

Palm Sunday 2024

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[0 : 00] The triumphal entry is baffling. It's a baffling event. Jesus enters Jerusalem as a triumphant leader, not unlike Caesar or a general entering Rome after a successful military campaign.

He is heralded as the son of David, the prophet of prophets, the Messiah himself, and yet in less than a week, the entirety of Jerusalem turns on him. In less than a week. And they turn on him, not that they just turn their back on him, but they call for his death. And again, not just a regular death, but a death upon a Roman cross. They demand that Jesus is crucified, which for the Jewish nation is a sign of a deep, deep divine curse upon his life. How on one end of the week is Jesus the king? He is the one who is going to set everything right. And by the end of the week, they want him to die not just the most gruesome physical death, but an eternal one, cursed by God for eternity. How can the same crowds turn so quickly upon Jesus? Well, Jesus was a convenient figure. For the crowds, for the masses, as he entered Jerusalem, he was going to be the Messiah, the one that would rid Israel of Rome to reestablish the kingdom of David once again, that Israel would see glory days that would make anything that came before look weak and pale and black and white. That King Solomon and his kingdom would be nothing compared to what the Messiah would do. The Messiah would be King David's son. But Jesus doesn't fit that narrative. He's not coming in as a king ready to conquer Jerusalem and oust the Romans. Instead, he foretells the temple's destruction. And not just the temple's destruction, but Jerusalem's sacking. He further condemns the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and the hollowness of worship that is happening in Jerusalem itself. He doesn't set up a place of victory in Jerusalem. Rather, he laments over Jerusalem. The religious leaders plot to kill him and easily drum up the people to back their evil plan. It really is a remarkable thing in this narrative.

Humanity has this innate ability to seek our own fortunes and our own glory. And in failing to find that vision in our minds, collectively, individually, of what that fortune and glory and the good life, whatever you may call it, failing to find that, we don't just shrug our shoulders and move on. We hurt and abuse, destroy, lambast those that get in our way. Or put another way, we vainly seek our glory out of selfish ambition. And as a result, we destroy anything that stands in the way.

[3 : 42] This almost certainly results in humanity's suffering. And not just suffering, but suffering humiliation. In short, this is pride. Why does the crowd turn on Jesus so quickly? It's because he doesn't fit their vision of what the Messiah is to be like. They don't submit themselves humbly to God's word, but their pride wells up, and they turn on Jesus. This isn't a first century problem. This isn't a Jewish problem. This is a human problem, for it is a human condition. And to some degree or another, it is found in the heart of all of us. In fact, it was the reason sin entered the world through our first parents to begin with. Adam, maid and Eve, maid in God's image, thought that becoming God, was their destiny. And they pridefully tried to steal God's glory, and as a result, suffered humiliation and shame. The irony is that they shared in the image of God. They were connected to God.

They were in relationship to God, but they wanted to be God. They did not want to submit. Pride welled up in their hearts, and they sinned. And that has followed the human race all the way to the present.

And this leads us to our text in Philippians 2. Philippians 2, it's a centuries-old reading in our prayer book that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, he was the chief architect of the Book of Common Prayer. He put it together in the mid-16th century. He saw fit to include Philippians 2, 5-11 for the Sunday before Easter. And this text speaks about not the first Adam who sinned because he tried to, in pride, take over God's glory, but the second Adam, Jesus, who had the glory of God, who was God himself, but humbled himself and took upon him human flesh. We call this the incarnation. Literally,

God became enfleshed, but remained fully God. Through the incarnation, the humble self-emptying of the Son to the will of the Father, through that our perennial humiliation, wrought by our selfish and vain pursuits of glory, will forever, forever be reversed. So it's a very fitting reading leading up to Easter because Easter is when Jesus will pay the penalty for our sins, but it's in the incarnation that really Easter Sunday begins, in a sense, when God was born to Mary as a child.

So, leading into the Holy Week and the Passion of Christ, Philippians 2, it's incredibly important and it's very wise for us to read. It's the high point of Christology. That's simply just to say it's the high point of what we know about Jesus. It is how we understand who Jesus truly is, and in light of that, it will magnify our view of what the cross really is, and how God will save us from our prideful humanity and humiliation. So I've broken up the text to look at three aspects of the incarnation and three aspects of who Jesus is and how he can save us. The first is because he's the incarnate one. We'll look at that in verses six to eight. We'll also look at Jesus being the humble one. Verses nine and then verses 10 and 11, he will be the exalted one. So let's look with, or look with me now at verses six and seven, and we'll see how Jesus is the incarnate one. Nowhere else do we see the incarnation so vividly proclaimed as in Philippians 2, 5 to 11, and this is what I'll read verses five to six here. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, verse six, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Although saying form of God may seem as not as definitive as a statement of saying Jesus was God, in the original language, this, the idea of Jesus being in the form of God, it conveys that which truly and fully expresses what it is. It's literally that Jesus is, he is God himself in the form, in the shape, he is morphed, so to speak, that he truly and fully expresses what he is in the form of, namely God. This means that Christ Jesus had all of the essential attributes of God, his all-knowingness, his omniscience, his power, his omnipotence, he's perfect, he's unique, he's one, he's the fullness of beauty, perfect in glory. Everything that God is, so too is Jesus. It is not as if God, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, came down into just a human being and supercharged that human being. The incarnation teaches us that

[9:37] God, the Son of God, remaining God, took on human flesh so that he was 100% God and 100% man. As God, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus always was. There was never a time when he did not exist. He is uncreated. He is still fully God. But if Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, equal to God the Father and God the Son, takes on human flesh, why then does our text say, that he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped? This is where a lot of heresies have pulled a proof text, so to speak, that Jesus wasn't truly God or that he was just some kind of Superman or great prophet. God is one. Jesus clearly isn't equal with God. Therefore, Jesus isn't God.

So, was Jesus not God? Or was he just God-light? Diet God? A subordinate version of God? God. This tells us that Jesus is in fact God, but that he did not leverage his divine glory and majesty, his divine prerogatives as God when he became incarnate. What does that mean? It means that when the Son of God took on human flesh, he gave God the Father deference without giving up his equality. It is a way to say that he became fully man. You and I are not equal to God, and we ought to recognize that. We are subordinate to God. So, Paul, the apostle who wrote this, is drawing our attention to the fact that when God, the Son of God, became man, he became man. He was fully man in every respect, but also that he did not cease being fully God. So, we see this in verse 7. This is what it says.

But made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. When Jesus emptied himself, he gave up his divine rights by becoming a servant. Notice that it's the same word that he took on the form of, or in the likeness of man here. It is the same as in verse 6. Again, it's to say that he is still God, and yet he is still, and that he is fully man. It means that as a man, he had to come under God's full authority. He had to. This is a key aspect of what makes you and I humans. We live under a creator. We are not creators ourselves. And in fact, as I referenced earlier, Adam and Eve, this was their big sin. They tried to make themselves God. Was that not the temptation that the serpent said to them? If you have this, you will become just like God. And forever after that, this is the human problem. We are created beings under God. We have no ability to create. I mean, we can create, we can be creative, but we can't make something out of nothing. We are not God. And yet, we try to fashion ourselves into God, take the place of God.

[13:15] And yet, Jesus, when he comes, he takes on flesh and submits himself to the full authority of God as a man, but at the same time, as God doesn't try to take over the throne of heaven like Adam and Eve or like all of us. In a sense, he's the perfect man. He is in relationship with God the Father in a perfect way.

In fact, he is the better Adam. He doesn't buckle under the authority of God. He doesn't get tempted and give in to the temptations to subvert God's plan and think that he can do it better himself. There is no prideful vanity within Jesus, leading to his humiliation. But what does he do? He humbles himself. He empties himself. He voluntarily suspends his rights, his divine rights, in order to become fully man. This is the beauty of the incarnation. He did not pursue his own glory that was his by rights, but rather he limited his glory. He divested himself of his glory. He submitted to the will of God the Father. He lived as a human being in a perfect relationship with God. Again, the perfect man, the better Adam. Adam 2.0, if you'd like.

He was fully man, but not only man. Remember, he is fully God as well. And this is important for our salvation. Something wonderful about God is his unchangingness. He is perfect in all that he does. He does not change his mind. There's nothing to be added to him or taken away. We talked about this a bit last week and also mentioned it in the Sunday follow-up email that I sent out. Therefore, what we see of Jesus, we can understand, again, he doesn't change, that what we see Jesus do, we can be sure that that reflects perfectly the heart of God. It means that everything he displays, his character, is actually the character of God. He is, in a sense, the icon, the perfect icon of God. He manifests his very character, his essence on earth. So, when we read about Jesus taking off his outer garment and tying a towel around his waist and washing the filth and the grime and the animal droppings and the stench and the dust off of his disciples' feet, we see a picture of God extending grace and extending love and extending mercy to us.

[16:08] What we see Jesus do, because he is perfect and because God is unchanging and because he is fully God, we know that this is the heart of God the Father. Again, the incarnation is key for us.

It's a beautiful picture of God's heart towards mankind. Do we deserve it? No. But God, in Jesus, humbles himself to show kindness and love and grace.

If Jesus was merely a good moral teacher, a miracle worker, then he's just that and nothing more. And he does really nice things. He washes people's feet. It's gross, but he's nice about it. It's great. People are hungry. Okay, so he, you know, drums up a little party trick, a bunch of food for everybody. Excellent. You know, let's feed the masses. But that's where it ends. It doesn't say anything about who God is. It doesn't communicate the heart of God towards us. It doesn't point to ultimate salvation.

It's just nice things. And maybe we emulate it. Maybe we follow his example. But again, that's where it ends. If Jesus is merely a moral teacher or a miracle worker, great, fantastic. But that is not, that then doesn't speak to him as a savior.

[17:32] The incarnate God is the only one who could give grace and heal not just our temporal humiliation, but our eternal humiliation. This is why the incarnation, it matters so very much. And this is why Jesus is the incarnate one. And it had to be this way. It couldn't be any other way.

But Jesus doesn't just wash feet as a picture of grace and mercy and love, does he? His humility runs even deeper. Look with me at verse 8. And this will be our second point, that Jesus is the humble one. Verse 8 says this, Why did the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, empty himself of his divine rights?

So that he would show the ultimate form of service to others by dying on the cross. God, the Son of God, he empties himself in the incarnation to take on human flesh, to humble himself in service and obedience to God, the Father's will, by dying on the cross to redeem us. He had to die as a man for us in our place. But he could only satisfy the requirements of the law as God himself. And this is, again, why he had to humble himself in the incarnation, why he had to humble himself to die on the cross.

Notice here in verse 8, that the Apostle Paul makes no reference to the historical narrative of the crucifixion. It's not that it doesn't matter to him. But the emphasis that the Apostle Paul is drawing our eyes to here is not on the narrative of what happened, but rather on the utter gruesomeness, the grime, the embarrassment, the shame of the cross, which speaks to the very depths of Christ's humility. Again, he doesn't just wash feet, but he descends, he condescends, he goes to the very lowest possible rung of humility. And crucifixion was just that. It was the worst form of public

execution ever conceived by humanity. It was hellish. It wasn't just that you suffered excruciating pain.

It was very deeply embarrassing for an honor and shame society. I mean, whether or not Jesus had an undergarment on or not, maybe, maybe not, the fact is Romans would crucify people naked and they would be there, there would be complete shame and they'd have to suffer and people would mock them and animals would get at them. It was, it was hellish. Cicero said of the crucifixion, quote, 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.

[20 : 51] Jesus humbles himself to the very lowest of low. There's no lower than the cross. There's no further humility that he could have achieved. He humbles himself to the lowest rung of humanity's frailty and brokenness and by doing so, he identifies with us all. There's nobody that is now not identifiable that he doesn't identify with. There's nobody that has existed on planet earth in the history of time that is somehow more humble than Jesus. Jesus is at the very bottom, which means he can identify with all of us. Can God identify with you? Does God know who you are? What you have gone through? The shame that you have endured? The hurt that you have experienced? That you have done yourself? Can God identify with you? How it feels to be abandoned and forgotten and despised and shamed and hurt and broken and abused, feeling no better than a worm? Does he know the depths of your sinful condition and what results from that? Your humiliation? Can he understand that? And in the incarnation and in the crucifixion, the answer is an emphatic yes. Yes. Some of us, again, I know some stories, not all stories of folks in here, gone through stuff. Never to the extent of Christ. That means he can commiserate better than anybody else. He doesn't just commiserate, but he can relate.

He understands. He understands. He's not aloof to what has happened in your life. Imagine that. Imagine the times in your life where you have been heard by somebody. You have been vulnerable. You have poured out your heart. Somebody listens and you feel heard. You're heard, but you feel it right here.

That is Christ. But infinitely greater than whoever has heard you, who can relate to you. This is Christ.

The cross, this humble, self-emptying, incarnate, crucified Christ emphatically can identify with you. And not only does he identify with you and know you, but he does so voluntarily, not out of compulsion, which means it must be an act of love. The Garden of Gethsemane is an incredibly deep and profound scene in the passion narrative. But notice that Jesus, he doesn't get his arm twisted by God the Father.

[23 : 56] He says not my will, but your will be done. Which means, again, it is an act of love. An act of love within the triune God, but that act of love that is then extended to us.

God not only can identify with the depths of our brokenness, but proclaims his self-giving, perfect love towards you before you were even conceived, before you were ever around, before your parents, before your grandparents, and so on and so on and so on. He dies in your place so that you do not have to taste the just penalty for your sins, so that your humiliation is not the final word. What a wonderful truth. The final word on our lives, for those that are in Christ Jesus, it is not sinner or loser or failure, and it's not death.

It is love, it is grace, it's eternal sonship. Jesus manifests the very character and essence of God. So when we see this self-humbling, selfless service that loudly proclaims love, we see the very heart of God towards us, vain and prideful sinners.

We try to take the throne of grace and are humiliated, and God's response isn't, you got what was coming for you. He sends his son to die on our behalf and elevates us out of our humility.

[25 : 35] A wonderful, wonderful picture of love and grace extended to us. And by the way, we get to enjoy this love and be a part of this love and participate in this love forever.

And this, friends, is why, and this is just, I'm just touching on this, this is like, we could double click this and spend eternity discovering it. But this is why the Trinitarian understanding of God is the only understanding that can make sense of Jesus dying on the cross.

Because if God, the Son, went to the cross out of love, and that is the unchanging nature of the Triune God, it means that God was always extending love. And if that was always his heart before we were created, then it's not like God just loves himself, singular. It's not like he's just existing for all eternity and just, I love myself, this is wonderful. No, the Triune God, three persons, one essence, one God, the Father is loving the Son, and the Son is loving the Father, and the Holy

Spirit is involved in loving this, and in some regards is the expression and the source of love. From all time, the uncreated God is constantly extending love within the Triune, within the Trinity itself. And when God saves us, because God is extending his love towards us, we get invited into this. Not that we become a part of the

Trinity, but that we get to enjoy the love that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit enjoy in the Godhead, because we are now found in Christ. Jesus had to be fully God and fully man for this to happen. Jesus humbles himself by dying on a cross as an expression of the love of God, but does he stay dead?

He does not. And here's where the rubber truly meets the road in terms of Jesus's divinity, because all people will die. All of us have had death thrust in our faces, whether it's loved ones or close calls with ourselves or with family members. I mean, the past 12 months have been really full of death in the news. Canada continues down a culture of death. There's wars. I mean, the picture is, we become numb to it because of so much death. Everyone will die. We are accustomed to death, but no one will come back from the dead. It's impossible for a mere human to rise again from the dead. For all of us, death is a necessity, but only Jesus chose death. It was not a necessity for him, which means he is more powerful than even death itself. He has authority over death. So when he humbled himself, he humbled himself even to death. Jesus is indeed a human, but remember, he is not only a human. The rest of our passage communicates to us this truth that Jesus did not stay dead, but rose again and has been exalted from the lowest depths to the highest heights. Look with me at verses 9 to 11.

[29 : 07] And this is our third point and final point, that Jesus is the exalted one. This is what it says, verse 9 to 11. 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, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Not only does Jesus rise from the grave, defeating sin and death forever, he is also exalted to the highest place and given highest authority. Remember, this is Jesus who refused to count equality with God a thing to hold on to. He divested himself of his glory. He humbled himself completely and now has it bestowed on him because he was perfectly obedient to the will of God, fully man, fully God, and now is exalted to the highest place. Not reverting back to God, the Son of God, leaving his humanity on earth, but being exalted as Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God. And if we therefore are in him, that will be our destiny as well. No eye can see, no mind can comprehend what Christ Jesus has for those that trust him and love him and put their faith in him. Can we fully grasp what it would mean to be exalted with Christ in the heavenlies? This is what this text is telling us. These verses emphatically declare that the incarnate Jesus is indeed God himself and yet again fully man.

We see in parts of the Old Testament that God, he does not share his name with no other and that God is the one to whom all creation will bow down to, Isaiah 42 and 45. And here, what does it say? Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. That is to say, all of creation, Jesus is God.

Jesus is exalted to his rightful place with the Father, with all honor and dominion over all of creation, over all of the cosmos. All of it is his. All of it, whether in this life or the next, will bend a knee to Christ as King. He is given the divine name, the divine authority, all of his divine prerogatives once again bestowed upon him. This is a brief yet magnificent picture of the consummation, the climax of all of redemptive history.

This entire section, it is understood really to be a hymn. Not the hymns that Jono led us in, but a hymn of praise, a doxology almost, just proclaiming the greatness and glory of God.

[32 : 17] So to wrap this up, the Christian faith starts and ends with Jesus. It is built upon his life, his death, his resurrection and exaltation. According to the scriptures, his incarnation. Sometimes these supernatural claims are hard to fathom.

We recognize Jesus actually lived. But was he really God? I don't know. Did he really walk on water? I don't know. Did he really multiply loaves and fishes? It's kind of hard to believe. Did he heal people? Did he cast out demons? There's a lot of difficult things to wrestle through. And people loving what Jesus represents turn him into a type of archetype, a myth, somebody to emulate in a sense.

His stories, they look to something greater. And to an extent, it's true. But Jesus is 100% fully God and fully man. He 100% fully rose from the grave. For if he didn't literally do that, our faith is gone.

Stay home next weekend, please. Better things to do if Jesus didn't actually do this. Go to brunch. Go for a nice walk. Visit somebody. But if he did, if he did rise from the grave, changes, changes everything. It really does. We live in a disenchanted age. We struggle to even comprehend anything that we can't materially see or explain. Supernatural claims are, I mean, we call them myths. And really this is just the air we breathe. It's hard to push back against that. But I'll just say this. That worldview is 2D at best. It doesn't understand that the good and the true and the beautiful find their fulfillment in a source, in the source of a perfect being, because it cannot recognize that those things reflect godly design, God's character and his essence. If Jesus didn't come in the incarnation, if he didn't live and die and rise again, then what does goodness ultimately point to? What does love, how does, where does love find its, its end, its telos? Where does, where does, where does, where does beauty kind of climax? Like what, what is, there's always greater amounts of beauty, but what, but the, surely there, there is a source of beauty or an ultimate beauty. But if not, then our world starts to unravel.

[35 : 14] The God of the universe created humanity to be united to him. He is the source of everything that, again, is good, that is true, that is beautiful. And we rejected it for something far less glorious and far less beautiful. All of our strivings, our failings, our foibles are all vain attempts to regain that thing. And it's, and it's a, a vain pursuit. Friends, we are people shouting Hosanna on Palm Sunday only to shout crucify him a few days later on Good Friday. He knew this and he still rode into Jerusalem.

He still rode into Jerusalem. He knew it and yet he still triumphantly entered Jerusalem. Not to save us from Rome, but to save us from sin and death and our vain pursuits and to redeem us from this humiliation that we've suffered since our first father.

Jesus emptying himself, suspending his divine rights, becoming enfleshed, becoming fully human so that he can identify with us, paying the price to redeem us, not staying in the ground, but rising again, exalted into heaven. Friends, this is something rock solid to put our faith in. Let us do that today. Let us pray.

Father, thank you so much for the incarnation. Thank you that it is a very appropriate and good thing to read and to ponder and to meditate upon and, and ultimately to live in light of as we enter into Holy Week as we journey towards the cross. Lord, by your Holy Spirit, Lord, we ask that you'll impart and implant these truths deep in our souls. Lord, we thank you that your response to our vain pursuits of glory that result in destruction to others and humiliation in our own lives was grace. And Lord, we pray that you would bless us in this truth today. In Christ's name. Amen.