

When God Became a Man

- Philippians 2:1-11
- I heard Frank Turek say at Elon a few years ago that the greatest miracle ever done was the miracle of creation, because God made something out of nothing. Others have said that the greatest miracle of all time was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and certainly we would all agree that it is Christ's victory over death and the grave that gives us hope. But others cast their vote for the incarnation being the greatest miracle of all. Wayne Grudem wrote in, Systematic Theology: "It (the incarnation) is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible – far more amazing than the resurrection and even more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become a man and join Himself to a human nature forever so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe." We can disagree about which of the three events in history are the greatest miracle, but the incarnation is amazing and glorious and worthy of our study and attention. And saints, listen. I take issue with those Christians who refuse to acknowledge Christmas because of all the arguments they muster: Dec. 25 is not the actual day Jesus was born, there are pagan celebrations connected with Christmas, it's gotten too commercial, or any number of other reasons. We understand those arguments, but we also understand that the incarnation is a fact, a real event, and we celebrate that! It is the birth of the Messiah, the coming of our Savior that we celebrate on Christmas!
- I would like to spend two, maybe three weeks looking at this passage in Philippians that some say is the greatest doctrinal statement in the NT relative to the person of Christ. It is called the "kenosis" passage, the word there in verse 7: He "emptied Himself." I wish we could really grasp with our understanding how high He was and how low He came. But there's no way we can. It's like asking your dog to understand Shakespeare...when you're still working on trying to make him understand "no." Or, "be quiet." But there is much we can know, even with our limited, finite minds, and so I would like for us to explore this passage, to be doggedly determined, if you will, to know why it's here and what it means.
- Some believe this passage, especially verses 6-11, to be a hymn that was popular with the believers in that day, and Paul adapted it for his purposes. Which begs the question. What IS the purpose of the kenosis passage? Look at the verses that precede it, where Paul urges the church in Philippi (and us!) to "do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." Look out for others' interests, not just your own. Then, "have this mind among yourselves." Or literally, "Think this in you." Think what? Think this attitude that Christ had when He left heaven to come to earth in order to die on the cross. What attitude? What characteristic of the Christian life is Paul urging the church to embrace? HUMILITY! What does humility look like? We all know humility when we see it in someone else. And Paul describes it well in verses 3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition..." We know what it is. Paul is asking, even commanding the church to know what it is. He is telling us to humble ourselves. BUT it is interesting and important here that Paul does NOT teach us HOW to humble ourselves. Or at least, he doesn't give us a list of practical steps. Right? He doesn't say, "Do these seven things for three weeks, and then you will be humble." No. Instead, he teaches them theology. He looks at the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ as unparalleled humility. And that teaches us why and how to humble ourselves.

1. He is equal with God (vs. 6)

- He was God. And He is God. "Though He was in the form of God." That word, "form" is "morphe" in Greek, and it means, "essence, or nature;" it's who a person really is, not outward appearance. Paul tells us in Colossians, "For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." (Col. 2:9) John says in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then verse 2, "He was in the beginning with God." Who is the Word John refers to? Verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only son of the Father,

full of grace and truth.” The Word was with God. The Word was God. This is the cornerstone of our faith, the linchpin of our salvation, that Jesus Christ is God. That the God-man had to die for us, or we would still be in our sins. “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” (Heb. 2:9)

- This is why the incarnation is in the crosshairs of nearly every heresy that has ever come down the pike. The rejection of Jesus’ deity is the faulty foundation of nearly every cult. The Unitarian movement that started in the 16th century rejects the idea that Jesus is co-eternal with God the Father, but that Jesus was created by God. This was called Arianism, which came from Arius who lived in the 3rd century. He taught that Jesus was not equal with God because Jesus said to His disciples, “I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28) What did Jesus mean by that? That he was inferior to God the Father in essence? Right after Jesus said the father was greater, He said, “I do as the Father commanded me.” He was subject to the Father but that made Him no less God’s equal, as Paul clearly tells us here. The rejection of Jesus Christ’s deity is also the faulty foundation of the Mormon Church, one of the largest cults in the world. They teach that Jesus was the first spirit to be born in heaven, and Satan is his spirit brother. Each presented a plan to God to save the world, and God accepted Jesus’ plan. The rejection of Jesus’ deity is also the faulty foundation of the Jehovah’s Witness cult. They also believe that Jesus was created by God but is not God Himself. Arianism was followed by Nestorianism in the 4th century who taught that Jesus was actually two distinct people. There was the human Jesus and there was the divine Jesus, but both natures could not exist in the same person! As Alistair Begg quips, the Nestorians got their theological underwear all wadded trying to reason that one out from Scripture. It took the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century to finally sort it all out and put an end to the nonsense. This is just a portion of the ‘confession’ that was written by the council in 451: “...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person...” (You think they’re trying to make a point?)
- Why is this important? Because the incarnation of Christ is essential to our salvation. And because the understanding of what Jesus did by leaving glory and becoming a man is essential to our own humility. Jesus was equal with God. But look again at verse 6: He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” JB Phillips writes in his translation, “For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to the privileges as God’s equal.”
- Jesus was not afraid of stepping down. In fact, He did so with joy. Hebrews tells us to run the race “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...” (Heb. 12)

2. He emptied Himself (ESV)... made Himself of no reputation (NKJV) ...stripped Himself of every advantage (Phillips)

- Augustus Strong said, “Jesus Christ voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes.” Emphasis on “independent exercise.” We have to be careful here. Jesus did not empty Himself of His divine nature. He was fully God, even as a newborn. **He humbled Himself by addition not by subtraction.** Nothing was subtracted, but humanity was added. Which means He had to learn to walk. He had to learn to talk. Mary may have taught Him the difference between a ladle and a spoon, and Joseph may have taught him the difference between a sycamore and a fig tree. We need to understand what the incarnation meant: that Jesus, co-eternal with the Father, very God of very God, took on a second nature and became man. When the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus “upholds the universe by the word of His power,” (Heb. 1:3), that means that at the same time that Mary was cradling baby Jesus in her arms, Jesus was holding the universe in His. Is that hard to understand? Yes. Is it impossible? No, clearly not. To say that we cannot understand it is humility; to say that it is not possible, Grudem says, seems more like intellectual arrogance. Jesus’ attributes of deity were, for the most part, veiled. He condescended to live as a man.

- Addison Leach illustrated it this way. A father and son are playing ball together. The child is 3 yr. old, so the father throws the ball underhand, from 5-6 feet, not from 30 feet as hard as he can! He helps his little boy learn to cup his hands, and hold them together, and he gently encourages him. This could go on for hours. But all of a sudden, suppose the little boy drops the ball, and it rolls down the lawn and into the busy street. Acting impulsively, as 3 yr. olds are prone to do, he runs to get it. He is about the step into the street in front of a car when the father races down, using all of his energy and strength, not holding anything back, and at the last possible second, he grabs his son, pulls him back. Now the father has actually displayed two kinds of being. First, he has condescended to live on the boy's level, play ball at the boy's speed, act as he acts, for the purpose of fellowship with his son. Second, for the purpose of SAVING his son, he exerts everything he has to pull him out of danger.
- That's the way it was with Jesus on the earth. Most of the time people saw Jesus, they just saw a man. He walked like everybody else. No rocket boosters under His feet. He ate and drank with His disciples. He got tired. He felt pain. Jesus was known by those in Nazareth, the one-horse town where He grew up, as "the carpenter's son." There was no halo. No aura around Him. He didn't glow. He was human and divine at the same time but most of the time the divine nature was veiled. But every now and then, the shekinah glory of God was clearly seen; remember the Mount of Transfiguration? In fact, Judas had to identify Him to the soldiers with a kiss. Otherwise, they might have arrested Peter or Bartholomew. But he was not "just a man," despite what Mary Magdalene sings in "Jesus Christ Superstar."
- Remember when Jesus was asleep in the boat with His disciples as they crossed the Sea of Galilee? Why was He asleep? Well, we presume it was because He was tired. He was a man. Then a storm was unleashed on the disciples and they were afraid for their lives, to the point that they went and woke up Jesus and said, "Don't You even care that we are about to perish?" Jesus arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and they immediately died down. He was not "just a man." What is this? Tired yet omnipotent! Worn out but all-powerful at the same time! Here Jesus' human nature completely hid His omnipotence until that omnipotence broke forth with a sovereign Word from the Lord of heaven and earth! Oh no. He was not "just a man."
- I heard a story recently of three men who were asked what they wanted people to say about them in the funeral home when they were passing by their casket. The first man said he wanted them to say, "He was a good man who always did what he thought was right." The second man said he hoped people would say, "He never met a stranger and would help anyone who needed it." The third man nodded thoughtfully and the other two said, "How about you?" He said, "I hope when people see me in the casket, they'll say, 'He's moving!'"
- That's exactly what they said about Lazarus, but not until after Jesus showed up. Remember when He stood outside the tomb of Lazarus, his friend who had been dead for four days? He cried out, "Lazarus, come forth!" John writes simply, "The man who had died came out." And Jesus told them to take the grave clothes off of him. Those are just for dead people. Just a man? Hardly.
- Jesus was not just a man. He was God who humbled Himself to put on human flesh, taking the form of a servant, obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Have THIS mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.