim's watch. Unbeknownst to her Jim has sold his gold watch in order to buy Della a set of custom combs. In the end the great gift that they give and receive is the expression of the sacrificial love they both had for each other. And the story's been repeated endless times. It was a Honeymooners, Mickey Mouse had one where Mickey turns in his harmonica to buy Minnie a chain for her watch and Minnie trades in her watch to buy a case for Mickey's harmonica. And the point is the value of a gift lies not in its cost but in its costliness.

Now it's one thing to recognize the humble beginnings that Jesus had, I mean no room at the inn, born in the stable, laid in a manger, no crib for a bed; but until you understand, understand just what and where Christ came from and what he left to enter into

our world, you're going to never truly get the meaning of Christmas. There never has been a gift as costly as the incarnation of Christ. And so in order to understand the glory that God denied himself in order to incarnate, I want to revisit the very last book of the Bible which gives us a picture of the glory and the honor that belonged to the son of God before he became Jesus of Nazareth.

The apostle John in the book of Revelation is given a vision of Christ, and he successfully lived the perfect life, he's died the perfect death and risen from the grave triumphantly, having ransomed his sheep and he's now receiving the honor he is due. This is *Revelation 5:11*. It says: *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! So power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.*

You know, seven is the number of completeness and seven is also the number of these specific qualities that the thousands of thousands who were gathered around the altar are all proclaiming that Jesus was worthy of. It also represents seven different areas of glory that Jesus denied himself by coming to earth as one of us. And so I want to spend some time this morning looking at each of these qualities that Jesus gave up.

And the first one is power. Jesus denied his power. *Romans 1:18* says: *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.* So the first part of the glory that God denied himself in becoming flesh was power. God describes his power as being understood through what he has made. 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 had absolutely no idea that this babe in the manger was the very same one who was responsible for everything that has ever come into existence. I mean the idea that I had before I came to Christ is that Jesus began his existence on Christmas day 2,022 years ago. It never occurred to me that the son of God had existed for all time along with the Father and the Holy Spirit and that about 2,022

years ago that Son left heaven, took on flesh and became a baby who was known as Jesus of Nazareth. He later became known by his title which is "the Christ" which is another word for "anointed one." I mean for the longest time I thought Christmas morning marked the beginning of the existence of a person whose first name was Jesus and last name was Christ. That's just the way I was raised, that's just what I understood.

Now if your baseline thinking is anything like mine, then you'd be shocked as I was when I read the Bible that Jesus who actually thought was a man named Jesus Christ was known by another name and that name was "the Word." I first came upon the statement in the Gospel of John about Jesus being the Word, I was shocked to find that it identified him, this Word, as the author of everything in all creation. We read it this morning. *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 been created.*

Well when I first read of this word, well, I saw that he was uniquely with God as well as being God. Again that only makes sense if God is more than one person. I can't be with you and be you unless there's more than one you. I mean understand that God is not two but three; he's Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So here's

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 every single thing that's ever been created. It's only when I got down to verse 14 that I realize this Word was another name for Jesus because 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.*

And so the Bible says that this Jesus, this Word became 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 any harder to believe than the claims of the materialist naturalist who states that the universe simply blew itself up into existence from 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, the moon, the stars, the oceans, the birds, the animals, all of nature, he spoke them into existence and then he went to a place where he couldn't even speak. On Christmas morning the Son of God found that the voice that had so much power that it brought creation into existence from nothing now had reduced itself to the squalling of a baby unable to 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. And we started as babies and so did he, denying himself the power that was his.

Well next is riches; riches denied. How do you measure wealth in a person who's the author of every single thing in the created universe that wealth itself is created through? You know, I own the property that I live on simply because I have a piece of paper stating that at such a time over forty years ago I bought it. But that paper is a convenient legal fiction. You see, 40,000 years ago this property belonged to Jesus Christ and 40,000 years from today, 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 this 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 because virtually every ounce of wealth of every person stems from something previously owned by Christ and something that will in the end be recognized as belonging solely to Christ.

Picture owning everything and anything this universe has to offer and then being willing to deny yourself to the place that Jesus reduced himself to when he said: *"Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."* The poverty that Jesus lived in belied the fact that by far he

actually was the richest man who has ever lived. As *2 Corinthians* tells us: *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.* Jesus denied himself the riches that he was entitled to to freely identify with us.

Well next is wisdom; wisdom denied. Now we know that God is the source, the very fountainhead of all wisdom. Now consider what Jesus did when he left heaven to become a baby. Here he is, unable to speak, unable to move and certainly incapable of expressing the wisdom he once possessed. Jesus was no giant genius baby who spoke like Einstein from the crib. He was someone who had to gain and learn wisdom the hard way. He had to gain and learn wisdom the exact same way that we do. You know *Luke 2* says: *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.* I mean consider the source of all wisdom voluntarily denying himself the wisdom that he had from eternity past just to identify with us. He started from scratch. He used the very same process for gaining wisdom that we have. The human nature that Jesus embraced had to learn how to crawl, walk and talk just like we do. And he learned wisdom all the while veiling his human nature from his former wisdom and knowledge. I mean the scripture says 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 discover our mission from God's wisdom, and we do that by understanding what the spirit reveals to us through the scripture. And by having to discover through the scripture Jesus identified his full identity as Messiah.

You know, a while back we did a series on the servant songs of Isaiah and this is a series of prophetic songs that are buried deep in the Old Testament. They speak very clearly of the role that Jesus would have as Messiah. And it's entirely possible that the Father used these servant songs of Isaiah to instruct his Son in the role that he would have as the suffering servant. That means that Jesus had to grow in wisdom the hard way, by applying himself to the study of scripture.

We know that at the age of twelve Jesus had already discovered through the scripture his unique relationship with the Father and the role that he would have in reconciling the world to himself. We also know that his understanding caused a substantive break with his earthly parents over his true Father. I mean if you remember in Luke 2, the story of the boy Jesus in the temple, you have Mary and Joseph and Jesus, they've gone up to this Passover ceremony in Jerusalem. Somehow or other in the confusion of the caravan Mary and Joseph both left each thinking the other one had Jesus with them. And so after three days in a panic they return to the temple

and what do they find? They find Jesus as a young boy of twelve conversing with the great leaders of the law. This is *Luke 2*. It says: *After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished.*

Just think about this. Try to picture this for a second. This is a twelve-year-old boy wowing the great religious leaders of Israel. Jesus had been attending a Passover celebration and it meant so much more to him than it did to the Jews who were attending it because Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit through the scripture had recaptured the wisdom to understand exactly what that Passover was about. I mean the Jews thought they were just remembering their escape from Egypt. It was an escape provided by the worst of the ten plagues when the angel of death swept into Egypt, killing the firstborn but passing over all those who had protected their households by smearing the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. Most of them didn't realize that they were picturing the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross whose blood alone could save them from death itself, but Jesus did. It was said that during the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem the stream that ran past the temple turned completely red with the blood of the lambs that were being slaughtered. But only one person in that temple,

only one twelve-year-old boy understood that all of that blood was a picture of his blood that was going to be shed for sins to be paid for.

By the time Jesus had reached the age of twelve his wisdom had so grown that he had fully come to grasp the enormity of who he was. That's why he would say to his earthly parents in *Luke 2*: "*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. Well they didn't understand but Jesus at the age of twelve did. I mean, he fully understood that twelve years earlier he had left heaven itself to enter the womb of a peasant woman to be born in Bethlehem. Jesus had come to fully realize that he was the Messiah come to earth and that he had the very mind of God inside the body of a twelve-year-old. You think about this. You know Solomon is considered the wisest man to have ever lived. We have Michelangelo, da Vinci, Einstein, maybe Stephen Hawking, the world considers to be extraordinarily geniused. These folks' minds were mere thimblefuls compared to the limitless ocean of wisdom that was inside the mind of this twelve-year-old boy.

Just think about, picture this twelve-year-old boy, and thousands of years earlier this boy's mind had confronted Job when Job sought to question his wisdom in how he created and ordered the world. I

mean 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? Well the one who had originally laid that cornerstone was now in the flesh in the temple in this twelve-year-old boy.*

That same mind went on to ask Job this question. He said: *"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 shall you 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." That*

twelve-year-old boy could declare it perfectly because it was he who thousands of years before had done it. And again he asked Job: *"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 the earth?"* This adolescent boy could and did remember that he had denied himself the astounding wisdom that he'd had to become a little baby who had to learn how to crawl and walk and talk. We humans can't begin to imagine just where this young man had come from.

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 leaning on his every single word. He could have begun his earthly ministry right then and right there at the center of Jewish thought and culture. He would have been instantly famous. Well the scripture said he did otherwise. It says: *Then he went down with them -- that's his parents -- and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart.*

Let me tell you something about Nazareth. You know when Jesus is first calling his apostles he finds Philip, Philip finds Nathanael and Nathanael is appalled to find that this Jesus that he's been told of, this guy comes from Nazareth? This is what Nathanael said

about Nazareth in *John 1*. He 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. I mean, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Instead of welcoming fame like he could have at the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus goes back with mom and dad to the mean streets of Nazareth.*

You know, John Gill commented over a century ago, 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 neighbours, 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 parents Mary and Joseph. And you know why? He had learned well the lesson of the servant song in *Isaiah 42*. It says: *"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."* You see, this twelve-year-old boy was the most brilliant genius the world has ever known. He was astounding the greatest teachers in Israel and yet

even though his own mother and Joseph still didn't understand him, he leaves the temple. That place could have been the launching place for worldwide fame, power and ministry. And he goes back to a life of absolute and complete obscurity working in a carpenter's shop for his stepfather, because again: *"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."* And so for 18 more years Jesus submits to and serves his earthly parents. The one whose wisdom laid the cornerstone of earth itself is now measuring and cutting boards for his stepfather. The creator of Orion and the chain of Pleiades is doing household chores for his mother. So just consider the glory of Jesus' infinite wisdom denied.

Well next we have strength; strength denied. Strength and power are oftentimes seen as synonymous. I mean, for our purposes we could look at the power that Jesus denied himself in all that he created and the strength that he denied himself as something personal, something that Jesus clearly gave up in his person. And Jesus went to possessing the greatest strength the universe has ever seen to a personal weakness such that as a newborn, he couldn't even lift his head. He couldn't speak. This voluntary lack of strength was temporary. We knew Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature but then we return as he comes full circle at the very end, giving up the strength as he cries out in complete and utter weakness from the cross.

We are reminded of the extent of the strength that Jesus denied himself in an incident that took place in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was about to be arrested. This is the incident according to *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 to him. Again he says: *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" -- not what is it you want -- "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. So after identifying himself as the specific one being targeted, he repeats the question once more isolating himself in order to protect the disciples.*

*Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. 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're all about to scatter and abandon him, he was thinking specifically of them for two reasons: Number one, he deeply loved them; and number two, they were a gift that were given to him by his Father. He said: *"I have not lost one of those you gave me."* And we all know what happened next, I mean Jesus surrendered himself to the authorities and immediately they began beating and mistreating him.

But when we consider Jesus denying himself strength, we need to go back to this incident in the garden and re-examine what we can easily overlook. Again *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.*

A detachment of soldiers. Well a detachment could range anywhere from upwards of 600 soldiers who formed a cohort down to a hundred

or so, but it was a large number. There's plenty of arguments as to how many people were there in the garden that night, but one thing is for certain these were heavily armed men who were sent to address what the Jews had presented to them as a grave threat to the nation. One way of understanding it, as one commentator said, at the very least this was the equivalent of a heavily armed SWAT team arriving to take Jesus into custody. And Jesus used that opportunity to very subtly demonstrate the strength that belonged to him and the strength that he was willing to deny. Scripture says: *When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.* It's a detail given in the narrative that seems so minor it seems easy to overlook but understand Jesus had the power to flatten a detachment of soldiers a hundred or so in number just by opening his mouth.

Another indicator of Jesus' strength occurred when Peter cut off one of the soldier's ears. Jesus said: *"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 in this way?"*

Well you talk about strength denied, Jesus has just kind of

casually stated that there are 72,000 angels that are just waiting with bated breath for a signal from Jesus and they will make Judas and this cohort of soldiers regret that they've ever lived. At the strength of Jesus' command he could have unleashed creatures that this world will only see on judgment day.

Now there's been some who have tasted a little bit of these angels' fury. Gotten a little taste of it, if you consider the ancient ruler Sennacherib, he mocked God, he attempted to annihilate the Jews and the night before he was to attack he got to experience not 72,000 of these angels but one. This is what *2 Kings* says happened: *That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand 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. But here it is God himself about to be mocked, stripped and crucified and yet for our sakes Jesus is denying the strength that could have stopped it immediately.

Next we have honor; honor denied. Time again Jesus performed miracles, instead of receiving the honor that those miracles deserved he was denied that either through the greed of the crowd that simply demanded more food, more miracles, more shows, or in the case of those who were close to him including family who were

genuinely offended at who he was, it was outright denial. And the sting of this particular denial was the more worthy of honor Jesus was, the more intent on denying him that honor were those closest to him. Matthew describes one such response to Jesus' miracles. It says: *And 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.

Next we have glory; glory denied. We know at the end of Jesus' public ministry he poured out his heart to his Father in prayer, and we have parts of that prayer preserved in scripture and one of Jesus' heartfelt requests of his Father was for the honor and glory that he once had to be restored. *John 17*, he says -- this is his prayer: *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

Well, what was that glory like? We don't know. We only have little snippets to inform us, and once that snippet was described by the prophet Isaiah who was once caught up literally into the throne room of God to see what that glory looked like, and he described it this way. He said: *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 thresholds shook and the 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, Isaiah was arguably the holiest man of his entire generation and he's brought into the presence of the glory of God and in that presence he's so aware of his uncleanness he feels like he's disintegrating. Well Christ as the flawless Son of God was quite at home in the presence of that glory. It was perfectly natural, it was perfectly appropriate for him and he traded it all in for a manger in a barn in Bethlehem as he denied himself his glory.

And finally we have blessing; 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 willingly became a curse.

*Galatians 3 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. We've all heard it many, many times, it's *Numbers 6. 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.* Sproul said in the article: "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.'"

See, the wonder of Christmas is that from the very start God knew that this curse was precisely why he had to leave heaven itself, to enter into a place of absolute darkness that hated the light that he was. I mean Jesus' 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 had. So that by faith in his sacrifice we could then claim Jesus' righteousness as our own and stand before God no longer clothed in our sin but now clothed in his perfection. As 2 *Corinthians* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So Jesus literally traded blessing for cursing. Is it any wonder that all of heaven marveled at the glory of glory denied that Jesus represented.

See, Christmas really is 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 the owner of all wealth that has ever existed for our sake 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 the study of scripture. And when at age twelve he recognized his purpose, he still willingly came under the authority of his stepparents for another 18 years.

Christmas is also the story of strength denied when the one who's very voice could flatten a cohort of soldiers whose angels could slaughter an entire army in an evening when he gave up that strength and voluntarily became weak for us. Of honor denied, Jesus himself said that a 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's forsaken. Of blessing denied when Jesus literally becomes a curse for us.

Jesus according to *Philippians 2:5*: *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.* That's a passage we're all familiar with, everybody's heard that. It's followed up though by a "therefore" and that should be our take away with this Christmas season. 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 take away this morning is the biblical principle summed up by Jesus himself. He says: *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 belonged to him and him alone. You know we say the practical test of whether or not you have a servant's heart is to determine whether or not or how you respond when you're treated

like one. How did Jesus respond? Well, he responded perfectly and all heaven exalted him. Again: *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! The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. Let's pray.*

*Father, what a gift your Son is to us. What a cost of this gift. I just think of all that you have vested in him and all that he was willing to give up in order to identify with us. And I praise you and I thank you for the greatest gift that ever was, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*