The Incarnation of the Triune God
Scripture: Philippians 2:6-11
Code: 2003

I invite you to take your Bible and turn to Philippians, chapter 2 – Philippians, chapter 2. And I want to take as the text of our Christmas message verses 6 through 11 – Philippians 2:6 through 11. Now, before we read the text and specifically present what the Spirit of God has said, let me just set our thoughts in context. At Christmas, we are confronted again, and I'm sure you're aware of it, with the sometimes very difficult task of separating the reality of Christmas from the clutter that surrounds that reality. There is so much confusion that sometimes you feel like the real Christmas story is like a diamond lost in a haystack. It just seems impossible to find. Christmas has really become a hopeless muddle of confusion.

The humility and the poverty of the stable are somehow confused with the wealth and indulgence and selfishness of gift-giving. The quietness of Bethlehem is mingled with the din of shopping malls and freeway traffic. The soberness of the incarnation is somehow mixed with the drunkenness of this season. Blinking colored lights somehow have some connection to the star of Bethlehem. The room in the inn, so obscure, so dirty, with such meager fare, somehow embraces the thought of a warm house, a fireplace, and opulent feasting. Cheap plastic toys for little kids with which to play out their follies are mixed with the true value of the gifts given by wise men. Salesmen somehow get mixed up with shepherds. Angels are confused with flying reindeer, one of which even has a red nose.

The pain of childbirth is mixed with the parties. The filth of the stable is confounded with the whiteness of fresh snow. And then there's Mary, Joseph, Perry Como, and Bing Crosby. And so it goes. The great reality of Christmas, which is the glory of the Lord being revealed, is obscured by so much tinsel, and activity, and commercialism; and I think it's true that Santa Claus really has become the focus of Christmas for most people. And I've noted in the years that I've been ministering, that more and more each year, Santa Claus takes a dominant place. In fact, it's amazing, but I think some people have trouble confusing Santa Claus with Jesus – if you can imagine that.

One of the most incredible and blasphemous confusions of Christmas I ever read appeared in a recent issue of the Episcopal News: The Diocese of Los Angeles, written by a rector of St. Mark's Church, in Upland, California. He wrote this article. I think it might point up to you something of the confusion of Christmas. Listen. "There are few causes to which I am more passionately committed than that of Santa Claus. Santa Claus deserves not just any place in the church, but the highest place of honor, where he should be enthroned as the long-bearded, ancient of days, the divine and holy one whom we call God.

“Santa Claus is God the Son. ‘You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I’m telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town’ simply refers to God the Son slipping into the secrets of the heart as easily as he slips down the chimney of the house. Santa Claus is God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth, in whose hand is a pack bursting at its seams with the gifts of His creation. Santa Claus is God the Holy Spirit, who comes with the sound of gentle laughter, with a shape like a bowl full of jelly, to sow in the night the seeds of good humor. Santa Claus indeed deserves the exalted and enthroned place in the church, for he is God, Son, Father and Holy Spirit.

“So there he is: God the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. I’ve seen him in the toy store. I’ve seen him in his car on the freeway. And when I saw him with his crazy beard and his baggy red suit, I saw more than the seasonal merchant of cheap plastic toys. I saw no less than the triune God,” end quote. Unbelievable. Santa Claus is the incarnation? What confusion; and from the clergy, no less. How far can you miss the real Christmas, huh? So far that you believe Santa Claus is the incarnation of the triune God? What confusion. Now, as we face the reality of Christmas, I want us to see the true story, and this time not from the perspective of Bethlehem, or Joseph, or Mary, or shepherds, or innkeepers, or wise men, or Herod, or Old Testament prophets.

But I want us to see the Christmas story from the viewpoint of the Holy Spirit of God, as revealed to the apostle Paul. And I believe it gives us the real Christmas story. The scenery isn’t there. Bethlehem isn’t the issue. Shepherds, and wise men, and Joseph, and Mary, and mangers, and oxen, they don’t appear in this perspective. But what is here is the reality of the incarnation. This is one of the greatest texts in all the Bible. It is, perhaps, the most profound statement of the Christmas story anywhere in the Word of God. Paul Rees said, “The passage is oceanic, for the fathoms are countless, and the tides are measureless. In it, we enter the depths.” F.B. Meyer said, “It is almost unapproachable in its unexampled majesty.”

And, believe me, it’s a greater challenge than I can handle to deal with its fullness, but if I can just scratch its surface, that should be infinitely satisfying for the time. Look with me at verses 6 through 11. And in these verses, we will see five steps in the Christmas story, five features as God enters the world, five great aspects to the incarnation. First of all, number one, the Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position. He abandoned a sovereign position. Verse 6, let’s begin: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Now, we’ll stop right there.

We find in the verse 6 particularly, and then just at the beginning of verse 7, that the Lord when He came into the world abandoned a sovereign position. Now, first of all, the Holy Spirit establishes that sovereign position. Look at verse 6. It begins with the relative pronoun “who,” and that refers back to Christ Jesus in verse 5. “Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God.” Christ Jesus, then, is the theme of this passage, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what does it say about Him? The first phrase: “being in

the form of God." Now listen to me – this is without question the heart and soul of the Christian faith. The affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ is the sine qua non of all that we believe. That is why it is always under attack. Christ is in the form of God. It is the deity of Jesus Christ that is the substantive affirmation of the Christian faith.

Now, let's see what this phrase means. The word "being" is very important. The word "being" denotes that which a person is in his very essence – that which a person is in his nature. In other words, that which is true of a person that cannot be altered, it cannot be changed. That which someone possesses inalienably and unchangeably that cannot be removed. It refers to the innate, changeless, unalterable character and nature of a person. For example, men may look different, but they're all men – that's their nature. They all have the basic same elements of humanness, the functioning of breathing, and the heart, organs, mind, will, thought, emotion. These are the elements of humanness.

You can change his clothes. You can do things to the physical form. But you never change the humanness. That is the being of man. And that is the meaning of this term. And it says of Christ that He is in the being of God. He is, then, unalterably and unchangeably, God in His essence, in His essential being. In fact, in John 8:58, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." And He used the "I am" because He lives as an eternally present God. He is eternally in the "I am" mode, in the present mode. He is always and will always be. He isn't was and will be, He is simply "I am." That is the basis of our faith. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word" – what – "was God."

Hebrews 1, "He has spoken in these last days by His Son, who is the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person." First Timothy 3:16, "Great is the mystery of godliness" – what is it – "that God was manifest in the flesh." That is the substance of our faith: that Jesus Christ is God. Colossians 1:15, "He is the image of the invisible God." So the word being, then, has to do with His essential nature. Jesus Christ, then, has His being – now mark it again – in the form of God. Now what do we mean by "form?" The English can't really help us with this Greek word. We have to go back and talk about the Greek term for a moment.

It is not "form" in the sense that we think of a material shape or a resemblance. It is completely different than that. The word in the Greek is the word morph, and morph has to do with a deep, inner, essential, abiding nature of something. It is not the external. That is the word schma. Schma means the outward, the passing, the changing, the fleeting, the external. And by the way, look at verse 8; schma is used in verse 8. "He was found in fashion as a man." We'll talk about that in a moment. But "fashion" is the external, the changing. "Form" is morph, the unchanging, the internal.

For example, if you traced the use of the term morph in its various forms, you will find that that is exactly where the emphasis lies. There are places where they seem to be used in an overlapping sense, but the specific uses of morph in very important texts of the New Testament lead us to

conclude that it means the inner nature. For example, in Romans 8:29, “Whom He foreknew, them He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son.” And it’s morph. It is a new nature, an inner change. The inside of man is conformed to the image of His Son. It’s talking about our nature. Second Corinthians 3:18, it says, “As we look on the glory of the Lord we are transformed into His image.”

Again, it’s morph. We are changed on the inside, an abiding change that affects our inner nature. Galatians 4:19, Paul says, “My little children, I have birth pains until Christ be morph in you,” until, literally, He be formed in you. He isn’t talking about trappings. He’s not talking about externals, but that the image of Christ would be manifest in the inner nature of man. In Philippians 3:10, he uses it again; he says, “That I may gain Christ and become conformed unto His death.” So he’s talking about a deep inner representation of the image of God.

On the other hand, the word schma, from which we get scheme, is something to do with a passing, fleeting external. For example, First Corinthians 7:31 uses schma this way: “The fashion of the world passes away.” Second Corinthians 11:14: “Satan fashions himself as an angel of light.” He isn’t really, but he puts on that facade. First Peter 1:14 says, “As a Christian, do not fashion yourselves according to your former lust.” In other words, you have a new nature, you are a new creation, don’t put on the garments of the old life. You find both of these words brought together in Romans 12:2: “Stop being fashioned according to this world, but be transformed in your inner man through the renewing of your mind.”

So one is deeply related to the internal, and one is to the external. And the one of the internal is used here. It is being in the morph of God. That is, being substantively and essentially, in His deepest inner man and nature, in the form of God. He is God. Don’t let anyone deny that. That is the basic affirmation of the Christian faith. Consequently, look at the end of verse 6: “He did not think it was something to be grasped to be equal with God.” Now what does that mean? Listen to this. Satan was a created angel. Satan was created by God, he was inferior to God, he was less than God. But in Isaiah 14, he said, “I will, I will, I will, I will, I will,” five times, and the substance of what he was saying was “I will be like” – whom – “God.”

Satan thought it something to be grasped at to be equal with God. He thought it something to seize, something to grasp at. Jesus didn’t. Why? He was already equal to God. There was nothing for Him to seek. There was nothing for Him to grasp. He is in contradistinction to Satan. Second way to approach it, the verb that is used there means to clutch, or to snatch, or to grasp tightly. And it can also be interpreted this way: “He thought it not something to cling to” – not so much that He didn’t have it and He snatched it, but that He had it and He might lose it, so He clutched it. But Jesus didn’t hang onto this thing fearing He would lose it. Why? Because He was essentially God, and could never cease being God.

So it wasn't something He had to snatch to get, and it wasn't something He had to hang onto to keep, you see? It is a classic statement affirming that Jesus is God in His inner nature; so much so that He didn't seek it, and so much so that He never feared He'd lose it. He's God. That is the great heart and soul of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then this, verse 7: "But He" – the Authorized said – "made Himself of no reputation." The Greek says this: "He emptied Himself," keno, from which we get the theological term "the kenosis," the self-emptying. He emptied Himself. The verb means to pour out everything, until it's all gone. He poured out Himself. He emptied Himself. He divested Himself. He rendered up.

Now, what is this saying? Well, what I pointed out in the very first statement I made, as you begin to move through the steps of the incarnation, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position. The sovereign position is affirmed in verse 6, and the abandoning of it is in verse 7. Now, notice that I did not say He abandoned His deity. He did not give up His deity. He did not give up His divine attributes. He abandoned the position. He could never give those things up; they were His essential being, and if He ceased being God, He would be no one. And God could not cease anyway, for He's eternal. Now, what, then, did He give up? What did He pour out? What did He empty out?

Some people have tried to say He emptied out His deity. That's ludicrous, because then He would cease to exist. That's who He was; He could never lose that. Some writers put it, I think, this way: He stripped Himself of His privilege. He gave up the insignias of His majesty, and so forth. But let me put it to you very simply. I can tell you in the New Testament what He gave up, because the New Testament tells us exactly what He gave up.

First of all, He gave up His glory. He gave up the manifestation of His glory. He gave up the radiance of His eternal effulgence and brightness, the full manifestation of all of His attributes in glory. That's why in John 17:5 He says, "And now, Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." Give Me back the glory which I once had, which means at that point He didn't have it. He veiled His glory in human flesh. He set aside the full expression of His glory.

Secondly, He gave up His honor. He gave up His honor. Isaiah 53 says He was despised, He was rejected. The New Testament tells us He was hated, He was mocked, He was spit on. His beard was plucked. He was defamed. He was dishonored. He was discredited. He was accused. He was murdered. He gave up His honor, clearly. And the prophet Isaiah said in His despising and rejecting, there was no beauty in Him that men should desire Him. Thirdly, He gave up His riches. Second Corinthians 8:9 says, "He who was rich for our sakes became" – what – "poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich."

Fourthly, He gave up His favorable relation to the Father. And He did that only in a moment of time, when He died on the cross and said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But He lived

with the anxiety of coming to that point through all His life.

He also gave up His independent exercise of authority. He said, “I will do only that which the Father shows Me. My meat is to do the Father’s will. What the Father says I will do. What I see the Father I will do.” In other words, He gave up His independent exercise of divine authority. He gave up His very special relationship to God. He gave up His riches. He gave up His honor. He gave up His glory. He emptied all of those things out, and yet He continued to be God. It wasn’t that He lost any of His divine attributes, it is that He chose not to use them; that He gave up the prerogative, or the privilege, of using them. Was He still God? Yes, that’s who He was.

It’s a deep mystery, people, by the way, and I can’t fathom it all. John Milton wrote, “That glorious form, that light insufferable, He laid aside, and here with us to be, forsook the courts of everlasting day, and chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.” He was God, but He gave up all His privileges. Boy, does that say volumes about His character? Does that say volumes about His love? A reporter was interviewing a successful job placement counselor who had put people in positions and they had succeeded so well. He had such a high rate of success that the reporter said, “What’s your secret? How do you evaluate people? How can you really find out what a person is like?”

He said this: “If you want to know what a person is like, don’t give him responsibilities. Give him privileges. You give him responsibilities and most everyone will fulfill responsibilities if you intimidate them enough or pay them enough. But if you want to find out the real character of a person, give him a privilege. A person with real character, and real selflessness, and real leadership will use his privileges to help others and to build the organization. A lesser man will use his privileges only to promote himself.” Jesus had all the privileges of glory, and He had no obligation to us. He was equal with God. And yet it says so much about His character that He chose to use His privileges to build the Father’s Kingdom and to reach lost sinners. So like a king who takes off his robes of majesty and puts on the garment of a beggar, the Son of God abandoned a sovereign position.

Second point: He accepted a servant’s place. He accepted a servant’s place. Back to verse 7: “He took upon Him the form of a servant.” When He became a man, He didn’t become a king as a man, or a great ruler, or great leader, or great master, He became a servant. The moment that He divested Himself of His robes of majesty, He donned the servant’s apron. This is exactly as the Old Testament prophet had said, Isaiah 52, verse 13, said He would be a servant. Hebrews 10, “I’m come to do Thy will, O Father.” And notice again in verse 7 that He wasn’t just acting like a servant. He wasn’t just pretending to be a servant. He wasn’t just playing the part of a servant. He really became a servant.

Verse 7, “And being” – look at this – in the form” or “having taken upon Him the form” – and there’s the word morph – “He took on Him the inner essential nature of a servant.” He became a real servant, a true servant, a genuine servant. Luke 22:27: “I am in the midst of you as one who serves,” He said. Mark 10:45: “The Son of Man is come not to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom.”

John 13, the disciples had dirty feet, and He put on a towel and He washed their feet. And then He said the servant is not greater than His lord. We see Him in service all the time. And the ultimate act of service is when He died on a cross to save sinners. He served His Father. His Father invited Him to come into the world as a servant to work out the plan of redemption, and He willingly became that servant. So truly, He abandoned the sovereign position and accepted a servant's place.

Thirdly, He approached a sinful people. He approached a sinful people. In His perfection, He was willing to be a servant to the Father. In His perfect harmony with the Father, He was willing to be a servant. That service meant that He had to approach a sinful people. He had to enter this sin-cursed planet. He had to render His service here on this earth. He couldn't do it from outer space. He couldn't do it from the edge of heaven. He had to come into this world, and He had to touch sinful man at his own level, so that abandoning a sovereign position and adopting or accepting a servant's place meant approaching a sinful people. Look again at verse 7. "He was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man." That was the only way it could be done. He had to become a man.

By the way, it says in the Authorized, "was made in the likeness of men." The word "was made" is probably not the best translation. It is a participle of the verb ginomai, genomenos, which means "becoming." He was becoming in the likeness of men. And the idea there is not that He was created then, but that He always was God, but He became a man. He preexisted as eternally as God is eternal. He wasn't made then. He was then becoming a man. He had always been in existence. So the proper use of that verb indicates a change, becoming something, and it is saying that Jesus, who always was in the form of God, was becoming in the likeness of men. And it was a process; He was born, and He grew in wisdom and stature. He was becoming in the likeness of men.

By the way, the word "likeness" is so important. The first part of the word is the word homo, which means "the same," homogeneous, something that is the same. And what it's saying is He was becoming the same as men. He was in every sense in the sameness as men. He was a genuine man. He had the essential attributes of humanness. He wasn't just God in a shell; He was fully man, in all parts and dimensions, a genuine man with real humanity. He had everything that all men have except for one thing – what was it? Sin. But that doesn't mean He wasn't a man. Adam was a man before he was a sinner. And you and I will be glorified men throughout all eternity when our sin is put behind us. And there are times in our lives when we're not sinning.

So to be a man does not necessarily mean you must sin. And Christ did not. The Bible is clear: He was without sin, but He was no less a man. In fact, if I may be so bold to suggest, He was all that a man could be that we could never know a man to be because of His sinlessness. So He was a genuine man. He was fully man in the essence of His humanity, at the deepest point. He was man. But go to verse 8. He also was found in the fashion of a man. Not only was He a genuine man, and deeply and truly in His nature all that a man is, but He also took on the outward form of a man. And

here’s the word schma, the fashion of man. He didn’t come into the first century with a twentieth century outfit talking a twentieth century language. He didn’t drop like some visitor from outer space.

He was born of a Jewish mother. He lived in a little village of Nazareth. He ate the way they ate. He talked the language they talked. He transported Himself the way they did. He wore the clothes they wore, took care of Himself the way they took care of themselves. He ate what they ate. He drank what they drank. In other words, He took on the scheme of their life, the customs of their culture. So by personal experience, He adapted to the outer manifestation of the time in which He lived. He was man at the deepest part of His nature. And He adapted to man in that climate, and that culture, and that time, and experienced all of their experiences, fully God, fully man, the mystery of the incarnation, and sinless all the while.

Don’t think of Jesus as less than fully human. He was fully human. Did people come into this world through the natural process of birth, through the womb of a mother? So did He. Had others been wrapped in swaddling clothes? So was He. Had others grown up? So did He. Did others have brothers and sisters? He did. Did others learn a trade and work? So did He. Were other men at times hungry, and thirsty, and weary, and asleep? So was He. Were others grieved and angry? So was He. Did others weep? So did He. Did others rejoice? So did He. Were others destined to die? So did He. Did others suffer pain? So did He. Were others loved and hated? So was He. He was a man, in the form and the fashion.

I think it’s the Christmas carol “Away in a Manger” that says, “The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.” You mean to tell me, that because He was God, He didn’t cry? All babies cry. It isn’t necessarily a sign of sin. He cried when He was a man, why can’t He cry when He’s a baby? “Hast thou been hungry, child of mine? I, too, have needed bread. For forty days I tasted not, till by the angels fed. Hast thou been thirsty? On the cross I suffered thirst for thee. I’ve promised to supply thy need, my child, come to Me. When thou art sad and tears fall fast, My heart goes out to thee, for I wept o’er Jerusalem, the place so dear to Me. And when I came to Lazarus’ tomb, I wept. My heart was sore. I’ll comfort thee when thou dost weep, till sorrows are all o’er.” Sure He wept. He was human, in all the fullness of humanness.

So He abandoned the sovereign position. He took a servant’s place. He approached a sinful people. He became one of us. Paul Harvey tells a very beautiful story that illustrates this truth. It was Christmas eve in the Midwest. There was a man who had been in a family where his wife and his children were Christians, but he was not, and he rejected it. He sat home that Christmas eve in front of the fire. It was cold out and the snow was blowing. His wife and the little children had gone to the chapel in the nearby village for a Christmas eve service to honor the Christ they loved. He sat by the fire reading the paper. All of a sudden, he heard a loud and repeated thumping.

He thought someone was banging on the door. He went to the door and opened it, but found no one was there. By the time he got settled back into his chair, he heard it again, and again. And he was bewildered as to what was causing it, until he realized that something seemed to be smashing against the window. And so he went to the drapes and he pulled the drapes aside, and to his amazement, a flock of birds was flying into the window. A snowstorm, you see, had blown in, and the birds had been caught away from their shelter, and they couldn't find their way back. They couldn't fight the wind. They saw the lighted window, and the warmth of the light had attracted them, and they were literally flying into the glass, trying to get to the light to get warm. They would freeze to death, you see, if they didn't find some shelter.

Well, the man who had refused to go with his family to the Christmas Eve service because he had no interest in the Christ of Christmas was all of a sudden very compassionate for these poor birds. And so he wondered how he could help them, and so he opened the door, and went out in the cold, and tried to chase them away, so that they wouldn't kill themselves against the window. And then he ran to the barn, and he threw the doors open, and he whistled, and he shooed them, and did everything he could to get them to fly to the barn – they wouldn't do it. He even went so far as to take some corn and some bread, and make a big trail from the window to the barn, and they wouldn't follow it.

In frustration, he said to himself, "If I could just communicate with them. If I could just tell them that I don't want to hurt them, that there's warmth, and there's shelter, and that they need to stop beating themselves to death against the glass. But I'm a man and they're birds, and we don't speak the same language. Oh, if I could just become a bird, I think I could tell them." And then it hit him. And in that moment, said Paul Harvey, the whole meaning of Christmas dawned on that man. Mankind had been beating itself to death against the barrier that kept him from the warmth of God's love, until somebody became a man and told us the way. That's the Christmas story. He who was fully God did not cling to His privileges, but laid them aside, became a servant, and approached a sinful people.

Fourthly, having abandoned the sovereign position, having accepted a servant's place, having approached a sinful people, He then adopted a selfless posture – He adopted a selfless posture. Verse 8: "He humbled Himself." Oh, people, what a statement – what a statement. Do you ever think about the humility of Christ? I mean I see Him, and there He is as a little boy or a young man, and He's helping Joseph make a yoke in the carpenter shop, to put on some oxen that He had created. I mean He's washing the feet of twelve disciples, and He it was who designed their brains. He's hungry, and it was He who created the universe. The place of humility; He adopted a selfless posture – utterly selfless.

For us He did this, people. Humility is the theme of Christmas – humility. Filthy stable. Our family was in one this summer in the bottom of a barn, ankle deep in the mire and the filth, where never the light of day or the sun shone, foul stench that nauseated you, almost gagged you – humiliation. St. Augustine wrote so beautifully of His humility, so beautifully. "The word of the Father," he said, "by

whom all time was created, was made flesh and born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one of those days for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of the ages. Born of an earthly mother, He entered on the course of the years on that very day.

The maker of man became man, that He, ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast, that He, the bread, might be hungry, that He, the fountain, might thirst, that He, the light, might sleep, that He, the way, might be wearied in the journey, that He, the truth, might be accused by false witnesses, that He, the judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge, that He, justice itself, might be condemned by the unjust, that He, discipline personified, might be scourged with a whip, that He, the foundation, might be suspended on a cross, that He, courage incarnate, might be weak, and He, security itself, might be wounded, and He, life itself, might die." Humility.

And how humble? Look back at verse 8. "He humbled Himself." How far did it go? Well, certainly He became mortal, but it went beyond that. He also became obedient unto death. You see, it was an act of obedience. He learned obedience, Hebrews 5:8 and 9, by death. The greatest act of obedience to the Father was in dying; that was God's will. And even in the garden when He said, "O Father, let this cup pass from Me," the humanness was crying out against dying, the deity was crying out against sin-bearing and yet He said, "Not My will, but Thine be done." He was obedient to death. He didn't just become mortal, He died. That's the worst that man could ever, ever endure – all the way to the grave. And He didn't just die, either. Look at the end of verse 8, "Even the death of the cross."

It's one thing to die; it's infinitely beyond that to die the death of the cross. The ancient writers used to say that to die on a cross is to die a thousand times before you take your last breath. The pain is excruciating, unimaginable. The suffocation of the organs when the body is suspended by four great wounds is more than you can believe. The pain, the fiery pain, pulsing through the body is more than we can conceive. It was a painful death, and it was a shameful death. It was reserved for the vilest and most wicked of criminals. And you hung suspended in space, naked before the gaping, gazing, mocking throng. It was a cursed death. God Himself had said, "He that hangs on a tree is cursed." It was a lonely death. There was no companionship; even God was gone.

And I wonder so often as I hear the words "Still, O soul, the sign of wonder of all the ages see; Christ thy God, the Lord of glory is on the cross for thee." Incomprehensible humility. But what's so marvelous is that even in His dying, even in His dying, even in such abject depth of human suffering, He still wielded the power of God to redeem the human race. In His dying He could do that. There was a battle fought long ago. The story came back to the king of one soldier who had a sword, who had single-handedly destroyed the enemy. And the king said to one of his soldiers, "Bring me that sword. I want to see such a sword that can do such damage."

The soldier got the sword and brought it in. Gave it to his majesty and he looked it over and he said, “Take it back. This is but an ordinary sword.” The soldier said, “Your majesty, you should see the arm that wields it.” You look at Jesus Christ and you see His humanness. You say, “But how could a man redeem the human race?” “This is but an ordinary sword.” “Ah – but what you should see is the arm of deity that wielded that humanness; that even in death, he redeemed the human race; great, great truth. So what do we see then? What is the Christmas story? The Lord Jesus Christ abandoned a sovereign position, accepted a servant’s place, approached a sinful people, adopted a selfless posture. That’s the Christmas story. But there’s one more thought.

Fifthly, He ascended a supreme prince – He ascended a supreme prince. What was God’s reaction to this? And what should be ours? God’s reaction, first, in verse 9: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name” – or a title, or a position, or a rank – “that is above every other name” – or title, position, or rank.” God lifted Him up; and, people, listen to me: that is a great classical spiritual truth. Jesus said it Himself, in Luke 14:11, “He that humbleth himself shall be” – what – “exalted.” And that is the spiritual truth that we must learn. When we humble ourselves, God will lift us up and exalt us. And that’s exactly what happened. He humbled Himself and He was exalted. He then becomes the supreme illustration of this Kingdom principle: you sink to the depths of selfless, sacrificial humiliation, and God will lift you to the heights of glory.

We see that in the Beatitudes. We see that all throughout the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Humility, then exaltation. Humility, then exaltation. Jesus in His baptism is humbled. He’s baptized by John. And in humility, He identifies with the sins of His nation. But in exaltation, the voice of God bursts out of heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” We see Him in the temptation. He’s humbled, 40 days without eating. He’s being buffeted by Satan. He’s fasting in repentance, again identifying the sins of the nation. In humility, He trusts the Father to take care of Him, and never uses His power to meet His own needs. And then in glorious exaltation, when the time is done, the Father dispatches the angels, who come and feed Him.

In humility, He publicly proclaimed to His disciples that He was going to die. And a moment later He’s in a mountain with them, and He pulls His flesh back and they see His glory. We see Him on the cross in humility, and then He bursts from the grave in exaltation. That’s the pattern. Humility, then glorification. God exalted Him. That was God’s reaction. God exalted Him, and God gave Him a name above every name. Why? Verse 10: in order “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” – every knee – now we come to us, and to all the other creatures. Every knee to bow. Every knee in heaven – who would that be? That would be the holy angels, and the redeemed saints who have already gone to heaven. Everyone in earth – that would be all the living. And under the earth – the demons, and Satan, and all that host.

All the creatures in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, all of them are to bow to that exalted name. “He is,” says Ephesians 1, “far above all principalities and powers, far above all other names” – given

a supreme place, the prince of God. Notice that He's given a name above every name. You say, "What is that name?" Very clear, in verse 10: the name of Jesus, that all that is embodied in that name, all that is embodied in who He is, He is unequalled, the Savior and the Lord of the world and the universe. And at that name every knee should bow. And you know something? Every knee will bow. That's right. Every knee will bow. If not in adoration, in judgment, right? If not in worship, in condemnation. Every knee will bow – even Satan will be cast into the pit forever. He'll bow the knee to the authority of Christ.

But look at verse 11, and bring it to personal response. Verse 10 encompasses the broad picture: "every knee should bow." Verse 11 comes down to the individual: "every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Every living thing, every living creature in this world will confess Jesus Christ as Lord. The demons and the damned, the redeemed, the holy angels, all will bow, all will confess, sooner or later. The issue is when. If you wait until the judgment, it's too late. But if now you confess Jesus as Lord, you enter into His Kingdom, His salvation. Romans 10:9 and 10 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, believe in thine heart God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be" – what – "saved." This is the message of the gospel.

Jesus Christ is Lord. That's what we're saying. He is God. He is in the form of God. He is God of very God, with all the attributes of God, come into the world with all the fullness of humanness. He became the servant. He humbled Himself. He died, even dying on a cross; and in the midst of that death, purchasing our salvation. God approved, and God lifted Him back up and exalted Him, and then God calls to all the created universe, and says, "Bow the knee and confess His Lordship." And if you won't now, you will someday – but then it will be in judgment and condemnation. Now or later – the choice is yours. You can bow the knee now in adoration and love. You can confess Him as Lord now, and enter into the joy of salvation forever.

Or you can resist and say "no," and someday you'll bow the knee because you'll be forced and you have no choice, and you'll be condemned. Our prayer is that you'll confess Jesus as Lord. What greater Christmas gift than that? And to receive eternal life. Why be a fool? What kind of fool would reject that? Incomprehensible. But is there a message for Christians here? Most of us are Christians. Is there a message for us? For sure. You want to know something? This passage was written for Christians. That's right. The passage was not written for unbelievers. It was written for Christians. How do you know that? Because this whole passage is just an illustration of another principle. Go back to verse 5. The whole passage simply illustrates another principle.

And what is the principle? Verse 3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Don't look on your own things, but on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being" – and then you go into the passage. What is Paul saying? Be humble. Be selfless. Be lowly. And if you need an illustration, then let this mind be in you which was in Christ, who was something, and became nothing that God

might make Him something again. He is a living illustration to the believer. If you will humble yourself, God will exalt you.

You know, people often ask around Christmas time, I guess, “What is the Lord trying to tell me? What is the point of Christmas?” I think the point of Christmas is right here. Christmas, there’s no better time in the year than to teach us the illustration of the lesson of humility. The character of Christ, He was unselfish. He was humble. He was condescending. And Paul is challenging the church to that perspective; an attitude of a willingness to suffer, to be humiliated, to be selfless, to be sacrificing, so that God can lift us up. And the thing we need to learn, people, is not to always be asserting ourselves, defending ourselves, pushing ourselves up, but to be humble and selfless. That is the message of Christmas to us.

Listen to the words of Paul Rees: “For us Christians,” says Paul, “there is no place where the principle of effacing self in behalf of others appears so impressively as it does in Jesus Christ. He is God, giving Himself away yet remaining God. He is God, putting off a sovereign’s vesture for a beggar’s rags. He is God, rising from His bench where He sits as judge and going to the gallows for the criminal. He is God, impoverishing Himself, beggaring Himself, exposing Himself to evil, spite, and spittle, never sparing Himself, until He has made the rude cross on Jerusalem’s hill the sign and the sum of His utter self- giving.” Great statement.

And what is he saying to us? “Let this mind be in you.” That is the message. Be humble this Christmas. Be selfless. Reach out to somebody else in need. Jesus did. Benjamin Warfield, the great theologian, said this: “We see Him among the thousands of Galilee, anointed of God with the Holy Spirit and power, going about doing good, with no pride of birth, though He was a King; with no pride of intellect, though omniscience dwelt within Him; with no pride of power, though all power in heaven and earth was in His hand; no pride of station, though the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily; no pride of superior goodness, but in lowliness of mind, esteeming everyone better than Himself, He healed the sick.

“He cast out the devils. He fed the hungry. And everywhere He broke to men the bread of life, though He Himself went without. We see Him everywhere offering to men His life for the salvation of their souls. And when at last the forces of evil gathered thick around Him, walking alike, without display and without dismay, the path of suffering appointed for Him, and giving His life at Calvary, that through His death the world might live.” Selfless – selfless. That’s the message for us, the message of humility. Let’s pray.

Teach us, Father, to be selfless. Wherever men suffer, may we be there to comfort. Wherever men struggle, may we be there to help. Wherever men fall, may we be there to lift them up. Wherever men succeed, may we be there to rejoice. Teach us that we cannot be self-consciously self-forgetful. We cannot be selfishly oriented. Teach us to walk humbly as Christ walked; to walk the path of self-

sacrifice is to walk the path of glory. May we learn that; and oh, Father, too, may those who don't know the Lord see in His humiliation the abounding love and be drawn to Him. We praise You, Lord, for the gift of Your Son.

We echo the words of the poet who said, "Lo, in resurrection glory, Thou art throned in heaven above, where Thou dwellest in the fullness of the Father's changeless love. Love bestowed on Thee unmeasured, ere the heavens were begun. Love of God the everlasting to His everlasting Son. Now to ages of the ages, crowned with honor Thou shalt be. All the heavenly hosts' unceasing glory might ascribe to Thee. Fadeless this, Thy royal splendor, purchased by Thy precious blood, Thine the praise of every creature, holy Son and Christ of God." Our praise we offer to You. Amen.

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