

The Better Story: The Incarnate God.

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, we come before you as people from all sorts of different walks of life, all sorts of different professions, stages in life.

Some of us have had excellent weeks, others have had really crummy weeks, weeks that they wish they could do over or forget. Yet here we are, Lord, both here at Ottawa Little Theatre and online.

And wherever we've come from, Lord, we pray that you would help us to quiet our minds, to prepare our hearts, that we may hear and understand your word that we will read together and look at together.

Lord, bless us this morning as we do so. In Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Terrific scene in The King's Speech, where King George VI finds out that his speech therapist, Lionel Log, is a theatre actor and not a qualified speech therapist.

It's a wonderful scene. I think it's in Westminster Abbey. The King has this growing confidence in his speech therapist and a growing confidence in himself.

[1 : 2 6] And he finds out, to his surprise, that his speech therapist is a fraud, or so he thinks. His confidence in Lionel plummets.

So too does his confidence in his ability to be a strong king for a commonwealth going to war. I think this is a great example to show us when something or someone that we trust in, that we have confidence in, it turns out that they're not who we thought they were.

That it can crumble our confidence in just about everything. Now, the example isn't the greatest because it turns out that Lionel's actually a fantastic speech therapist.

So the example falls short. But you get my point. It matters that we have confidence in someone when they say they are something.

It's very important. And that if that gets undermined, it is a very terrible thing for our confidence, for our lives.

[2 : 4 3] Some of us are new to the Christian faith. Some of us might not even be a part of the, be a Christian, but are seeking, are interested, are interested in spiritual matters.

Some of you might have been at church since the day you can remember. You feel like you have a robust faith. Some of you have gone from a fantastic faith in your youth to absolutely abandoning the faith.

And maybe you're just coming back again for the first time. Or you're in a season of return. Wherever you may be on the spiritual spectrum, so to speak, we do have a lot of diversity here.

I'll ask you a question. Who is Jesus? Who is he? If I, not in front of a bunch of people because that's rude to put somebody on the spot.

But if it was just you and me, and I said, who's Jesus? Like, I'm not taking notes. I'm not recording this. I'm not going to tell George. I'm like, who's Jesus? How would you respond?

- [3 : 50] Is he just a great miracle worker? Is he a prophet? A really righteous holy man? Is he a historical person that was no different than any other messianic figure in the first century? But somehow his followers developed a bit of a fictitious myth around him. Is he God? Is he man? Is he God and man?
- Who is Jesus? Why does this matter? What bearing does it have on your life?
- What bearing does it have on your faith? Why does it matter who Jesus is? So our text, our text is one of the very high points in the Bible when it comes to Christology.
- That is the theology around who Jesus is, who the Christ is, who the Messiah is. It's going to tell us a few things about who Jesus is.
- [4 : 57] We're dealing with six verses this morning, maybe seven. It's a small portion of scripture, but this is absolutely packed with this Christology, with who Jesus really is.
- So it will tell us a few things about him and why, if he isn't those things, he can't be Savior and Lord. So we're going to be in Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 11.
- Matt read the portion of scripture for us. But this, we'll jump into it in a moment, but this will tell us three things about Jesus, this portion of scripture. That Jesus is God, and that as God he became a man, yet remained God.
- A lot of this stuff is a bit of a mouthful. Just stick with me. Put on your thinking caps. That Jesus is God, that as God became man, yet remained God.
- The second thing, that Jesus became a servant and humbled himself by dying on a cross. And the third thing, that God exalted Jesus to be Lord and King over all.
- [6 : 08] So let's take a look at the first thing. That Jesus is God, and he became man, yet remained God. Nowhere else in the Bible do we see the incarnation so robustly described as in verse 6 and 7.
- We're just going to read verse 6 at first. If you have your Bibles, please follow along. Verse 6 says, Who, though he, Jesus, was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.
- I just said that Jesus is God. And yet here we have verse 6 saying that he was in the form of God. I mean, I think it would be a bit nicer if it said that he was God.
- This idea of the form of God, I mean, was it a hologram? Obviously not. There's no technology back then. But was it just some kind of spirit that looked like that he was like God, but he wasn't really like God?
- Like, what is it describing when it says that Jesus was in the form of God? I am no Greek scholar, but it helps to dig deep into the original language.
- [7 : 16] The word used here to describe form, so the form of God, is essentially to say that Jesus, in the biggest megaphone that you get, is God.
- To say that Jesus is in the form of God means that he fully and truly expresses what is described. So it says here that Jesus is in the form of God.
- It is saying that he is God. Everything that God is, so too is Jesus. That means that Jesus Christ had all of the attributes of God, his ability to know everything, that he's all powerful, that he's everywhere, that he is perfect, that he is unique, that he is one, that he is the source of beauty, the source of glory, the source of love.
- Everything that God is, so too is Jesus. As God, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus always was.
- So he wasn't a created being. He always existed. So to say that Jesus was in the form of God, that one word just packs a whole punch, doesn't it?

[8 : 37] Like, there's payload to that. Jesus is fully God. But if Jesus is God and equal to God, what, I mean, if we look at the second part of verse 6, it's, it kind of implies that he wasn't equal to God.

Read with me, this, the second part of verse 6. Well, we'll read all of verse 6. Who, though he was in the form of God, here it is, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

So what does, what does that mean? What this tells us is that Jesus did not leverage his divine glory, his divine majesty, his divine rights, his prerogatives, as God when he became incarnate.

That God, the Son of God, took on human flesh but didn't cease to be God. So what do I mean? And this is where we have to just kind of go slowly through this.

The, the, the orthodox, the teaching of the scriptures that has been believed by the church for centuries and centuries has always affirmed that Jesus was fully man, yet fully God.

[9 : 52] And for him to be fully man means that he has to be a human being. And to be a human being inherently means that we are under the authority of God.

See, Jesus couldn't be a human being, fully a human being, if he wasn't under God's authority. If he didn't give deference to God.

And yet this is exactly what we're seeing when we see the second part of verse 6, when it says that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. It means he came to earth as a man while also still being fully God.

Let's continue on, verse 7. Verse 7 says this, Again, we have that, that, that word here, form.

That he became, by taking the form of a servant. That he truly became a human being. And again, as human beings, we are under the rule and reign of God.

[11 : 13] Whether we, whether we think so or not. We are under the authority of God. It means that Jesus was fully a man and as a man, he submitted to all of what it took to be, to, to be a man.

But consider this again. He empties himself. He voluntarily suspends his divine right in order to become fully man.

So that he becomes truly, truly, and in its fullness, a human being. But not only a human being. So when Jesus empties himself, he doesn't cease to be God.

But he relinquishes all of his rights as God. So that he can come under the authority of God. That's a, that's two verses.

We still have a few more to go. But that's, I mean, I've spent all week kind of laboring over this. I'm, full confession, struggled with this. And I ask the question, why does this matter?

[12 : 20] Are we not just getting lost in the weeds? Why does it matter of, of talking about God descending, but still remaining God, becoming fully man, but still fully God?

And does it seem like we're just splitting hairs? Why does this matter? Well, here's why it matters. Something wonderful about God, excuse me, is that he is unchanging.

There is nothing to add to God or take away from God to make him better. He, he is perfect in who he is. There is, there is, there is an unchangingness about him.

He doesn't change his mind. He doesn't say, hmm, I never considered that before. There is nothing that he relies upon. So he is an unchanging God. In fact, everything that's good and true and beautiful find their origins in him.

So here's where it matters. Therefore, when we see Jesus as being fully man and fully God, it means that everything Jesus does, everything that Jesus does is a window to see the very character and essence of who God is.

- [13 : 29] He, Jesus, manifests the very character and essence of God on earth perfectly. And it matters because sometimes we read in the scripture really tough things about Jesus. Things that, that our modern sensibilities don't like. Here's a great example. Oh, before I give the example.
- So we read things about Jesus that we don't really, don't really like. Certain things that rub us the wrong way, that seem offensive. And we are put in a, a bit of a, a conundrum.
- Do we admit Jesus is, I don't know, a rather unpleasant person? And then somehow that means God is unpleasant? Or do we then just say, well, you know what?
- Maybe Jesus wasn't God. Maybe he emptied himself out of all of this kind of divine rights, but also his divine attributes.
- [14 : 35] So that Jesus isn't no more omnipresent or all-knowing than you or I, because he's fully man. And there's a whole school of scholarship that, that looks at this.
- Because it's, in a sense, it's easier, it's easier to deal with those hard passages of scripture if Jesus is just a man and not fully man and fully God.
- Because then it would reflect something about God that's going to mess up our world. So here's the example. A couple of weeks ago, there was a video that went viral from a self-described progressive, progressive minister.
- And he talked about how Jesus repented of his racism. So in the story of the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus calls her a dog. I mean, call any woman a dog.
- She doesn't have to be Syrophoenician. Like, don't do that, right? So Jesus calls her a dog. It's racist because Jews have this thing out for the Syrophoenicians.
- [15 : 42] But this woman spoke truth to power. And what did Jesus do? He repented of his racism. He gives us the example that we too ought to repent of our racism.
- Guys, you should repent of your racism if you're racist. But what ends up happening is you take who Jesus is.
- And because that makes you uncomfortable, you distort it. You change it. You shift the goalposts. And all of a sudden, Jesus is no longer fully God.
- And we help Jesus and God save face. Hey, we're helping Jesus and God save face. But here's the thing.
- To strip Jesus of his identity as fully God and fully man renders him no more a savior than you or I.
- [16 : 42] And what we need to do as people who are committed to the Christian faith, committed to knowing and growing in Jesus, is that we need to wrestle and struggle through some of those hard points of Scripture.
- Reading the Bible together as a community, as individuals. And never interpreting Scripture against Scripture. So to never interpret that whole instance of the Syrophoenician woman against Philippians 2 that we're reading today.
- But this requires struggle. You know what the easy way out? The easy way out is to say that Jesus repented of his racism. Like open and shut case.
- That's the easy way out. The hard way, the difficult way, the courageous way is to struggle with that. If Jesus truly is man, fully man, 100% man, and fully God, 100% God.
- And remember that Jesus perfectly expresses the character and essence of who God is when we read about him in the Scriptures. Then are we going to submit to Scripture?
- [17 : 53] Or are we going to submit Scripture to us? Are we going to submit to Jesus or submit Jesus to us? It matters who Jesus is.

Who is Jesus? So Jesus, you know, there's those hard bits of Scripture. But there's also bits of Scripture if we're talking about Jesus being the perfect example on earth of who God is, his character and his glory.

Then we can also look at an instance where Jesus takes off his outer garment and wraps a towel around his waist. And one after another cleans the filth, the stink, the grime off of his disciples' feet.

And that reflects the very heart of who God is. A servant God. A God that loves so deeply. A God that wishes to restore, to clean, to cleanse, to fix.

We get a window into the very character of who God is. If Jesus isn't God, then he's washed some disciples' feet. He's a nice guy. Call him a nice guy. I don't know.

[19 : 07] It's good. He washed his disciples' feet. It's great. But then it's no longer a window into the heart of who God is. But he doesn't just clean feet, does he? He doesn't just show his service by cleaning feet, does he?

Look with me at verse 8. And being found in human form. Again, that word form. You see it. This is the third time. Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Even death on a cross. Why did Jesus empty himself of his divine rights? So that he would show the ultimate form of service to others.

To you, to me. By dying for sins that he didn't commit. To pay the penalty that he didn't deserve.

To take the punishment upon himself. For you and for me. That's service. He humbles himself. Not only from heaven to earth. But then to earth.

[20 : 15] To becoming a servant or a slave. And not only to become a servant or a slave. But continuing to humble himself to the very lowest of low.

Because in the first century, there was nothing. Nothing worse than getting crucified. Cicero says this of the crucifixion. He says the most cruel and hideous form of punishment.

Far be the very name of a cross. Not only from the body. But even from the thought. The eyes. The ears of Roman citizens. You don't even mention a crucifix in polite society.

Roman citizens didn't get crucified. I mean the lowest of the low got crucified. And Jesus lowers himself to the very low. Why?

Because then he can identify with you and with me. And everybody above and below. That there's nobody that is a human being that he can't identify with.

[21 : 17] So he empties himself of his divine prerogatives. And then becomes the incarnate son of God.

And then humbles himself to the very lowest rung of what it means to be a human being. How does...

If Jesus is this window into the very character, the perfect character of God, what does that tell us about God? I don't like taking much charity from people.

I like having my charity ledger nice and in the black. I don't like when people give and all too much makes me feel uncomfortable. I usually shift my feet and look down.

I'm uncomfortable with it. What can I possibly give God who empties himself and humbles himself and dies on my behalf because of love?

[22 : 20] What can you possibly give to God in repayment? How can you possibly say, I mean, you owed me like I loved you a whole bunch or that was really great.

I'll get you back for that. The ultimate form of love, the self-giving, self-humbling, selfless love. Jesus becoming a servant and humbling self on the cross.

So if he can identify with the lowest rung of society, can he identify with you? Can he know what you are going through? Can he empathize with your hurting, with feelings of abandonment, with feelings of forgottenness, from loneliness, from feeling like you are a worm?

Can he relate? He can. Emphatically, yes. Yes, he can. And he couldn't do it if he wasn't fully God.

And he couldn't do it if he wasn't fully human. He would have just been any old chap that died on a cross of the thousands of the tens of thousands that died on a cross at the hands of the Romans.

[23 : 38] God not only identifies with the depth of our brokenness, but what he does is he takes that banner that is over us, that label that is on our breast that says sinner, that says despised, that says condemned, that says no hope.

And he takes it off. And he says forgiven, redeemed. He says you're part of my family now.

Irrevocable. Love becomes the very thing that we see on the cross, and we see the very character of God being a God of love.

And the thing about this God of love is that he has always been a God of love. And this is why the Trinitarian understanding of God is the only one that works.

Because God has always loved. It's not that he just started loving when he created the world, or he was in the garden with Adam and Eve, or when he made the promise to Abraham, or rescued the Israelites from Egypt, or made these wonderful declarations of love to Israel through the prophets, or when Jesus came.

[25 : 10] No, he was unchanging. Remember, he's an unchanging God. So he's always loved. And the thing with love, as much as you want to be a person that loves yourself, it's okay.

You can't, love has to have an object. You have to love something outside of you. So, God the Father has always loved God the Son, and God the Son has always loved God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, being the third member of the Trinity, loves the Father and loves the Son, but is the very love that the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father.

It's just, the Godhead is love. And we see that in what Christ has done, by laying down his life for you, and for me. This ultimate picture, into the very character and essence of who God is.

So Jesus dies on the cross, and does he stay dead? He does not. He rises again, and this is where the rubber hits the road when it comes to Jesus' divinity, because we all are going to die.

I mean, this past year, death has been thrust in our face. Regardless of where you land on, on how you feel about COVID-19 or not, but death has been thrust on our face.

[26 : 33] Every morning, I make breakfast for the kids, listen to 1310 News. It's exhausting. Everything in the morning is about case counts, or lockdowns, or we're out of a lockdown, or vaccines are coming, and no vaccines.

And you, I mean, you're living it with me. And it's just, it's just there. It's just there in your face. The mortality of humanity this past year has been thrust upon us, and when we die, we die.

Nobody is, I don't know, jumping out of a fridge at the morgue three days later. Nobody is clawing their way out of a casket three days later.

If Jesus is truly God, then, if he rises, if he rises from the dead, that he is truly God. That death has no bearing on him anymore.

And the rest of our passage communicates this to us, that Jesus does not stay dead. We'll finish off here, verses 9 to 11. Therefore God has highly exalted him, Jesus, 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, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[28 : 04] Not only does Jesus rise from the grave, it's implied here. He's dead, but then here he is, he's risen up. It's not that he's just rising from the grave, that he's resurrected, defeating sin and death forever, but he is also exalted by God to the very highest place, the highest authority.

Jesus, who refused to count equality with God, a thing to hold on to, a thing to be grasped, has it bestowed on him because he was in perfect obedience to God the Father by laying down his life as a servant on the cross.

You know what we try to do? We try to grasp at God, at the divinity. This was what caused Adam to fall in the garden.

He counted himself as equal to God. I'm going to reach up, and what happens? He gets humbled in the most just horrible way.

No more relationship with God. No more union with God. But what does Christ do? He humbles himself. And then is elevated. It's a complete reversal.

[29 : 23] These verses emphatically declare that the incarnate Jesus is indeed God himself, and not just God, but he bears the name of God, the divine name, the name that we see when God visits Moses at the burning bush.

I am who I am. I have always existed. The only God, the divine name, is given to Jesus. Not only that, but all authority is given to him as well, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess.

Isaiah 42 says, God shares his name with nobody. A bit later, Isaiah 45 says, that all knees will bow, all tongues will confess, that God is the Lord.

Jesus is exalted to his rightful place with the Father with all the honor and dominion over all of the universe.

that he is king, that God is finally king. It's a wonderful picture of the end of the age, the consummation of all of time, the very pinnacle of the story.

[30 : 43] This entire section, it's written in a letter that Paul writes to the Philippian church, but it is a hymn of praise. It is a liturgy of just absolute astonishment and praise and wonder to who God is, to who Jesus is, that he is God himself.

But here's the thing. The Christian faith starts and ends with Jesus. His life, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, we see it all in these six verses.

And inherent to that is Jesus being supernatural. That this whole thing is supernatural. That people don't rise from the dead. People don't do miracles.

The Bible is full of supernatural things. And these claims, if they are removed, it's like putting dynamite around a house and lighting the fuse.

The foundation crumbles. There's no more house. And if you struggle with this, I don't blame you. We swim in very, very modern waters.

[31 : 57] We are rationalists. Whatever we see with our eyes, whatever we can empirically measure with our science, and this isn't like a hit against science, but that's the only thing that exists.

We are anti-supernatural. So if you struggle with this, listen, I'm with you. I struggle with this as well.

But here's the thing. This is a worldview. This is a belief system that's just as much based on faith as ours.

And this belief system at best is flat and 2D. It doesn't celebrate the good, the true and the beautiful.

It doesn't recognize that there is a source of all goodness. It somehow puts man at the pinnacle. And we have limitations. So at best, we create this world that's rife with limitations.

[33 : 05] It's never what God intended it to be. In fact, it's actually the opposite of verses 3 and 4 of Philippians chapter 2. If you want to quickly look at that, it says this, do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interest of others. Our world pays lip service to this. I pay lip service to this, but my default is the opposite.

It is. Your default is the opposite. Our world's default is the opposite. When we put ourselves at the throne of God, when we are the ones who are writing the story.

But if these grand stories, these big narratives is what our society is built on, consider the biblical story, the biblical narrative, that God himself makes everything good and that we try to go after God and we utterly failed and have spent all of human history trying to achieve the very thing that we rejected, but that we deeply desire.

And God doesn't leave us in our terrible, pitiable state. He condescends. He becomes fully man, yet remaining fully God.

[34 : 30] and dies in our place, redeeming us again, uniting us once again with God himself. So that the very thing that we've gone after with our pursuits of people, places, or things, we find in God.

And our history, from the moment we have put our faith and trust and hope in Jesus, is to enjoy him forever. forever. That God is a God that condescends, that meets us because of love.

That is three-dimensional. That has meat to it, that has weight to it. And all of our best stories that we see in film, or in theater, or that we read, they all have hints of this.

They all have hints of redemption. They all have hints of a self-sacrificing for the betterment of somebody else. And they're just little whispers of the gospel and of who God actually is.

If Jesus isn't God, if the incarnation isn't real, if Jesus died as a regular criminal, didn't rise from the grave, is not at the Father's side, is not Lord and King, has not saved you, then take next Friday and Sunday off.

[35 : 57] And while you're at it, just be done with reading the Bible. Prayers are kind of tedious, so be done with that as well.

Our faith rises and falls on who Jesus is. And he is fully man and fully God, and the scriptures tell a better story.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your goodness and kindness that we do not deserve, that you humbled yourself, your son humbled himself, emptied himself, lived a perfect human life, fully God, fully man, and suffered on our behalf so that we might be united with him, so that we would have the mind of Christ to know him and to love him and to be in communion and fellowship with him, to live lives that then reflect his goodness and glory, and he did it all for our sakes, before we were even a twinkle in our father's eye, before we were even known he died for us, while we were still sinners, while we were still hanging out with death spiritually.

So Lord, I pray that you would help us this week as we enter into Holy Week to behold Christ, fully man and fully God, that we would read scripture, read the gospels, read the entirety of the Bible in light of that, and if we struggle with it, Lord, please have mercy on us and help us as we struggle.

We are prone to wander. Lord, we feel it. So Lord, please help us bolster our faith, help us to trust in the truth of the scripture, to take the scripture as it is, to not make excuses.

[38 : 01] Lord, we love you, help us to love you more. Lord, we believe in you, help us to believe in you more. Help us to embrace the beauty of this perfect and good story.

In Jesus' name, Amen.