

# The Incarnation

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Date: 15 December 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I would like to have you turn this morning to Philippians chapter 2, chapter 2.

! As we look to the Scriptures this morning, I trust you understand that I have an active responsibility that I've got to discharge this morning, which is preach the Word.

And you have an active responsibility, which is pray for the man who is preaching. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 1 and 2 should be woven into your thinking, and you recognize that as I preach, desperately dependent upon the enabling of God and His Spirit to work in my heart and to communicate effectively the glory of Christ, you have a responsibility of sitting there and being actively engaged in preaching.

Praying. Praying. Praying. That was a mistake. That's why you need to pray. I trust that you will do that with your eyes open. I don't care if you close them.

That's all right. And if you sleep, I assume that it's desperately needed. But I would prefer that what you do is pray and do so with your eyes open.

[ 1 : 38 ] Let's look and let me read here, if I may, beginning there in verse 6, Philippians chapter 2. Let's pray.

Our Father God, this morning, we are not careless in the matter of prayer, nor are we engaging in something that is merely a habit and something that is the preface to the preaching of the Word of God.

But we gladly announce that we are your people and we are dependent upon your Word and your Spirit to work in us. And what we ask is this, is that as the Word of God is taught with the enabling of the Spirit of God, that the Spirit of God would also take that Word and continue to mold and to shape us to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask, Father, that you are pleased, both with the things that are said and the things that are apprehended by your people and then put into practice. That as we leave here, we would leave with an incredible thanksgiving for the spiritual truths that you have given to us in your Word, but also thankful for salvation and thankful for the work that you are doing in forming us to be like Christ. And we ask this because of Him. Amen. Now, many of you here were in our Christmas program, and then many of you also were present when the Christmas program was put on both Saturday and Sunday.

[ 3 : 39 ] And I have to tell you, I've said this several different times since we had that program, that I remember when John brought it in and set it on my desk, actually Pastor Saul did, and said, here, look over this.

And I've confessed that I am not real good at reading music. I remember reading through and recognizing that the songs were recognizable and the passages of Scripture, but man, it was fantastic in its outcome and the joy of hearing such solid Bible truths brought musically, woven in with the passages of Scripture.

And one of the things that I couldn't help but think about as we were working our way through that program was actually the incarnation. I don't know if that focus came out of the fact that I tend to know where I'm going to be preaching next week, and as a result of that, I'm kind of doing the early lifting prior two weeks out, and I knew I was thinking about the incarnation.

But nevertheless, woven into that musical was the recurring theme that Christ Jesus came to this earth and came in human form. And so there is a sense in which we could say that as we look forward to Christmas and we look forward to what the holiday really represents, there is another way in which we could phrase that day.

We could refer to it as the celebration of the incarnation because really at Christmas, and we don't want to debate this morning what the actual date was, etc., but we do recognize that Christmas is

really a Bible truth in relationship to the fact that God sent His Son and He came to this earth and He took on human form that He still has.

[ 5 : 21 ] F.F. Bruce, a noteworthy Bible scholar, made a very interesting statement about the incarnation. He put it this way. He said, If there is, among the distinctive articles of the Christian faith, one which is basic to all others.

In other words, this truth is the one that kind of is chained and is the starting point of all the others. He said, It is this, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man for our salvation. This is the affirmation that we have in mind when we speak about the doctrine of the incarnation. And while there are different passages that we could look to both in the Old Testament and also in the New regarding the matter of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, probably the one that presses it together and takes the largest look at it in terms of history, it would be the passage that we've turned to this morning in the book of Philippians.

And so as we look at this passage, I want you to consider, first of all, His pre-incarnate glory. Look there, if you will, at verse 6, and it says, Who though He was in the form of God.

Paul is making a profound statement when he declares that this Jesus, who later on we're going to celebrate, is someone who came and actually was born in a manger.

[ 6 : 49 ] He was born as a little child, an absolute infant. And it tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ actually is in the form of God.

Now when it says form of God, it's not talking about some kind of plastic molding or creation. You know, it's like, well that's the form of, no, it's identifying that He was the express, true God.

And verse 6 is a strong declaration of the deity of Christ and His complete equality with God the Father. I think this is important doctrine because it is the foundation of our salvation, and it is a bedrock issue in our faith.

Don't think that it's a second tier, one of those subordinate issues that's not that important. It's absolutely at the heart of what we believe the gospel is. I want you to stop and realize that what this passage is telling us is that prior to His coming as a baby, when He took on human form, Jesus was and now remains the second person of the Godhead.

The Greek uses a tense to speak of His existence, and it says that who was always and in present continues to be God. That's probably a more accurate way of taking that little statement, who was in the form.

[ 8 : 10 ] It's saying who was and always is God. The Bible is filled with references to the deity of Christ, and the doctrine is important to our faith. Let me just have you look at a couple different passages in relationship to this.

You're there in Philippians, but I want you to turn back just for a moment to John chapter 1. And since it'll take me just a second to get there, if you're real quick, you could also go to Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, which is another powerful statement about the deity of Christ.

In John chapter 1, looking at verse 1 through 3, it says this, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. I want you also to look, if you would, at Hebrews, and I referred to the fact that this is another one of those classic statements about the deity of Christ.

The author of Hebrews puts together a string of statements that make it clear that Christ is indeed God.

[ 9 : 20 ] Let me read the passage to you. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. He upholds the universe by the word of His power.

After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of majesty on high. As you look at this passage, we're reminded that the Scriptures make it undeniably clear that Christ is indeed God. As we consider the glory of Christ before He took on human flesh, I think one of the things that is profitable for us is for us to ponder what we know about His pre-incarnate glory so that His diminution or His willingness to humble Himself is better understood.

Going back to the passage in John 1, verse 3, it tells us there that He was the creator of all things. And I want you to understand that what that passage tells us is that He indeed is who He says He is, God the Father, God the Son. He is part of the Holy Trinity.

[ 10 : 26 ] All the stars of the universe and all that we know is part of His creation. And the magnificence and the awesomeness of all of that make it clear that He is indeed God.

When we stop and consider the fact that Christ is the creator of the earth, I want you to understand that that fact is one of those things that should be humbling to us.

How significant are we? How significant are you? Truth of the matter is, is all of us, though we wouldn't want to say so publicly, here as we are together in church, we have a tendency of thinking, do you know what it says in Scripture?

Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think. How should we think of ourselves? We should think like the psalmist did who said this, What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you, what?

Visited him. It's amazing. When we stop and consider the fact that Christ is the creator, and we understand that that is the background to his humiliation.

[11:36] Interestingly, the fact of him being creator is significant, but it's not the most significant thing. By the way, so we understand the comparison, if you remember in the book of Job, Job has one recurring question or concern.

Do you know what it is? It's the question we all have. When something goes bad in our life, what do we want to figure out? Why? Why?

And all of us have spent countless hours lying awake or pondering that question. And by the way, does God ever answer Job's question? What's the response?

No. Instead of answering Job's response, what God does for three different chapters is he reminds Job of his creative power.

But I want to tell you, in the scope of eternity, the fact that God is the creator is not perhaps the most profound of truths. And I say that because it presupposes, number one, the angels rejoice in that, and they ponder it and look at it and say, wow, and we understand that the glory of God in Romans chapter 1 can be recognized by the unbeliever in the power of creation.

[12:56] But it is not creativity or God's power to create that really baffled the angels. What was it that really blew the angels away? It was what he did in salvation.

And as we look at this passage in Philippians, we recognize that it is telling us about Christ's glory prior to his incarnation, and we marvel that he who inhabits eternity was willing to actually come down here to the earth.

That brings us to the second thing that I want us to recognize, and that is his humiliation. Stop for a moment to think back to what we know about the fall. Adam and Eve saw deity as something to be grasped.

Do you follow what I'm saying there? Adam and Eve saw the potential and the opportunity of reaching out, so to speak, and taking hold of being like God.

That was the temptation that Satan offered. If you eat this, you will be like God. And they fell to that temptation. They desired it.

[14:05] It tells us here in the passage, and I want you to look in your Bible, in verse 6 it says, Who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God to be a thing grasped.

Everybody look up just for a moment. I'm curious. Don't nod your head and say, I do, I do, I know, I know. I would venture to say, however, that that little clause is a difficult one to grasp theologically. Would you agree with me? It says that equality with God is not something to be grasped. Is that saying that he wasn't grasping onto it?

What is it telling us? Let me explain it this way, and I think it is important for us to understand. Christ Jesus, being God, did not see his pre-incarnate glory as something that he had to cling to for his own sake and his own significance.

How many of you have ever done something nice but wanted credit for it? Raise your hands. In fact, the rest of you, I understand that you're just a little limp today and you don't want to put your hand up, but all of us have been perverse in our intents, haven't we not?

[15:27] Bring flowers to the wife, and what do you expect her to do? Thank you, Mark. Either that or do handsprings across the living room, right?

It's like, my husband did that. You know, you want to get some benefit from that. Spend \$18 on flowers and have some payback. You know, we're pretty crass little people.

I'm speaking of myself, not of you. But, you know, here it's saying about Jesus, he being God didn't find it necessary to cling to it.

But the logic immediately follows in the very next part that we see. I want you to recognize. It says, but made himself nothing.

Now, I do want to take just a little bit of time and recognize that Jesus did not cling to his position in superiority so that he was unwilling to give it up for us. He was willing to lay aside his pre-incarnate glory because according to the infinite wisdom and plan of God, it was imperative for him to take upon human form.

[16:34] And he chose to take upon humanity and lay aside the outward manifestation of his deity. He laid aside his visible radiance.

I mean, just imagine had the people who saw Jesus been fully exposed to the glory of his person, what kind of reaction would they have had?

Does anybody know? They would have been absolutely struck down. And we find in Scripture that the glory and holiness of God the Father and God the Son is overwhelming, the amount of transfiguration, an example.

But we know that Jesus willingly, voluntarily, of his own choice, laid aside much of that outward manifestation of his glory. He laid aside his infinite power in some sense that he became tired, he was hungry, he was thirsty.

He did these things of his own volition. I want you to understand that this emptying of his pre-incarnate glory, manifestation of it, does not mean that he stopped being God.

[17:49] One of the ideas that's floating out there is that, well, when Jesus came to the earth, he really stopped being God. He became all man. And our little pea brain can't put together that somebody can be all man and all God.

And you would agree with that, wouldn't you? I can't figure that out. Can you figure it out? No. But the truth of the matter is, is that he is all man and all God. And when he took on humanity, it doesn't mean that he stopped being God.

How do we know that? A couple of illustrations. For one, he knew what was in people's hearts. How many of you have, on occasion, thought you knew what was in other people's hearts?

We're all guilty of that, are we not? Here's how it plays out. Somebody does something you don't like, and you immediately assume the best of them.

Is that right? How many of you here? I always assume the best of other people. I don't see any hands. Okay. Yeah, I know what they were thinking. They wanted to do me harm, blah, blah, blah, blah. Jesus actually knew what people were thinking.

[18:53] Now, who can do that? Only God. You remember as well that in the case where he healed the man who had been born, he was a paralytic, remember?

Led him down through the roof, and the guy had been brought because he was having a physiological problem with his limbs. And Jesus, what was the first thing Jesus did?

Good news, your sins are forgiven. How did that tweak the Pharisees? Who? Who but God can forgive sins?

And Jesus said, well, that's a good question. Let's try this. Take up your bed and what? Walk. And Jesus demonstrated his deity, and people aren't right.

Only God can do that. He never stopped thinking of himself as God, even though his pre-incarnate glory was hidden. And let me give you a couple illustrations of that from the book of John.

[19:50] And in John chapter 8, verse 58, he really, once again, riled the Pharisees when he said, before Abraham was, I am. And in John chapter 14, verse 9, he says, whoever has seen me, remember that?

Has seen the Father. Jesus chose, and that's what we're looking at here in this passage in Philippians. He chose to take the mission of being a servant, and he chose to come here of his own volition, but also because of his obedience to the Father's will.

Every word that Jesus spoke, every miracle that he did was under the direction of the Father and under the enabling of the Spirit of God. And what we see here in verse 7 is that he permanently took on humanity, not with sinfulness, but with its natural and biological limitations.

Let me come to the third thing that the Scriptures make undeniably clear about the incarnation of Christ, and that is his work of atonement. You look there in verse 8, and it says, being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

I want you to recognize, for one thing, that Christ Jesus came, first of all, voluntarily to please his Father by his obedience. I'm struck when I stop and realize that the scope and the level of the obedience of Christ to his Father in all things, one of the things that is very interesting as you read through the gospel accounts, Jesus did not act apart from his Father's direction and his Father's

purposes.

[ 21 : 32 ] When he did something, he did it because it was what the Father wanted. When he said something, he said it according to what the Father had intended for him to say. Turn back in your Bibles, if you will, just for a moment, to a passage in Isaiah chapter 53 that I find rather stunning in relationship to the will of the Father in relationship to Christ, Isaiah 53.

By the way, as you're going there, how many of you are familiar with Isaiah chapter 53? Wave your hand so I can see what percentage of our... Again, let's do this slowly because I am in the process of evaluating our scriptural...

Raise your hand and wave at me. Okay, that makes me feel a little better. Anybody else want to wave so I feel better? Sorry. I know, I know.

While I'm standing in line, people are going to go by like this. Pastor, we hope you feel better. That's not what I meant. Okay, here we go. Isaiah 53. Look at the passage. Verse 10, we're talking about the Father.

Why did Jesus die? Well, we could say that He died for our sins.

[ 22 : 51 ] Why did Jesus die? We could say that He chose of His own volition to die in our stead. That would also be accurate. Why did Jesus die?

Why? Jesus died because it was the Father's will to do it and He obeyed His Father. Isaiah 53 makes it clear that it was the Father's will that His Son suffer in our stead.

I think just for a moment also to the prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden, and you probably remember it where Jesus said this, if it be possible. Another way of saying that would be if there's any other way.

If it be possible. In other words, hey, are there any options on this plan? If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. What's the next part?

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours. I want you to recognize, beloved, as you think about what Christ did when He came here, and as we read in Philippians, it says that He took on human form and He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death.

[ 24 : 11 ] We have a tendency to find our significance, and I want you to think with me about this. We have a tendency of finding our significance and doing our own thing.

Now, Christians don't want to admit that. But here's the deal. When your own thing gets thwarted, how do you respond? Huh?

How many of you had your plans interrupted by other ill-conceived... Let's stop right there. I have a tendency of getting beyond myself, and it causes problems.

But you know what I'm saying is other people mess with your brilliance. You had planned to shop. And there are a thousand yahoos that should have been doing it on Amazon when you decided to go to the store.

You know? And the people who drive in front of you, what do they demonstrate other than their lack of wisdom? They should have their license suspended.

[ 25 : 15 ] Okay, there we are. You know, we really come around and think that our significance lies in our own ideas and our own performance.

And it tells us that Jesus was willing to do only what His Father wanted. I want you to realize the passage also tells us that Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross.

By becoming obedient to the point of death. How does death take place in our culture when someone is justly condemned and given the death penalty?

How do they die today? They take to Him... Probably none of you have ever been there, thankfully. I'm sure you haven't. But, you know, they take them into a room and they strap them on a gurney. And then they put a little chemical cocktail into the person. Am I right? And how does that cocktail play out? Well, first the person goes to sleep.

[ 26 : 29 ] And then the person sleeps less. And then they take a gasp or two and guess what? The doctor comes in and checks his pulse and listens and blah, blah, blah. He's gone.

Okay. Now, it says here, He was obedient to the point of death. And then we have a little comment. It says, even death on the cross. We view the cross as an accessory today, don't we?

I mean, if you're a little extra spiritual, you might wear one. Nothing wrong with wearing a cross. Do you know in the ancient world nobody ever wore a cross?

And the reason for that is the cross was the most brutal, vile, despicable, offensive way to be put to death. It was a penalty reserved only for those that the government wanted to make a strong

statement about.

I want to be careful that I don't go left of center here. But I remember going to a football game down at OSU. And they had gotten one of those mine-resistant vehicles from the Army.

[ 27 : 47 ] And it was parked outside of the OSU stadium. And I thought, wow, what is that doing here? Do you know what I'm talking about? It wasn't a buffalo. It was one. What was it?

Can you help me here, Seth? It was one of those big mega, you know, about like 20 tons of armor and all that kind of stuff. And I saw it parked by the front gate and I said, whoa, that's going strong, right?

I mean, it's like if you mess with us, we're going to roll this up and put it right through your front door. And you will understand not to mess. Do you follow that? That's nothing compared to crucifixion.

Crucifixion. Crucifixion was the most brutal way of telling a population you had better knuckle under or you're going to die screaming your heart out and you're going to suffer for days in public.

When parents would come into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, on occasions they would have to walk by the places that these criminals were being executed by crucifixion.

[ 28 : 58 ] And I can guarantee you that a parent would throw the cloak of their robe across the face of their little boy and say, don't look, don't look. Put your fingers in your ears.

Put your fingers in your ears. Because it was the most brutal way to die. And it was saying this, this is what happens to people the government doesn't like.

It says Jesus died on the cross. I read this week of a man who was executed for murdering two elderly women.

And I thought to myself as I was reading that article of the contrast between how Jesus died for our sins and how that man died. Do you realize that Christ's death happened because of me and because of you?

I like the song. In fact, I almost asked John for us to sing it. In Christ Alone.

[ 30 : 11 ] I love that song. By the way, there's been a lot of little hubbub about the fact that several publishers wanted to include Keith Getty's song, In Christ Alone.

But he would not remove the words, the wrath of God was satisfied. And they thought that it was just a little too strong.

And it really talked about the penal substitution of Jesus. You know, penal substitution means Jesus died for me. I deserved all that wrath.

Do you follow that? I justly had it all coming to me. And Christ Jesus died in my place. And he died in your place. That's what this is telling me.

He humbled himself. He willingly took our place on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins we richly deserve.

[ 31 : 20 ] Let me have you stop with me just for a moment now as we come to kind of a summary of all of this. Because when we consider this passage, if the Spirit of God is working in your heart, here's how it plays out.

Really, we recognize that all of the people who are present this morning can be divided into two separate categories. One, those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

And when the Spirit of God is working in the life of the believer, and you are reminded of what Christ Jesus has done for you, do you know what the Spirit of God does in your heart?

He stirs it to be thankful that He died in your place. I remember reading what Martin Lloyd-Jones said about the preaching of the gospel.

He said that a genuine believer who is affected by the Spirit of God can never hear the gospel without having it resonate in their soul.

[ 32 : 25 ] Do you think Martin Lloyd-Jones is right? I do. So this morning, as we stop and think that Jesus died in my place, the heart of those who know the Lord Jesus should kind of like, whoa.

In fact, if that's not going on, here's what I would encourage you to do. I would encourage you to be reminded of what we read over in the book of Revelation, where it talks about people whose hearts have grown cold, and they have lost their first love.

By the way, the longer you're with Him, and the longer you grow in loving Him, the more affected you are by the sweetness of your relationship. Isn't that right? On the other hand, you may be here as a person who doesn't know Christ.

Now, is it possible to grow up in a church, go to Sunday school, actually be an Awana participant, and memorize those verses?

And I know, because I've worked in Awana, guess what the first thing is that little kids learn in Awana? Here's what they learn from the very beginning. In fact, I think, help me here, Doug, you're with this, right?

[ 33 : 50 ] You have to learn from the very beginning that you're a sinner, and Jesus died for you in order to get anything, right? Candy or games. I mean, it's important.

Don't take me wrong. But here's the point. It's at the heart. It's at the heart. And so, here's the deal. You can grow up in church, and you can hear all the stuff about Jesus, and you can be sitting here this morning, and the truth of the matter is, is you've never come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can't tell you how often I've ended up in conversation with people that tell me they know Jesus, but their life shows absolutely no evidence of the transforming power of the cross.

Jesus Christ. The man who was born blind, remember, he didn't know who healed him.

How many of you know that story in John? Didn't know who healed him. And the Pharisees are giving him the what for. They're just beating him up. And he says, hold it, hold it. I don't know who, and I don't know what, but I do know there was a time when I was blind, and now I can see.

[ 35 : 14 ] There is a before and after in those who are converted by the power of the cross. And if you're sitting here this morning, and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, let me plead with you when Christ said, be reconciled.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

He took upon himself human form. He humbled himself. And that humiliation is beyond our ability to fully grasp.

The reason why is because we're into being human. And we don't understand being God, do we? But he did that. So he could take your place and die in your stead.

Let me close with this. God is holy. And he will judge sin.

[ 36 : 29 ] But I will tell you that there must be an amplifier in his judgment of those who sit and hear the gospel and harden their hearts.

And in the face of what Jesus has done for you, you refuse to receive the gift he offers. Let's close in prayer.

Our Father, this morning, we revel in the doctrine of the incarnation that you willingly sent your son, second person of the Trinity, to take upon himself human flesh expressly for the purpose of dying in our place and for our sins.

Jesus, and those of us who are believers have our love tested this morning by the effect that that sweet truth has upon our heart.

And those who are here that do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, it is our plea and our prayer that they would come to see Christ as their only hope.

[ 37 : 43 ] they would confess their sins and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world. And we ask this in your precious name.

Amen.