

Advent 2022: What God is This?

Week 2: Joy! God in our brokenness

Sunday, December 11th, 2022

---

- **Last week we began our Advent season by remembering the wonderful Christmas carol, “What Child is this.” We reflected on the miracle of the INCARNATION- the reality that IN CHRIST the FULLNESS of God came to us as a human being. And so when we ask “What Child...”, we are also asking “What GOD is this?”**
- **We learned the word KENOSIS, the idea we see in Philippians 2, when Paul describes how Jesus ‘emptied himself’ – that in his humanity, being FULLY GOD, he was also FULLY HUMAN.**

**Philippians 2:7-8** *Jesus made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

- **In the earthly life of Jesus- birth to death and resurrection, we see the image of GOD as the...**

† **The God of Humility**

- **Key- IN CHRIST we see that the incarnation was not just a humble ACTION on the part of God, but that humility of heart is God’s very nature**

**Matthew 11:28-30** *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

- **Think of this! Because scripture proclaims that in Christ we see the full and true nature of the father, this isn’t just Jesus speaking here. It is GOD SAYING “I am gentle and humble in heart...”**
- **This leads to our big takeaway from last Sunday:**

*The loving ‘kenosis’ of Jesus (self emptying power, sacrificial love, radical servanthood) isn’t a temporary departure from the nature, work, and glory of God- it defines and most fully reveals the nature, work, and Glory of God!*

- **Another passage that drives this home is Romans 8**

**Romans 8:1-3b** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.*

- **We don’t want to miss this- in his humility, his ‘kenosis’- Jesus not only took on humanity, he took on and lived the human experience. Jesus lived the human condition. Jesus never sinned, but he fully experienced and understands the brokenness that sin brings.**
- **THIS is important, because...**

† **If Jesus really ‘did’ Romans 8:3b, then this means...**

- **Jesus fully experiences, and understands... adversity. What it is to feel pain and devastating heartbreak.**
- **KEY- Jesus understands our age old struggle with the irreconcilable chasm between the reality that GOD IS GOOD, and the stark reality of human suffering and affliction.**

– **Go with me to Hebrews 4:14...**

**Hebrews 4:14-15** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

- **Jesus is able to empathize with our weakness because he fully experienced our weakness.**
- **Jesus was tempted in every way- this is much bigger than our concept of moral temptation and sin. This includes the temptation of anger, frustration, hopelessness, and despair because of the depths of injustice and cruelty we humans perpetrate upon each other, but ALSO the tragedy of suffering from accidents, disease, mental illness, natural disasters- things your insurance company may call ‘acts of God.’**
- **Jesus understands the human condition because he experienced the human condition.**
- **The conflict between the HEIGHTS of God’s goodness (which we confess and scripture proclaims) and the depths of the human condition (which we experience) is a HUGE and crucially important topic we can’t even begin to address now, except to say EVERY attempt we make to reconcile these two realities ultimately fail. They are BRIDGED, but not reconciled- that’s a perspective we’re going to spend time on next year.**
- **BUT RIGHT NOW - How does WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT GOD BY LOOKING AT JESUS speak to this struggle?**
- **One thing Christian culture likes to point to is the miracles of Jesus, the many instances where he supernaturally overcomes the human condition- mostly through healing- but also supernaturally overcomes nature- such as when he walked on water.**
- **We tell ourselves (many teachers do this)- our hope is for Jesus to do this sort of thing in our own life situation now. AND, you can find many people who will give testimony of this happening- financially, physically, or otherwise.**
- **The problem- and it is significant- is that this is NOT THE NORM. It certainly is not universal for all believers- it wasn’t even universal during the first generation of the church we have recorded in Acts. Moreover, it is NOT promised in scripture.**
- **If we talk about God’s provision in the midst of life as it really is, this must be something that is true and available for ALL believers, all the time, for the entire history of the church.**
- **AND SO, just pointing to Jesus’ miracles or supernatural provision as our hope in the great challenges of life is not really helpful- and at times it can be borderline spiritual abuse.**
- **On the opposite side of things is the Gospel message that In Christ we have the hope of eternity. That RIGHT NOW is not all there is, and IN CHRIST we have the hope of ultimate deliverance from the afflictions of life. THIS IS TRUE! But this too is not particularly helpful to a person struggling to house and feed their family, a parent struggling to raise their child in a crazy world, or a person struggling with any variety of crisis.**
- **What do we learn from Jesus about the nature of GOD TO US, RIGHT NOW, in the midst of life as it really is?**
- **THREE Gospel images of how God- in the person of Jesus- provides and relates to us in the midst of our brokenness. AND, even though I’m framing this in terms of life’s difficulties, these all are signposts pointing us to HOPE, PEACE, and dare we say it, JOY.**
- **So, first...**

✠ In the midst of our brokenness, Jesus is God who PARTICIPATES

- **In the church we often say things like...**
  - **When we believe we give our life to god**
  - **God calls us to follow him- to go to Him**
  - **We are to participate in what God is doing**
- **These statements all have truth, but they are all a secondary effect of a primary cause.**
  - **We give our lives to God because Christ gives His life to us**
  - **We can go to God because in Christ God came to us**
  - **We are able to participate in what God is doing because In Christ God participates in what we are doing.**
- **IMAGE- In the gospels we have two (maybe 3) accountings of Jesus walking on water... First...**

**John 6:16-20** When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, <sup>17</sup> where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. <sup>18</sup> A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.”

- **Think of this image. For these Galilean fishermen, crossing the lake by boat was a common experience, as was getting caught in a storm. So here they are, fighting against the wind and rain, when Jesus enters the picture... supernaturally. Walking on the water. Once they recognize him, he gets into the boat, and they quickly arrive at shore.**
- **This is at a high level, but consider: The situation of being caught in a storm on the lake was commonplace, but also very dangerous. Boats sank often, and people died. Into this situation comes Jesus, and the result is deliverance from fear.**
- **Similar story in Luke 8, but this time Jesus is with the men the whole time. A storm comes up, the boat is being swamped, and luke tells us they were in great danger (again, commonplace!). WHERE IS JESUS? He is asleep...**

**Luke 8:24...** The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. <sup>25</sup> “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

- **Lets look at these parallel...**
  - **Disciples found themselves caught up in the quite common, but very difficult, experience of life.**
  - **Jesus is right there with them.**
  - **Jesus’ presence brings peace and calm.**
  - **Jesus’ presence is supernatural!**
  - **In both stories, Jesus brings his supernatural presence into their very human experience.**
- **TWO BIG thoughts on this.**
- **FIRST- There is no life experience we could possibly have- no matter how severe, ugly, beautiful, or mundane- where Jesus is not right there with us.**
- **BY FAITH we are able to recognize his presence, believe he is here. Because BY HIS SPIRIT, which dwells within us, HE IS.**

- *BY our faith and His Spirit, we may pray... JESUS, right now, I need courage. I look to you as my strength.*
- *RIGHT NOW, I am hurting. I look to you as my comforter.*
- *Right now, I have great uncertainty. I look to you as my security.*
- *Right now, I am facing great temptation. I look to you as my conviction and strength.*
- *Right now, I am afraid. I look to you as my peace.*
- *Jesus is present to us in all of these things through His word, and simply through the reassurance of his Spirit within us, which by faith is very real.*
- *SECOND- Jesus' presence in our experience is STILL supernatural. But not like it was for the disciples. In the Gospels, Jesus' presence was physical, at times supernatural, and ultimately temporary. It's interesting that whenever Jesus left the disciples on their own, they tended to head straight into the tall weeds.*
- *It would be after Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the HS at Pentecost that these men and women would come to know Jesus presence by FAITH, just as we do today.*
- *FOR US, and for ALL BELIEVERS, ALL THE TIME, the supernatural power of Christ's presence is the fruit of his Spirit. The power of his Love.*
  - *Peace. Hope. Patience. Kindness. Gentleness. Self-control. Other-centeredness. Contentment. Joy.*
  - *HEAR- we tend to downplay these and elevate our desire for physical supernatural experiences, or dreams, visions... but this is a mistake...*
  - *In the midst of the reality of life, when BY FAITH we look to Christ, choose to believe and live in the good of what is TRUE of us IN CHRIST... and this produces in us patience, contentment, hope, and other-centeredness... THAT IS NOT NATURAL to the human condition. That is the supernatural work of Jesus Christ dwelling in union with our spirit.*
- *IN EVERY EXPERIENCE we could possibly have, Jesus Christ is right here, participating with us in the midst whatever those circumstances may be. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF THE INCARNATION! That IN CHRIST, GOD CAME TO US.*

**2 Corinthians 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- *Think of that! In Christ God became LIKE US- in the depths of the human experience, so that through a faith relationship, as he participates with us in ALL OF LIFE, we might become LIKE HIM.*
- *AND BECAUSE THIS IS TRUE, the next thing Jesus teaches us about God is also true...*

† In the midst of our brokenness, Jesus is God who ASSOCIATES

- *You've heard the term, 'Guilt by association'... as a young person my parents taught me to be careful of who I hung out with, not to get caught up in group activities where I could get in trouble, even if I wasn't personally doing anything wrong. THIS IS WISE advice for a young person.*
- *As we grow, however, as we learn to worry that associating with certain people could damage our reputation- what might people say! JESUS DIDN'T HAVE THIS ISSUE. Jesus was NEVER worried about guilt by association.*

- **TURN OUR ATTENTION to favorite story from children’s Sunday school... the wee little man, Zacchaeus. It’s ironic how this story has come to be seen as primarily for children, because it speaks powerfully to adults...**

**Luke 19:1-7,10** Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup>A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **(You know the deal about tax collectors...)**

<sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. <sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, **(You can just hear the religious indignation)** “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” <sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, **(They are at his house here)** “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- **OKAY. You know the story- here’s the question. At what point did Zacc repent, refer to Jesus as Lord, and change his ways? BEFORE JESUS associated with him, or after. IT WAS AFTER.**
- **Don’t miss this. To go into a person’s home as a dinner guest was a powerfully intimate experience. It’s the case today, but was much more so then- the concept of TABLE FELLOWSHIP was one of the most intimate and personal ways you could spend time with a person. In the case of Zaccheus, a publically known figure, for Jesus to go into his home- at Jesus’ initiative, mind you- was tantamount to JESUS saying- THIS MAN IS MY FRIEND. I am going into HIS WORLD. HIS HOME.**
- **Jesus DID THIS BEFORE the big change in Zacchaeus’ life.**
- **IN THIS IMAGE from the heart of Jesus, we see a crucial truth about the heart of God- In the midst of our brokenness, God never hesitates to meet us- or anyone- RIGHT WHERE WE ARE.**
- **He loves us enough not to LEAVE us where we are, but make no mistake- Jesus comes to us where we are. He participates... associates with us, even if it means getting down into the depths of our human struggles with us. As Jesus said to his accusers who didn’t approve of his friendship with Zacchaeus... “I came to SEEK OUT- to come alongside- to befriend- to love and to save... the tax collectors. The immoral. The worst of sinners. The lost. I came for them, so don’t tell me with whom I can and cannot associate.**
- **That leads to one more, very essential thing Jesus teaches us about the heart of God. This one may be harder for us...**

† In the midst of our brokenness, Jesus is God who **ACCEPTS**

- **Every pastor, and many others- know this story. A person is sharing about their lives- how they’ve known rejection, abandonment, maybe abuse- crushing low self-esteem. They have a working knowledge of New Testament teaching about Jesus, and they say something like... “I suppose Jesus may love me, but God will never accept me.”**
- **On the flipside of this, growing up in the church I often heard the line “we hate the sin but love the sinner.” Back in the summer we talked about how the church has really struggled working out what that looks like.**

- **In the Gospels, Jesus shows us the way, and in doing so he shows us the heart of God. GO TO story of when Jesus called his disciple MATTHEW, also known as LEVI. Like Zacchaeus, Levi was a tax collector.**

**Mark 2:14-17** *As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

- **Story almost certainly compressed here! If we take the dialog literally we miss the even greater richness of what's happening. As he travels Jesus meets Levi. Jesus initiates a conversation, an initial friendship. Levi has some understanding of who Jesus is. Through this new relationship Jesus invites Levi to follow him, and Levi does.**
- **As a result, Jesus spends time with Levi at his house- he may have stayed with him for a number of days. Here the dynamic of Zacchaeus is taken to another level. Levi invites over his community- his fellow tax collectors, sinners, and reprobates. Jesus eats with them. He shares life with them.**

<sup>15</sup> *While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.* <sup>16</sup> *When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* **(They didn't just not approve- they were confused. WHY would Jesus do this. NOONE does this!)**

<sup>17</sup> *On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

- **The image here is powerful. Jesus isn't just associating with people like Matthew- he is DOING LIFE WITH THEM. They are his friends. He has accepted them. If this makes us wince, it made many people wince then as well. So much so that Jesus was accused of being a 'glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'. (Matt 11) Jesus accepted these people into his life- intimately- and for the religious people around him, this was simply unacceptable.**

- **In Luke 6 Jesus speaks to this. Buckle up!**

**Luke 6:27-36** *"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

<sup>32</sup> *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

- **THINK WITH ME. Let's say I told you there was a person in my life whom...**
  - **I love, I did good things for. I regularly prayed for.**
  - **A person I blessed, that I was vulnerable with.**
  - **That I loaned my stuff to, and didn't worry about it.**
  - **A person with whom I sought to have a reciprocal relationship- I treated them the way I wanted them to treat me. A person I respected, trusted, listened to.**
- **Would you say that is a person I had accepted into my life? YES! Of course!**

- **CHURCH! This can hard! I can hear the ‘yeah but’s, and ‘what if’s’ piling up, because they come to MY mind!**
- **THIS is a supernatural way of living! We need to consider these words of Jesus, wrestle with them.**
- **Referring to God the father, the “Most High”, Jesus said ‘He is KIND.. to who? To the ungrateful and wicked!’ This is why several months ago I said that kindness, when it is born out of the love and character of God, ‘makes no moral distinctions.’**

**Reality! Jesus doesn’t accept sin, He accepts PEOPLE who sin.**

- **To restate... God-in-Christ came to set us FREE from the brokenness of sin, and one of the biggest ways he did this- and does this- is by first accepting us for who we are, right now, even in the midst of our sin.**
- **Psalm 40 came to mind- a deep heartfelt confession of David (you know, the liar, adulterer, and murderer)**

*I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.*

<sup>2</sup> *He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;*

**(IMAGE! He got down into the slime and mud with me)**

*he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.*

<sup>3</sup> *He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.*

*Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him.*

- **Many will see, be in awe, and trust in God because they have seen what he did for me, and because I have turned to them- participated with them, associated with them, and accepted them- in the same way God turned to me.**

† **In the midst of our broken world, we (disciples who are being transformed by Christ in us) will be people who:**

- **Participate** with Christ in His work in us and around us
- **Willingly associate** with people as bearers of Christ’s love
- **Are accepting** of others, just as Christ has accepted us.

- **Are there exceptions to this? There may be. Context matters. Details matter. But THIS IS THE HEART of Jesus, and this is the heart of God!**
- **In Romans 15, speaking into the deep and historic divisions between Jews and Gentiles, who now found themselves both as followers of Christ...**

**Romans 15:7** *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

† **As people who have received grace and mercy, may we be givers of grace and mercy!**

- **What does this look like for the church in our culture today?**
- **What does this look like for you, for me?**

**Hebrews 4:15-16** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*