

Advent 2022: What God is This?

Week 1: The God of Humility

Sunday, December 4th, 2022

† What Child is this?

- In 1865 William Chatterton Dix, in England, wrote a poem called “What Child Is This”
- “What Child is this who laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping, whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping- THIS THIS is Christ the King, who shepherds guard and angles sing. Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe the son of Mary.
- Today is the second Sunday of Advent, the time of year that Christians for centuries have celebrated the coming of the Christ, the miracle of the WORD MADE FLESH, the birth of the baby Jesus, the silent night that was anything but silent.
- The traditional themes of the advent celebration are Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love... and today is the Sunday of Peace.
- This is the miracle that we- fallen humanity- may once again have PEACE WITH GOD- and peace with each other- through what began on that night, clothed in humility, when the God of the universe consented to take on the fullness of humanity- our human experience.
- But that’s not all. When we ask “What Child is this?” the answer isn’t just that In Christ God became fully Human, but that being human, in the physical life of Jesus we also behold the fullness of God.

† The fullness of God

- From its earliest days the Christian movement- the church- proclaimed this truth. They mystery that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully God- fully divine- at ALL TIMES. We see this truth throughout the NT.

Colossians 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form

John 14:9-10 Jesus: Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... I am in the Father, and the Father is in me

- When we see Jesus, we see the fullness of God. In Christ we see the clear, definitive image of who God is- his nature and his purpose. The implications of this are profound.
- And so, when we behold the baby in the manger, we can not only ask ‘what child is this’, but...

† What God is this?

- Think for a moment- If I ask “What are different images of God we see in OT and NT?” What comes to mind?
 - o All powerful creator.
 - o Fearful Storm over MT Sanai- so powerful that you would drop dead if you looked upon God.
 - o Burning bush- Holy- Unapproachable... Moses had to take off his shoes
 - o Maybe image of righteous judge, sitting on throne judging the nations.
 - o One concept of God that’s always been popular for some, and has been increasingly invoked by some in the past years, is the image of God as a conquering king, violently destroying his enemies

Psalm 21:8-9 *Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. When you appear for battle, you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and his fire will consume them.*

Revelation 19:11-13 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.*

- **We read this and it can easy to think... YES! God is going to punish the wicked, destroy his enemies... and by this we mean... God's going to destroy OUR enemies. It's not hard to find many sermons where the preachers almost delightedly declare how God will soon vanquish the sinners and unrighteous, only the faithful will be spared- meaning us, of course.**
- **The history of Christianity is uncomfortably filled with highly militaristic language of the church as soldiers of Christ engaging in battle against the sinners and unbelievers. As a child, I can remember joyfully singing the hymn... 'onward Christian soldiers'...**

*Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus going on before
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe
Forward into battle see His banners go
At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory...*

- **This is the language and thinking employed by Constantine as he violently and forcibly 'converted' the Roman world to Christianity. It was the mindset of much of the crusades, the inquisition. In American history you can read source documents where generals destroyed native American villages, engaged in ethnic cleansing in the name of eradicating paganism and preparing the American west for God's people.**
- **At a lower level this is completely commonplace In our culture today- we've all heard phrases like 'culture wars', and our national debates framed in terms like 'fighting against the enemy.' In a speech not long ago a likely upcoming presidential candidate quoted the Ephesians 'full armor of God' passage, equating his political opponents to Satan, who are evil and must be warred against.**
- **A line that crops up every now and then is the idea that "Christ came the first time as a lamb, he will come again as a lion" "The first time he came in love (for believers), he will return in wrath (for my enemies). This idea comes from Revelation 5, but when we actually look at the passage, we see the opposite point being made.**

Revelation 5:1-6 *Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."*

- **You can feel the drama here. Most evangelicals believe this to be the opening of God's violent judgement of his enemies during the tribulation, and it is Christ, as a powerful lion,**

who will carry out the judgments. In this scene the elder cries out “LOOK! The Lion of Judah- there he is!”.... but the scene doesn’t stop there. John looks, and he doesn’t see a lion.

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne.

- **The image here couldn’t be more counter-intuitive- or more Christlike. Rather than seeing a lion ready for war, we see the crucified lamb. Jesus is indeed the Lion of Judah, but his nature, his character, how he engages those who have rebelled against him- is through his sacrifice. The cross. His radical servanthood. His humility.**
- **THIS is the image of Christ- of God- that we see at the heart of the Christmas story.**

Luke2:6-7 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

- **The nativity scene is so iconic- ubiquitous- that it’s easy to miss the power of its meaning.**
- **This is a story of poverty. It is a story of people suffering through governmental edicts. It is a story of class injustice. Of rejection, suffering and humiliation.**
- **THESE are stories experienced across the totality of humanity. THIS is the significance of the setting of Christ’s birth- it is intensely HUMAN. It is a painting of the deep struggle of the human condition, the very struggle from which Christ would do everything necessary to set us free.**
- **SO, YES- in scripture you will find images of God as the righteous Judge, the unapproachable deity, the powerful conqueror... but the definitive image of God, the great essential reality of God to which all other concepts of God must bow- the event which more than anything else reveals God in the fullness of his nature and character... is...**

† The incarnation: **The miracle that God is with us**

- **“Incarnation” is important word- root ‘carne’, meaning ‘flesh’. The incarnation is the event of God taking on human form- human flesh and blood. NOT just Christ’s birth, but the entirety of the Christ event, from birth to death, resurrection, and ascension.**
- **This is what John spoke of when he wrote...**

John 1:1,14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- **The WORD- the LOGOS- that WAS GOD, in union with the Father, the fullness of GRACE AND TRUTH- GOD IN CHRIST took on flesh, took on all of humanity, and came to us, to be with us, AS ONE OF US.**
- **As Matthew famously said...**

Matthew 1:22-23 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

- **God. With. Us. Without this truth there is no Christianity, and there is no understanding the nature and character of God. YOU SEE, many world religions, mythical systems, have the idea of God (or a God) that comes down and is present among humans- maybe even in disguise as a human.**

- **But this is NOT the story of Jesus. The New Testament is unique in proclaiming, consistently, that in the Incarnation God-in-Christ became FULLY HUMAN- God came to be with us, as one of us, and in doing so revealed the fullness of his Glory.**
- **This assertion- that while remaining fully divine Christ took on the totality of human frailty- this is what Paul most clearly describes in the famous passage of Philippians chapter 2. There's a concept we are going to see here, one of the most important words every Christian should understand- in the Greek the word is KENOSIS. Directly translated it means 'self emptying'**
- **The NIV translates this "Christ made himself nothing" ... the NASB "he emptied himself".**
- **This is the reality that of all the images of God's nature we could describe- His majesty, his power, wrath, all of the OMNI's... WHEN WE LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT, what we see revealed through the Incarnation of Christ- above all these other concepts of God is the nature and glory of God as HUMILITY.**

 The miracle of Kenosis: The God of humility

- **The passage is Philippians 2:5-8**

Philippians 2:5-8 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself

- **This is incredibly important, and not just 'theologically'- the implications for our lives – how we understand God and how God works through us- are huge. So let's look a little closer.**
- **What does Paul mean when he said Jesus 'self-emptied' himself?**
- **One predominant theory is that Jesus' 'kenosis' was authentic, but temporary. Understanding of passage would be something like this:**
 - **For eternity past, God was the all-powerful, almighty king of the universe who reigned from heaven. Emphasis here on God's Omni's.... This was God's nature.**
 - **Then, in the incarnation- God-in-Christ the son, temporarily set aside his all-powerful nature, and became meek, self-sacrificial, even weak as he humbled himself to the point of death.**
 - **Then, after defeating death in his resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven, and returned to the nature of being all-powerful. AND, when Christ returns, it will not be as he was before, but as the conquering king.**
- **This sounds right, and I (and others) argue that it ALMOST is. The emphasis here is that in this understanding, the nature of God we see in Jesus was TEMPORARY. But what if that's not the case?**
- **In his book "A more Christlike God", Bradley Jersak asks it this way... "WHAT IF Jesus' humility, meekness, and servant-heart were not a temporary departure from God's Glory and Power, but rather, fully define and demonstrate God's Glory and Power?"**

- **Make no mistake, God (and Jesus as God) IS all powerful. God IS almighty. God IS omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. BUT WHAT IF God's underlying essential nature-his purpose by which he expresses his power, is through KENOSIS.**
- **What if God's expression of his eternal power and Glory is exactly what we see in Jesus-self emptying power, self-giving love, and radical servanthood. What if THIS is the very heart and nature of God?**
- **WHAT IF (and this is last what if), What if God does indeed rule and reign, but NOT through imperial power, not through coercion, control, or force.. but through the self-emptying, self-giving, servant love of kenosis, seen most fully through the cross.**
- **THIS IS a very different concept of God than the way he is often portrayed. And this concept of God is more than just a 'what-if'... it is the testimony of scripture.**
- **Back to Colossians 2:9... Here Paul says that in his BODILY FORM- in who Jesus was and how he lived with us in his 30 years upon this earth- THIS is ALL the fullness of God. This is the clearest revelation of the Glory of God.**
- **On that point... let's look at another passage- not in your outline, but key... John 17. This is at the end of Jesus' gathering with his disciples, right before they would depart for the garden of gethsemane where Jesus would be arrested. As we begin the chapter Jesus looks toward heaven and he prayed**

John 17:1-5 “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

- **Did you see that? What is the 'hour' that has come? It is the CROSS. Jesus death- the greatest point of his humility, self-giving sacrifice, and human weakness.**
- **Through prayer, Jesus reveals it is that very hour that would bring Glory to both the Father and God the son.**
- **KEY- When Jesus says he and the father would be glorified, he is saying that through what was about to happen the fullness and essence of God's nature would be revealed.**
- **In verse 4, Jesus says to the God the father "I am going to bring you this glory by finishing the work you gave me to do." What is this? THE CROSS.**
- **THEN, VERSE 5, Jesus declares the Glory about to be revealed through the cross- in the very presence of God- this is the same Glory he shared with the father before time even began.**
- **In other words, the definitive demonstration of God's Glory (revelation of who God is) that we see upon the cross- this is the same Glory and nature of God that has existed for all eternity.**
- **THE LOVING HUMILITY OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS IS NOT A TEMPORARY DEPARTURE from God's nature- it is the VERY NATURE OF WHO GOD IS.**
- **Church- this has all sorts of implications, but for the rest of advent we are going to focus on just one. If the self-giving, sacrificial, and humbling love of KENOSIS is the nature of**

how God-in-Christ SEES US, then this is also the way Christ in us will lead us to see the people around us.

- **By the Holy Spirit, God will give us eyes with...**

† Humble vision

- **Friends... it is tempting to see the world around us as enemies to be conquered. But that is not the heart of Christ in us. Jesus's heart in us will see the world around us through the lens of loving humility. Likewise, our actions- how we engage with and relate to people- when we are being led by the Spirit of Christ in us our actions will look like how Jesus engaged with and related to people.**
- **At the beginning of our passage in Philippians 2 Paul said... "In your relationships with one another- with the people of this world around you- be like Jesus."**
- **In his first letter, John put it this way...**

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

- **And consistent with the greater testimony of the New Testament, I would add "this is how the Spirit of Christ in us will lead us to engage and relate to the people of this world around us."**
- **We started today by seeing the loving KENOSIS of Jesus through the humility of his birth. In the coming weeks of Advent we will see this same love through other examples from Jesus' life.**
- **NOW, we will close by remembering the ultimate illustration of Christs self-emptying power and love, as we remember the cross.**
- **COMMUNION**
- **On the night he was to be arrested Jesus and his disciples celebrated together the passover meal. As we often describe here, Jesus took an ancient and precious tradition and filled it with a new and greater meaning. Paul record's it this way in 1 Cor 11...**

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,²⁴ 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."²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.