

John 1:1-5, Phil. 2 "The Sacrifice of the Incarnation"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Last week, we started talking about Christmas together, about the Incarnation, preparing our hearts to celebrate, to wonder, and to be transformed by this fact that the Word became flesh.

The Incarnation of the Son of God Himself. I spoke of the Incarnation of what Jesus did as the intentional entrance of the Divine Son of God into our fallen world, in human flesh, to secure our redemption at the cost of His life because of His great love.

And last week, we started talking about the Incarnation by talking about our need for the Incarnation. The darkness of our world and of our hearts that required the rescue of God, that required Him breaking in to bring light and life.

And the hope that Christmas reminds us of in the midst of our darkest moments is that there is light powerful enough and passionate enough to break into your darkness.

[1 : 27] No matter how thick that darkness feels to you, there's light powerful enough and passionate enough to break into it. We need that reminder, don't we?

Because we feel that a lot. That's the hope of Christmas. Jesus has come. Jesus is coming again to bring light and life for us.

This morning, we're actually going to consider the sacrifice required of Jesus in the Incarnation. What did He have to give up when the Word became flesh?

We certainly will see this mystery of God becoming man in John chapter 1, where we're focusing most of our time this Christmas season. We're going to look there a little bit this morning.

But I want us to start with the great Christ hymn in Philippians chapter 2 today. So let's turn there and read from Philippians chapter 2, beginning at verse 3.

[2 : 26] This is God's holy, inerrant, infallible Word given to us so that we would know Him, love Him, and honor Him.

Philippians 2 at verse 3. 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 interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 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, and being found in human form.

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Thus far, God's Word. Let's pray and ask for His help as we study it together.

Father, we give You thanks for Your Word. And we ask that Your Spirit would come as He loves to do and shine light upon it. That those of us who struggle to understand, and when we understand, struggle to trust, struggle to follow, would have Your help.

[3 : 51] That You might teach us, that You might lead us, that You, Holy Spirit, might change us. We ask that You do that so that we might see Jesus more clearly, so that we might worship Him more fully, that this Christmas season would be one that we delight in, because we delight in the birth of our Savior.

We ask it in His name. Amen. Every year when we get ready at our house to decorate the Christmas tree, I pull out this old box that is labeled, Will's Christmas Ornaments.

It's getting crowded. I've got over 30 years of ornaments piled up in here now, and I pull it out and get so excited and start to look through and see which ones am I going to use this year.

They go all the way back to childhood ornaments. The oldest, one of them, is this kind of cute snowflake frame picture of me when I was a baby.

It's only cute if you really like chubby cheeks, then it's really, really cute. There's a lot of those. But it goes kind of downhill after that one.

[5 : 07] You get this styrofoam snowman. They're pictured up there because I know you can't see me holding them up, but he's missing some of his outfit. He's got pieces falling apart, but he used to be cute.

And then there's a clothespin toy soldier. You know, he hangs like this and spins a little bit. He's got an arm that's kind of broken off to the side. It looks really painful.

His hat is falling off on one side. It's barely hanging on, a little bit of extra glue helping it to stay there. But the piece de resistance, maybe my favorite, is this felt Christmas tree that I decorated when I was two years old.

You know, there are all sorts of sparkly things on here. A lot of different kinds of glue. They're different colors now, the glues are. In fact, it's even decorated with bits of dirt and dust and fluff that the felt Christmas tree has picked up off of other Christmas ornaments and old Christmas trees over the years.

And they're all kind of attached to different parts of the tree. Kids, if you want to see these, you can come up and I'll help you learn how to make one for your Christmas tree. They're very special, special ornaments.

[6 : 26] But we have all of these things and I love these ornaments. I love getting them out and looking at them every year. Some of them bear kind of the scars of time.

They've been worn and tattered, but I love them and I hold on to them very tightly. I don't know if you have ornaments like that at your house. I'm pretty sentimental.

Okay, I'm really sentimental. So I love holding on to old things. In fact, I like keeping things in general. I'm not just sentimental. I'm also very practical.

So I love holding on to things like clothes that don't fit anymore. Or if I'm honest, for me, it's more like the baggy jeans that one day are going to come back in style.

There's no way skinny jeans is going to stick. And so if I keep all these baggy jeans in the garage somewhere, then one day I'm going to be ready when that day comes.

[7 : 27] So I'm hanging on to those things. I'm a pack rat. I know that. But we all have things we hold on tightly to, don't we? Things you can't imagine letting go of.

You think you're always going to need them. Think about what would be on that list for you. What kinds of things are grasped tightly in your sweaty palms?

If you've never seen the sweaty palms of a child sitting in a pew waiting for the offering plate to come by and the coins that are in there, by the time it gets to them, you can't even shake them off because they stick to the sweat.

But what would be there stuck in your sweaty palms because you've been holding on to it so tightly? It may not be felt Christmas tree ornaments or out of style clothes.

It could be money that our instinct is to hold on to tightly. So when I walk out of Target this time of year and see the Salvation Army bell ringer, I think, no way.

[8 : 28] No, no, I'm looking the other direction. Or I hear my church ask for help financially at the end of the year and I think, seriously? My money? Hold on tightly to that.

Now, I want you to think this morning, what are those things? Material things? Maybe immaterial things that you cling to tightly. What would we find in your proverbial sweaty palm that you would never part with?

The sacrifice would be too great. Everybody got something in mind? We're not going forward until everybody thinks of something. So you've got to think. Have that in your mind.

And then listen to what Paul says as he talks about Jesus in Philippians chapter 2. He says Jesus possessed some much more valuable things than any of us ever has.

And he had to sacrifice those to let it go, as it were, in order to become flesh, to bring light into our darkness.

[9 : 31] It was costly to Jesus. That act of becoming flesh, the incarnation, cost him immensely. We want to consider that sacrifice for a few minutes as we prepare to come to this table this morning.

Next week, we're going to focus on what he entered into when he did that. But today, what he gave up in order to become man. See, verse 6 of Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

And it's so important for us to understand this because some people have totally misused this verse. And they said, see, Jesus didn't count equality with God something to be reached for, to be grasped at.

Which proves that Jesus wasn't actually God. He didn't grasp for divinity. That's not what this verse means at all. The context makes that very clear in the word itself.

Actually, in the Greek, what it's referring to is holding on to something that is yours. Grasping tightly and not letting go. Using it for your own purposes.

[10 : 45] I'll have it for me. That's what the word means. Or as in this case, Jesus not doing that. Not grasping tightly.

Deciding that although he was indeed fully God, with all the benefits that are associated with that reality, he would let go of those in order to take on flesh.

So that's the first thing he sacrificed. The infinite glory and status of being God on high to become man.

Though he was in the form of God, he took on the likeness of man. John says the word was with God and the word was God.

But then what happened? The word became flesh. Since you and I have never been God, we can't even begin to imagine or think about the distance here.

[11 : 50] The sacrifice that this was for Jesus. We don't have analogies to compare or words to describe the glorious mystery of fully God becoming fully man at the same time.

The theologian John Murray says it this way with some rich theological words that probably help our minds start thinking a little bit. The infinite became finite.

The eternal and supratemporal, outside of time, beyond time, entered time and became subject to its conditions. The immutable, the one who could never change, became mutable.

And all the difficulties that he had to face alongside of that. The invisible became visible. The creator became the created. Note he's really intentional there to include the word the.

It's not that he became created. But that he became part of the created. The creator walking around among his creation. The sustainer of all became dependent.

[13 : 00] The almighty infirm. All is summed in the proposition, God became man. All of these things. I don't like change at all.

And the change for me is usually very small changes. This is the God who is unchanging and unchangeable. Becoming something very different from him.

We are not just right there beside God. He takes on flesh. He walks on this earth. The glory that he sacrifices. Just ponder that for a minute.

The fullness of glory was his. No one rivaled him. What are the things we know about God? There's none other like him.

He's worthy of all praise. Even the rocks know to praise him. All of creation knows who he is and worships him. To put it in my words, a little bit less long than Murray's.

[14 : 03] The one who deserved all eyes on him became one from whom men hide their faces. He goes from being recognized by everyone to ignored by many.

The God who is so big that he creates with the word of his mouth the entire universe and all the solar systems. Back up and get just a glimpse of that like you're seeing it in a picture online or something.

All these solar systems and stars out there. And God's bigger than that and has created all of it. And all of a sudden he becomes so small that he's contained in less than a little pinprick on a map.

In one planet. In one country. In one little no name city. In a manger. The great and awesome big God becomes very small.

Jesus says I'm not clinging to my glory. My status as God. I'll sacrifice that.

[15 : 11] And become man. What else is sacrificed as he does that? It's not just the fact that he's not God on high. That he's also now fully man.

I'll say he sacrifices his riches and comfort. The privileges of heaven. Remember John tells us the word was with God in this perfect relationship.

And he lays that perfect natural intimacy aside to become flesh. In fact Philippians 2.7 he made himself nothing.

Emptied himself. We sang it earlier this morning. Thou who was rich beyond all splendor. All for love's sake became poor. Throne's for a manger did surrender.

Sapphire paved courts for stable floor. Thou who was rich beyond all splendor. All for love's sake became poor.

[16 : 14] He had everything at his fingertips didn't he? Dwelling in perfection. Never even needing to slumber or sleep. Sleep. Wasn't something that ever factored into his day.

Heir to all the riches of heaven. No sin to interfere with the safety and security of his day to day existence. Nothing interrupted. I'd call that a comfort zone if there ever was one right?

How comfortable. How safe and secure. Nothing could touch him there. No one could harm him. God his father.

The greatest good of all goods. His constant companion. With deep fellowship. Close relationship. I'd never give that up.

Boy I'd hang on to that one. But what does Jesus do? He lets that go. He lays it down.

[17 : 14] He steps out of that comfort zone of safety and security. Into a war zone. Where suffering is immediate. Where hunger is a regular experience.

People are trying to kill him. And eventually he will sacrifice all the way to death on a cross. But we'll talk more about that next week. This is the aspect of Jesus' sacrifice that has really just gotten at my heart this week.

If you've got close relationships in your life. Just a few really close relationships. Aren't those precious relationships? Don't you love those? Wouldn't you give anything to keep those close relationships?

Especially if it's maybe a father, son, father, daughter. Any parent, child relationship. If you have a beautiful close relationship with a parent. Isn't that a precious thing to you?

Many would tell you who don't have them. And that's priceless. I long to have even one such close friendship. Close relationship. And Jesus willingly leaves.

[18 : 26] We talked about the incarnation as the intentional entrance. With eyes wide open. Jesus leaves that unique, special, unparalleled relationship.

Closer than any human relationship we can imagine or desire to have. That relationship with his father and the Holy Spirit. That he's known from eternity past.

It's the only thing he's ever experienced. He leaves it in order to become flesh. To bear our sins. And as he does that. And he knew where he was going.

As he does bear our sins. He finds his father's face turned away from him. We hear him cry out. My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? And one who's never known that reality.

Nothing but the closeness of relationship. Knows his father's face turned from him. Can you imagine the sacrifice? That he made to become man?

[19 : 27] One more way I think we could look at it. These are obviously you could laundry list words. I just picked a couple more. These verses highlight the sacrifice of his position.

And prerogatives. That Jesus makes in the incarnation. Verse 7 again. Made himself nothing.

Taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men. Made himself nothing. Taking the form of a servant. The Lord.

The ruler of all creation. Becomes the servant. Of that which he rules. In heaven he was in charge, right? Since all glory was due him.

Every decision should serve him and his purposes. The only person who's ever existed. Who could justifiably say it's all about me. And it was.

[20 : 30] And he determines not to use that for his own benefit. That's part of what that word grasp means. That I was talking about earlier.

You'll even see it in some translations. That write a little longer to explain a word. It's the idea of clinging tightly to something. In order to use it for your own purposes.

In order so that you have it to achieve your own ends. Where the decisions are about you. Jesus determined not to cling to his divine prerogatives.

Which he certainly was entitled to say. It's all about me. And every decision should be made for my purposes. Jesus lets that go. And lays it down.

For the benefit of others. To serve their interests. In fact at great cost. To himself. Isn't that the context in which Paul is writing here in Philippians?

[21 : 31] He's using Jesus as an example for the Philippians. Isn't he? Look back to verse 3 where we started reading. Here's what he's telling the Philippians. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or conceit.

But in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests. But also to the interests of others. How? Have this mind among yourselves.

Which is yours in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God. Let go of it. That's what gets Paul to talking about Jesus here. Isn't it?

He's saying. Here's your example. Remember the incarnation is not primarily. First and foremost. About Jesus being an example for us. That's not the focus.

But here clearly. It's at least partially that. Isn't it? That's what Paul is saying. He's calling the Philippians to think the way Jesus thinks. To approach life the way Jesus does.

[22 : 31] Where others are more significant than I am. All Paul's discussion about Jesus' sacrifice and service that we've been reading. Is to demonstrate the attitude toward others that we too are called to have.

Jesus had it. Yes. And you have this mind among yourselves. Which is yours in Christ Jesus. Not pridefully seeking our own position. Or own comfort.

But humbly considering over and over what benefits others. See when the king loosens his grip on glory. His followers follow suit.

In fact Paul implies if you're not focused on others and sacrificing for them. You will be naturally focused on serving yourself. That's our default setting isn't it?

And Jesus models a new one. A different one. Sacrificing. Laying down our lives for others. And you'll notice here Jesus does more than merely show us how.

[23 : 35] And just be an example. Look back at verse 5 briefly. Have this mind among yourselves. Which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Do live like this. But you only can do this in Christ. For you armchair theologians among us this morning.

This is one of those great verses that reminds us that the imitation of Christ. Must flow out of union with Christ. If you're not an armchair theologian and that meant nothing to you.

Totally fine. Just think this way. The power for living like Jesus comes from relationship with Jesus. I don't just do it on my own.

He doesn't just call us to have a new work ethic and a new priority in life. He also gives us a new heart. His spirit who empowers me to sacrifice where Jesus is calling me to sacrifice.

[24 : 43] He doesn't call us to something without empowering us to the same thing. That's why we need him. Where do you think that might be for you?

Where might he be calling you to sacrifice? Did you consider something earlier that you cling to tightly? Something tangible or intangible?

Your palm gets sweaty, gripping for so long. I was thinking about this this week. What I thought about for me was my time. Especially as the holidays are approaching and there's so much going on.

And my kids get only two weeks off of school. Doesn't happen very often, you know, in the midst of a busy time. And all of a sudden have two weeks where my kids are a lot more available.

And I just want to maximize all that time with them. To do all sorts of special things. To make memories together. And so I guard that time. I cling to it.

[25 : 45] I protect the calendar for those couple of weeks. How are we intentionally going to use every moment? And that can be a good thing. It can be a healthy thing. Some of us need to do that better.

Except sometimes when I do it, I think what I tend to do is to give my kids the impression that it's actually all about us. That family is the highest ideal that one could have.

So it's family for family's sake. It's just going to be about us. And so we just think about what would we do just us as a family. Family time might be in my sweaty palm around the Christmas season.

And God may be calling me to loosen my grip there. To sacrifice some of that comfort. It's a very comfortable place with all of us gathered warm and cozy around the fire.

And this picture perfect evening that I've got in my mind. How's this going to go for us? God may be calling me to sacrifice some of that comfort to move towards someone else into their life.

[26 : 55] Perhaps even bringing my family along with me. That we together would not just be about us, but would be thinking about serving others. About sharing the love of Jesus with someone else outside of our family even.

You know, that's actually what I want my kids to get a glimpse of. That's what I'm hoping they grow up realizing. Is that it's not just about us. But that we're actually to see Jesus love for us and have that impact us so that we love others.

Oh man, that would be a great thing if they got that impression out of Christmas. Not just family for family, but our family for God. For his mission, for his purposes in the world.

Perhaps our families could move out of our comfort zones. Could use some of our comfort and our position and our close relationship to consider someone lonely or hurting.

Consider them more significant than ourselves this Christmas season. Come to think of it, that actually, that sounds like Christmas.

[28 : 06] To consider others more significant than yourselves. Wouldn't that be a way to celebrate Christmas? Will we enter into the lives of others with that same intentional, sacrificial mindset that Jesus had?

Sometimes I don't know where to start with that. You know what I've found? A lot of times if I'll just ask the question, my kids actually know how that's going to look for us. A lot of times better than I do.

They got ideas all over the place. If I just take the time to stop and say, is there somebody y'all can think of that really could use love or thoughtfulness?

Or what could we do for somebody? They've usually got lots of ideas. But how are we being intentional with where God has called us and placed us to live like Jesus when he moved towards us?

If we are to think about others the way Jesus does and love others the way Jesus does, and Philippians says we are, we should expect it to cost us something.

[29 : 09] It may cost me leaving my comfort zone to share about Jesus with a co-worker. I may have to sacrifice status in the community to be seen serving some of the least of these.

It may cost me more money than I think I can afford or more time than I think I have to enter into the life of someone I know is struggling. But honestly, I've just been thinking it's going to be too messy and it's going to take too long.

And I'm not really there right now. What will it look like for you? I don't know exactly what it looks like for each of us individually.

But y'all, this is why we're here. Right? Isn't this why God called you to himself, put you here in Huntsville? This is why we're here.

Not so that we could be as comfortable as possible. It's just not his highest goal for us. But actually so that we could look at ways to give up our comfort in order to show others the sacrificial love of a Savior who has done that for them.

[30 : 18] That's why we're here. Jesus is calling us as a group. As his people. You're not on your own doing this. It can feel like that sometimes.

But he's called us to think, what would it look like for us to have this mind among ourselves? When he's writing to the Philippians. For us as a group to be a manifestation of this in our neighborhoods.

And in our city. And in our friend groups. That they start to experience from us the sacrificial love of a Savior who gives up glory.

For us to have that mind among ourselves. For us to have that mind among ourselves.

To think this way about our neighborhoods. To love this way in our city. Intentionally entering into.

[31 : 16] Proactively thinking, what could it look like for me? He's calling us to it. And as we are connected to him. The good news is. By faith he's empowering us.

To that as well. He's not leaving us on our own. He's called us to it. And he's given us his spirit. That connected to Jesus. By faith. This is the mind we have.

Remember no matter how much. We would sacrifice. He's given more. Way more. Than we have. Right? Far more than we could ever imagine giving up.

He's let go of the glories and comforts of heaven. He's loosened his grip on the riches of divine privilege. And having it be all about him.

And why? It may seem an obvious question. Why? Why did he let go of those things? So that he could cling tightly to you.

[32 : 19] And to me. He came for us. To cling to worn out, tattered, felt trees.

To hold on to us. It doesn't seem to make any sense, does it? All the stuff that he had to come after us? People who've picked up more dust and dirt from the difficulties of life than we can even keep track of.

Who feel perhaps worthless and not valuable to anyone. Not worthy of anybody's time or effort or attention. Have you ever felt like that? Kind of felt a little bit like one of these Christmas ornaments that you'd never let be on your Christmas tree.

Especially if guests were coming over. I don't want anybody to know. I don't want anybody to see. I'm not worth anybody giving that kind of attention to. And what does the creator of the universe.

The one who himself being God. Owned it all. Could have had anything in all of creation that he wanted. It was all his.

[33 : 27] And what did he say? That you're worthless? No. He said, I'm laying that aside. To come after and wrap my fist tightly around you.

Tattered and broken. And maybe not looking the way you'd want to. Or feeling the way that you think you're supposed to. And Jesus came for you. You're worth so much to him.

That's how precious you are to him. That he would decide of all the things in the world. To close his fist tightly around you. That's what's happening at Christmas. In that dirty manger.

In that little village. Is God himself. Is coming to grab you. Jesus says in John 10. I have given them eternal life.

And they will never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. He is clinging tightly to you. And he will not let go.

- [34 : 31] Because he treasures you. That's the comfort. And joy. Of the gospel. For us to soak.
In the sacrificial love. Of our savior. And it's the sacrificial love. That he shows. And pours
into our lives. That we then get to pour out.
To others. To give them a little taste of. As we sacrifice our comforts. And our privileges.
To move toward other. Tattered felt. Trees.
And cling tightly. To them. So they know how precious they are. To us yes. But. But to one
who would lay down. Much more than we could. Because he loves them.
And they can taste that in you. That's what this table reminds us of. It's a tangible picture
for us. Of a savior. Who would give up everything. Because of his great love.
- [35 : 31] For us. Jesus moving. Sacrificially. Toward us. At great cost. To himself. Just as he calls
us. To do. For others.
And he meets here. To commune with us. To strengthen us. To empower us. For what he
has called us. To.
Remember the way. Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 11. He says. I received from the Lord.
What I also delivered to you. That the Lord Jesus. On the night when he was betrayed.
Took bread. And when he had given thanks. He broke it. And said. This is my body. Which
is for you. Do this. In remembrance of me. And in the same way also.
He took the cup. After supper. Saying. This cup is the new covenant. In my blood. Do this
as often. As you drink it. In remembrance of me. For as often. As you eat this bread. And
drink the cup.
- [36 : 25] You proclaim the Lord's death. Until he comes. The word. Became flesh. And became
obedient. To the point of death.
Even death. On a cross. And we remember that. And celebrate that. Sacrifice here at this
table. It's his table. It's not Southwood's table.
It's not a Presbyterian table. This is the Lord's table. And if you know him. And have
trusted in his sacrifice. For you. Come. And eat.
And commune with him. And be strengthened. For what he has called you. To in this
world. If you don't. Know Jesus. If you've not. Professed your faith in him.
Joined yourself. To part of his body. The local church. Then I'd encourage you. Not to
come to this table. Don't come and eat bread. And juice. And do something.
- [37 : 20] When it doesn't mean anything. But I would encourage you. Instead to consider Jesus.
This Christmas season. There's going to be all sorts. Of Christmas stuff going on.
Theoretically.
At least the word. Is about Jesus. It's about the coming. Of the Christ. Would you
consider. Your need for him. Consider his love for you.
That he would love you. And value you enough. To give up everything. To have you be
his. Wouldn't you love to know. Love like that. For you. We'd love to share with you.
About that. So don't. Don't come to this table. This morning. Come and consider Jesus.
We'd love to have that conversation. Even to pray with you. If you'd like us to. This
morning. Let me pray.
And then we'll come to this table together. Jesus. We thank you. For your sacrificial love.
And the privilege we have.
- [38 : 14] Of not just thinking about it. But of now by your spirit. Meeting with you. Tasting of your
bread. Your body.
Wine. Your blood. It's given for us. Would you set these common elements aside. For a
sacred purpose. That they would be in our hearts.

Exactly what you intend. To be a source of strength. And empowering of us. To the things that you've called us to. We pray it in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. For more information. Visit us online. at southwood.org And we'll see you in the next and next question.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

[39 : 19] Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.