

## "Learning from the Incarnation"

*Philippians 2:1-11*

We are now officially into Advent and December so Christmas will soon be here. It's a great time of year of buying presents, eating special foods, and looking forward to being with family and friends. And it's fun and it's all good – but, do we learn anything from Christmas? Do we understand why Jesus came? Are we as children of God learn what the Incarnation (Jesus becoming human) means to us?

'Well of course we understand Christmas' you will say. Christmas is about when God became a man, born of a virgin named Mary and her engaged husband to be Joseph, who came to the world to save us from our sins. That's correct, but when we talk about Jesus saving us from our sins, do we only think of the after-we-die-we-go-to-heaven part of being saved from our sins? Did Jesus come to earth only to save us from the **penalty** of sin at the end of this life or did Jesus also come to save us from the **power** of sin in our day-to-day life? Does Jesus becoming one of us change how we live now? This is what we want to learn from Jesus as we read the passages about why He became one of us.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he was concerned about a number of things. When he wrote Philippians, he was under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier 24-7. Paul was obviously concerned about his own situation and pleaded with the church in Philippi to pray for his release. Actually, he asked them to pray for his eternal release (death which meant being in Jesus' presence) or freedom so he can continue to advance the gospel (1:13). He preferred to hang around because his main concern was for the believers in Philippi to remain faithful to God in spite of their persecution for the gospel.

In 1:27 he exhorts them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel and to stand firm in one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel without being afraid of those who oppose them. Suffering can possibly break up a church so Paul was concerned that the Philippians stay united in the face of persecution. Later on in the letter Paul pleads with them to stay united in the face of a different kind of problem – division in the church. Two women in the church named Euodia and Synteché had a serious disagreement and were hurting the church family and hindering the work of the gospel. So Paul pleaded for unity there as well so that the work of the gospel would continue.

How does Paul help these believers to stay united in Christ with external opposition and internal division? He takes them back to Bethlehem and reminds them why Jesus came. Yes Jesus came to save us from our sins and so we must repent of our sins and ask forgiveness from Him in order to have eternal life. But that's the beginning. Now we must live **for** Christ. Jesus also took on flesh to model for us what a saved life should look like; a life dedicated to God. And we live in community so we must live united for the gospel if we want the world to see how Jesus can change their life. We can learn how unity happens from Jesus' incarnation in at least 3 ways from this passage.

What we can learn from the incarnation from Phil 2:1-11,

**A Christ-like Life is About Exalting God not Self**  
**(2:5-6; 1-2)**

Paul uses Jesus' example and attitude (vv.5-11) as the motivator for our behaviour in vv.1-4. So we will approach it from this perspective. Paul commands us to have 'the same attitude' as Jesus in vv.5-6. What kind of attitude did Jesus have?

The revised NIV has,

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

Instead of the familiar,

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

They are trying to emphasize the word "your" or literally "yourselves" because it is plural. The whole letter is about unity; the church working together. How can we individually live a Christ exalting life so we can collectively exalt God more than ourselves? So, Paul says have the same attitude Jesus has in His relationship with God and people. Which is

### ***Jesus refused to live an entitled life (vv.5-6)***

*"Who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"*

This verse very clearly states Jesus was, is and always will be divine. *He is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by his powerful Word"* (Heb. 1:3).

There was no rivalry for top position. Jesus was, is and always will be fully content to be the Son of God. No less God but not God the Father. Jesus did not want to 'grasp' take over the throne even though He is every bit as divine as God. As the Son of God, He is entitled to preferential treatment. Yet when He was arrested in Gethsemane and Peter went to defend Him by pulling out his sword Jesus said to him,

*<sup>52</sup> "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup> But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"*

He could have defended Himself. He was entitled but He set that aside because it was about Him accomplishing God's purpose on the cross for us. Jesus refused to live an entitled life so that we could have eternal life.

If this is to be our motivation how does Paul apply that to us? Back in vv.1-2 Paul reminded the church about the blessings of being saved.

*Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

The 4 "if" classes in the Greek here are rhetorical, meaning of course you have encouragement in Christ, of course you have comfort from His love, etc. If we are saved, if we are "in Christ", then we receive the encouragement from other believers as well as through the internal presence of Jesus' Spirit, the comforting reminders of His love for us repeated over and over in His

Word, the fellowship of His presence inside us every day, all the time; the tenderness and compassion we experience when we're hurting.

Our joy will increase when we make ourselves aware of these blessings in our life everyday. But we don't always make ourselves aware of these things, do we? We sometimes forget. Especially when we're focused on ourselves. When we are centered on ourselves, we forget God and the blessings of being in relationship to Him through Christ. Joy is an internal peace and comfort of knowing all these things in spite of external circumstances. So then

***We must refuse to live a self-centered life (vv.1-2)***

*"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."*

All of us have these benefits if we're in Christ. There is no need to try and exalt ourselves or feel we're entitled to any special treatment since we're all sinners in need of salvation, and because we all share in these amazing blessings and benefits together! We can't be more exalted than this!

Paul wants unity not uniformity. Uniformity is when everyone is pressured to act the same way and say the same things. Unity has one overarching focus that always keeps you on track. There can be diversity of people and ideas but the purpose is always the same.

The unifying goal for Paul was the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was telling the Philippians don't let opposition from outside detract you from the goal of sharing the gospel. And don't allow internal disagreements detract you from the sharing the gospel of Christ. He must be exalted, not you.

The flesh, our sin nature and Satan are always tempting us – with occasional successes unfortunately – to make us the focus and not God. A lot of problems will be avoided if we continually learn from Jesus, who of all people was entitled to special treatment, yet refused that so we would act the same way. An entitlement attitude is a selfish attitude. Jesus actually died for our selfishness so we would become God-centered.

The next motivating example Paul uses from Jesus' incarnation is from vv.7-9;

*<sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Paul wants us to understand through Jesus becoming a man that . . .

**A Christ-like Life Makes Sacrifices for Other's Needs**  
**(2:7-8, 3-4)**

What did humanity need? Forgiveness of sins. How do they get that? Through a perfect human sacrifice. But there are no perfect humans. That's why Jesus became one of us, to supply what we needed. But in order to do that

***Jesus hid His deity to save humanity (vv.7-8)***

'Emptied Himself' refers to His willingly hiding His glory from us so that all we could see was a human, like us. That's why it was so hard for people to believe He was the Messiah, God's Son

because He was so ordinary. So, He sacrificed His glory, suffered an excruciating death surrendering to God's will so that our needs could be met.

So how does that apply to us? Have the same attitude as Jesus. This is what Paul points out in vv.3-4,

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Don't promote yourself. Instead sacrificially,

### ***Hold back your advantages to build others up (vv.3-4)***

Jesus' advantage was His deity, His glory and His right to rule us now. But He set all those aside for now, so that we might have the opportunity to come to God by faith in Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus had that over us but He didn't use it to crush our spirit by His superiority.

We all have advantages where with them we think we are better than others. It may be our general intellect, our spiritual knowledge, our authority (work, family, title, position) our age or even our health or resources. Paul says value others above yourselves. "Consider" means to examine closely, seeing what interests other people have. That means talking about them more than yourself. Asking about them without always mentioning that you know the same if not more than they. Sacrificially letting others share their knowledge (even if you already know more), their experiences (even if you've done it more than they), their resources and gifts (even if you have more of either) and their understanding of God (even if you already know all that) because they need to share it with you as a way of saying 'I'm growing in the Lord.'

But we are all guilty at times of finishing other people's sentences, sharing our better experience, our increased knowledge and our greater resources over others which results in deflating (or even crushing) their spirit. This can be one way of putting out the Spirit's fire in that person's life. People need to be built up by our rejoicing in how they are growing rather than tearing them down by needlessly and indirectly showing that our experiences, knowledge and resources are superior to theirs.

Imagine the 12 disciples are sharing a meal at twilight and there's a beautiful sunset, and one of them says to Jesus, 'Lord, have you ever seen a more beautiful sunset?' and Jesus said 'Oh that's nothing, you should see how it sets over an ocean horizon [knowing full well the disciples would have never been near an ocean].' Or what if, at the birth of new lamb one of Jesus' 12 said to Him, 'Lord, isn't that one of the most amazing things you ever saw?' And Jesus said, 'You think that's something? You should have seen Me create the first man!' I'm sure there were many examples of the disciples sharing life's joys and marvels of creation with Jesus totally oblivious to the fact that Jesus made all this and Jesus would have simply said 'You're right! I never get tired of seeing that!' What if we resisted the urge of always having to share what we know or experienced (even we know more) and just share in someone's joy of discovery? We encourage them in the Lord and at the same grow ourselves in Christ-like humility making small sacrifices for their needs.

One more lesson from Christ's incarnation:

## **A Christ-like Life Waits for God's Rewards** **(2:9-11)**

How did God reward Jesus' obedience to come to earth for us and to die for us? "*God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name*". God put Jesus back where He belonged and made His name glorious. It is the only name by which we can be saved. What did Jesus model for us?

### ***Jesus accepted the suffering before the glory (vv.9-11)***

The Lord of the earth, the Creator of the world accepted being spat upon, ridiculed, beaten, humiliated and crucified because He knew it would result in our salvation and a return to the glory He left. Jesus trusted in the promises of God of future rewards and glory.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

The passage is an appeal for us; 'let us throw off, let us run, fixing our eyes.' All looking at the example Jesus left for us 'so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.' And why do we sometimes grow weary and lose heart? Because we're looking for future rewards now instead of enduring temporal suffering. Because sometimes we have entitled attitude that seems to think God should make our life better because we're His children.

*He who did not **spare his** own **Son**, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)*

Future tense, looking ahead with His Son. Elsewhere Paul wrote

*"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

We will get to sit with Jesus! We will get to see the riches of His grace and it will take forever to show it to us! Therefore, like Jesus ...

### ***We must live with a delayed gratification perspective***

Paul talks about this a lot in Philippians.

*<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far*

Paul never hid suffering from his fellow believers:

*<sup>1:29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

But he also pointed to future rewards as a present motivator,

*2:14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.*

Paul looks forward to the day when in glory he will rejoice in the maturing and victorious homecoming of those he served with and helped come to know Christ. Jesus will return. Every knee will bow down. We will reign with Him. The fullness of His kingdom is still to come.

But Jesus set all that aside for 33 years to model for us through His humanity how to live now while we're waiting for future glory. Stop making yourself and your agenda the center of your world. Live sacrificially so other people are benefitted by your life and when life isn't going well remember the future joy and rewards waiting for us, and Jesus Himself is waiting for us at the finish line.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at  
[olivet@rideau.net](mailto:olivet@rideau.net)

