



SERMONS FOR ADVENT

Sermon Notes

On the Incarnation: The Condescension of the Son

Philippians 2:5-11

December 9, 2012

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

- Last week, we began a five-week sermon series on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, focusing on the sending of the Son into the world (by the Father) in order to save His people and redeem His creation.

I. December 2: *On the Incarnation: The Sending of the Son*

II. December 9: *On the Incarnation: The Humility of the Son*

III. December 16: *On the Incarnation: The Obedience of the Son*

IV. December 23: *On the Incarnation: The Exaltation of the Son*

V. December 30: *On the Incarnation: The Worship of the Son*

- The central truths we focused on then were that the sending of Christ was (1) purposeful; and (2) personal. Indeed, Christ came to save, *not* to just to make salvation possible.
- But the question remains, “How did He accomplish the mission that God the Father had given Him?” The answer, biblically, is clear: by assuming human

flesh, through the active emptying and humbling of Himself in obedience to His Father's will.

<p>I. The Example of Christ II. The Emptying of Christ III. The Humility of Christ</p>

- This morning, we will focus on His emptying and humbling of Himself. However, we must begin with the words of the Apostle Paul, who writes in Philippians 2:5:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...

<p>I. The Example of Christ</p>
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⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

- The Apostle Paul begins this beautiful creed by stating, quite simply, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...”
 - The Apostle Paul's point here is clear: as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who have been saved by grace, and united with Him through faith (“...yours in Christ Jesus...”), **Christ is your example.**
 - To be clear, Paul is not saying, “Follow Christ's example and you will be saved; rather, he is saying, ‘For those who have been saved by Christ, you should follow His example.’”
- The context, however, of Paul's admonition to the Philippian Church is a call to unity.

<p>²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. ¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.</p>

- In these verses, Paul is calling the Philippian Church to unity amidst persecution and strife.
- And so, he appeals to Christ as the great example for which the Church should follow.
- And for us here today, the *Carmen Christi* serves the same purpose: as a call to unity.

II. The Emptying of Christ

⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself,*

- From these verses, we learn several truths regarding the Incarnation of Christ:
 - **He was in the form of God;**
 - **He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped;**
 - **He emptied Himself.**

• The first truth here is that Christ was “in the form of God.”

- The Apostle Paul writes, “He existed in the *form* of God” [emphasis mine]
 - The word **form** is the Greek word *morphe* [morph], meaning the “outward display of the inner reality or substance. Here it refers to the outward display of the divine substance, i.e., divinity of the preexistent Christ in the display of his glory as being in the image of the Father.”
James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*
 - As John MacArthur describes, the word “**existed** translates a present active participle of the compound verb *huparcho* [uparcw]...and denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person’s nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable.”
 - That is, Christ existed from all eternity as fully God. This was His “form” or “substance” or “essence” as being God.
- It is interesting to note that another Greek word, *schema* [schma], means “form,” but in a much different sense.
 - William Barclay underscored the significance of the word *morphe*, by contrasting it with *schema*: “***Morphe* is the essential form which never alters;** *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and

from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the essential *morphe* of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his *schema* is continually changing. A baby, a child, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the *morphe* of humanity, but the outward *schema* changes all the time.”

- A parallel passage – Hebrews 1 – states that “He is the radiance of His glory and the *exact representation* of His *nature*,” (Hebrews 1:3)
 - The word translated **exact representation** is the Greek word *character* [chracthr], meaning, “...precise reproduction in every respect.”
 - Further, we read in John 1:1 that “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word **was God**.”
 - Therefore, it is very clear that Paul is asserting the full deity of Jesus Christ *prior to* the Incarnation.
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- And so it is in light of this truth that we turn to our second point.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped;
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- This point has very little meaning, if Jesus Christ was not **fully God** prior to His Incarnation. In other words, if He was a created being and only “god-like” (as the Jehovah’s Witnesses would say), or that He was just a “great man” (as most of the world would say), then the statement, “He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” would be a self-evident statement.
 - It would not be very much different than saying, “John Smith did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” We would all respond to such a statement by saying, “Of course he didn’t, he is just a man!”
 - Yet, this is precisely the point, Jesus Christ was **fully God** and “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”
- Over the past decade, it seems that the turmoil and crisis in the Middle East has only continued to escalate. Beginning with the fall of Saddam Hussein as the President of Iraq, and especially since the beginning of the “Arab Spring,” the world has seen the fall of one ruler after another: Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, then Moammar Gadhafi of Libya. And what we have seen as that these men have attempted to hold on to their authority until the bitter end, refusing to stop “grasping” it, even as their respective nations crumble around them. Even today, we see the leader of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, doing the same thing – “grasping to power” at any and all cost.

- But this practice is certainly not limited to the Middle East. Every nation in the world with any history has seen men and women cling to power as they hunger for more authority and control.
- In a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, in 1887, Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, first Baron Acton (or simply, Lord Acton), wrote: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”
 - Thus, the phrase, “absolute power corrupts absolutely” was coined.
 - Lord Acton was certainly echoing the belief of many before him, such as William Pitt the Elder, Early of Chatham and British Prime Minister from 1766 to 1778, who said in a speech before the UK House of Lords in 1770: “Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it.”
 - Indeed, these words may be true, but there is a **bit of irony here**, for no one has ever truly possessed “absolute or unlimited power,” only God.
 - And, yet, it was Christ, who is fully God, who “did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

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- Then, Paul writes that Christ “did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, **but *emptied Himself*...**”
 - **These very words express one of the greatest truths and mysteries of the Christian faith – “[Christ] emptied Himself.”**
 - But what does this mean?
 - Over the centuries, various perspectives and viewpoints have been raised, with some even suggesting that Christ ceased being fully God while He walked this earth. Yet, this would violate His very divine nature. So, once again, what does it mean?
1. The first point that we must remember is that **as fully God, the Son cannot change.**
 - Therefore, the “emptying of Himself” cannot denote any change in His divine nature whatsoever.
 - Jesus **never ceased being God** [Once again, this would have implied a change, which would violate one of God’s eternal attributes: His immutability]. Therefore, as the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ

was **fully God**. In Colossians 2:9-11, the Apostle Paul affirms this truth, stating, “For in Him **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...**”

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2. Secondly, this passage is in the **active voice**. In other words, Jesus was the one emptying Himself...He was NOT emptied [by an object other than Himself, i.e. the Father]. Jesus performed the action.

- Therefore, Jesus “emptied Himself” **voluntarily**. He was not forced by His Father to take on human flesh and live a life of “sorrows” rather, He did so voluntarily, again out of love for His Father.

3. Finally, Jesus Christ “emptied Himself” of at least two three:

a. His divine riches and heavenly glory

“Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of Godhead; but he kept it concealed for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it.” John Calvin

“When the Lord walked this earth, men did not see Him as a glorious heavenly being, for His glory was hidden, veiled.” James White

- As a church, we have traveled to Scotland on at least two occasions, conducting a Holiday Club (or Vacation Bible School) for children in a neighborhood in Glasgow, Scotland. And on each of these visits, we were able to take a day and go to Edinburgh, Scotland and visit the Edinburgh Castle. It is there where the royal jewels are on public display. One can only imagine the monetary value and worth of these. But imagine, for a moment, what the reaction of the world would be if the British royal family announced that it would not just sell, but voluntarily give away all of its jewels, Buckingham Palace and all residences, and all of its wealth, and move to Bangladesh to live among the poor there. I suspect there would be public outcry and anger (especially in Britain!). It would be a true scandal!
 - Such a scenario is not only laughable but completely impossible.
 - But, consider for a moment the riches of heaven, and the glory of Christ in the heavenly court. It was Christ who made all the jewels of the world and the entire cosmos. Needless to say, the British royal family are less than paupers in the presence of the riches and glory of heaven. But it was this that Christ “emptied” Himself of when He came to this earth.

b. Secondly, He also gave up the free exercise of certain divine rights attributes

- In other words, Jesus Christ gave up His *rights* as God in order to perfectly fulfill the will of the Father.
 - I believe so many Americans find many Scriptural passages difficult to understand, because we are so obsessed with our **individual rights**. Jesus Christ [and the Apostle Paul, for that matter] cared more about honoring God and the spiritual welfare of others than their individual rights as humans, and in the Lord's case, God.
 - Even as Christians, today (especially this year as we went through such a messy election season) we are obsessed with our rights.
 - We care more about our rights to be heard, our rights to have our positions acknowledge, our rights to be right, our rights...than we do the unity of the Body of Christ.
 - Consider the rights Christ had as King of Kings. Yet, he chose to not exercise them at certain times in submission to the will of His Father.

It was recently reported by the British media, making international headlines, that Prince William's wife, Kate is pregnant and was hospitalized for morning sickness. No doubt the care she received was without compare, and I am quite sure she did not have to share the room with a commoner. Many mothers in this room are likely thinking, "How great it must be to be a princess!"

But, once again, imagine with me what the world would say (or the royal family!) if Kate said, I want to give birth in a barn in the Middle East with no medical personnel present except my husband, William. Again, this would be a scandal!

- Christ had every right to be born to the wealthiest family on earth, but even this would be a condescension for He who created all things and enjoyed unimaginable and unapproachable glory in heaven.
 - In the giving up of His rights and the exercise of His divine attributes, Jesus Christ, again, did not cease being God in any way when He was on earth. **He simply chose not to exercise certain divine attributes in accordance with His humanity and the will of the Father.**

For example, imagine a man who had 20/20 vision and decided that he wanted to write a book about what it was like to be blind for one year. So, **he voluntarily put a blindfold on himself in order to accomplish this goal**. During the year he was blindfolded, **he still had 20/20 vision; however, He chose to keep the blindfold on himself**. Had he, at

anytime within the year, decided to take the blindfold off, he could not accurately say that he was blind for a year.

Or, consider if Bill Gates, who according to Forbes is the second wealthiest man in the world, with a net worth of \$56 billion...consider if Mr. Gates decided to grow a beard, put on soiled clothing and live in the slums of Mumbai, India. Assume he did this, and never revealed his identity, and never chose to use his wealth. He would still be the second wealthiest man in the world; however, you would never know it, because for whatever reason, he would choose not to exercise or use his wealth. In other words, his wealth would be “hidden”

- In the same way, Jesus Christ, when He walked the earth, did not cease being omniscient, omnipresent, etc. He did not “lose” His majesty or glory. It was simply “veiled” or “hidden.” He simply chose not to exercise those divine attributes because to do so would have violated His humanity. And, if Jesus was not fully human, He could not fulfill His role as our perfect substitution on the cross.

III. The Humility of Christ

by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself

- Finally, Christ humbled himself by becoming man.
 - In God’s wisdom, Christ also did not come to this world initially as a fully grown man, ready to save the world.
 - Rather, He began His human life where all of us begin – in the womb, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary.

As Athanasius emphasized in his *On the Incarnation*, “He took our body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of a human father.”

And as the Early Church Father, Irenaeus wrote, “He came to save every age [of human existence].” In other words, because He was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, and lived through adulthood, He alone can save the unborn child as well as the adult.

B.B. Warfield, writing in his “Imitating the Incarnation” stated, “We see Him, the properest child that ever was given to a mother’s arms, through all the years of childhood at Nazareth “subjecting Himself to His parents.” We see Him a youth, labouring day by day contentedly at His father’s bench, in this lower sphere, too, with no other thought than to be “about His father’s business.” We see Him in His holy manhood, going, “as His custom was,” Sabbath by Sabbath, to the synagogue,—God as He was, not too good to worship with His weaker brethren. And then the horizon broadens. We see Him at the

banks of Jordan, because it became Him to fulfill every righteousness, meekly receiving the baptism of repentance for us. We see Him in the wilderness, calmly rejecting the subtlest trials of the evil one: refusing to supply His needs by a misuse of His divine power, repelling the confusion of tempting God with trusting God, declining to seek His Father's ends by any other than His Father's means.

- In theological terms, we say that the Son *condescended* to us. He came down to our level...NOT in our sinfulness, but in our humanity. The gap between the divine the human is so great, however, that we will never fully understand how great this act of humility truly was.
- However, not only is Jesus fully God (existing in the “form” of God), but He is also fully Man.
- The Apostle writes:

by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ *And being found in human form,*

- Once again, this is similar to John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [*tabernacled*] among us...”
- The idea here is that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, never changed, even when He came to this earth.
- Rather, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, **assumed or took on human flesh**. That is, rather than His divine nature changing, He, in His person, took on another nature – Human nature – becoming also the Son of Man.
- This is precisely why we sing in the great hymn *Fairest Lord Jesus* that He is

“Son of God and Son of Man” for our Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man.

- In God's infinite wisdom, Christ, the eternal Son of God took on human form. In fact, Christ, in His divine form (as Son of God), cannot be seen with the human eye. Therefore, it is as though Christ took on a form we could see and behold with our physical senses to lead us to His form we can only behold through the eyes of faith.
 - Augustine, writing in his classic work, *On the Trinity* in the fourth century, wrote that “when the Son of God came in order to become Son of man and to capture our faith and draw it to himself, and by means of it to lead us on to his truth; for he took on our mortality in such a way that he did not lose his own eternity...we could not pass from being among the things that originated to eternal things, unless the eternal allied himself to

us in our originated condition, and so provided us with a bridge to eternity.”

- Christ’s Incarnation, was, therefore, **the single greatest act of humility the world has ever known.**
 - The implications of this truth for Christians and the Church today are profound.
 - Paul writes that Christ “**humbled Himself.**” This is in the **active voice**, meaning that the Father did not humble Christ; rather, Christ humbled *Himself*.
 - To the Father, Christ was never found saying, “Father, this is not fair, you are no greater than Me!”
 - Rather, out of His love for His Father, Christ humbled Himself.
 - Therefore, even though He was equal in His essence and being with God As we so often say, Christ was “ontologically equal with His Father” and “functionally subordinate.”
 - In the same way today, Christians should live lives of such humility. Whether it is in the home, in our Church, or in our work, we must willingly submit to those over us, as Christ did to our Father.
 - In marriages, for example, wives submit to their husbands, and children to their parents, not because Paul was in any way “chauvinistic,” but rather, because he was simply demonstrating how the family unit is patterned after the inner-Trinitarian union of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
 - Also, in churches, members should submit to the leadership of the Church for two primary reasons: (1) it honors God, since it follows great’s example; (2) it ensures the unity of the Body and the integrity of the witness of the Gospel to the world.
 - Even in our places of work, we should submit to those over us, even if they are not Christians, since **voluntary submission to authority is the very model Christ left for us.**

And so, when Christ came to redeem His people and His Creation, He did so through a virgin birth, humbling himself, being born into poverty.

- Last year, the Obama family celebrated their Christmas holiday in Hawaii for just over two weeks. This vacation cost U.S. taxpayers \$4,113,038. Now, my point is not to criticize the President, or where he spends his Christmas vacation, just to point out that much of this price tag was due to security, and all it took to prepare for the President's visit to the island state. In fact, before the Obamas arrived, the trip cost \$100,00 for the secret service to go and prepare the way.
 - Consider, therefore, when the King of Kings came to earth, what or who prepared His way?
 - What did His coming cost us? Better yet, what did it cost Him?
- In close by saying that God was not content to leave us in our sin. I realize that one of the common phrases in Christendom today is, "God loves you just the way you are." Mike often (rightly) says, "God doesn't love you the way you are. He hates you the way you are." Now these are shocking words, but the point is true.
 - If God loved us the way we are, why did He go to the lengths He did to save us?

I conclude with the words of B.B. Warfield: "We see Him among the thousands of Galilee, anointed of God with the Holy Ghost and power, going about doing good: with no pride of birth, though He was a king; with no pride of intellect, though omniscience dwelt within Him; with no pride of power, though all power in heaven and earth was in His hands; or of station, though the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily; or of superior goodness or holiness: but in lowliness of mind esteeming every one better than Himself, healing the sick, casting out devils, feeding the hungry, and everywhere breaking to men the bread of life. We see Him everywhere offering to men His life for the salvation of their souls: and when, at last, the forces of evil gathered thick around Him, walking, alike without display and without dismay, the path of suffering appointed for Him, and giving His life at Calvary that through His death the world might live."