

## THE GOD-MAN AND THE GOSPEL

Text: Selected Scriptures

December 11, 2011

### INTRODUCTION:

Christmas is a celebration of the Incarnation, God manifest in the flesh. The Incarnation is of fundamental importance to the Christian faith. James Buchanan writes, "The union of the divine and human natures in His one Person, as 'God manifest in the flesh,' lies at the foundation of the whole system of Christian doctrine, and none of its peculiar lessons can be understood in their true meaning, or duly realized and felt, without constant reference to it," (*The Doctrine of Justification*, p. 302).

Yet, regrettably, many times nostalgia, sentimentality, cultural and family traditions inform our thoughts and perceptions of Christmas and the Incarnation more than the teaching of Scripture. Thus, it is important to peel back the layers and take a closer look at the life-changing, mystery of the Christmas event. For, when we peel away all of the cultural distractions and distortions and look closely at the teaching of Scripture, we come face to face with a profound, life-changing mystery, in which we find the union of the divine and human natures in one Person, the man Christ Jesus.

The Bible doesn't seek to solve the matter of how one person can at the same time be both fully God and fully human, rather, the Scriptures simply acknowledge it. For example, consider Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus..." (emphasis mine). In 1 John 5:20, the apostle John writes, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is *the true God* and eternal life," (emphasis mine). In these passages, as well as others, we see how the Scriptures (apostolic witness) set forth the union of both the humanity and deity of Christ in one person.

Again, the apostle John tells us in his gospel that the great amazing mystery of Christmas is that the Creator became the creature, "<sup>3</sup> All things came into being through Him...<sup>14</sup> the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..." (Jn. 1:3, 14). In Matthew 1:23, an angel of the Lord declares, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us," (cf. Matt. 1:22-23; Isa. 7:14). Again, Paul in 1 Timothy 3:16 confesses, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh..."

Luke, in his gospel records the following words concerning Jesus' birth, "<sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will

be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:10-12).

Note closely in v. 11 the three titles ascribed to Jesus: Savior, Christ (Messiah) and Lord. These titles reveal the greatness of Mary's son (Note also the contrast and union of Savior, Christ, Lord and baby!). The words, “fear not” were words often spoken by the OT prophets in a situation of impending disaster or judgment which expresses the faithfulness of God to save His people (cf. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, p. 38). Here in Luke 2, in a sudden, unexpected moment, an angel appears to the Shepherds and announces that this God-Man—a baby!—is the fulfillment of God’s faithfulness and promise to save His people from a great impending disaster.

In light of this profound mystery (i.e., God manifest in the flesh) there are two questions we want to briefly consider this morning. First, why was it necessary for Christ to be both God and man in order to be our Savior? Second, what did Jesus accomplish for us in becoming the God-Man?

LESSON:

I. WHY WAS IT NECESSARY FOR CHRIST TO BECOME THE GOD-MAN?

To begin with, you cannot separate the person of Christ (one person; two natures) from the work of Christ (the gospel). Without the union of the divine and human natures, Jesus could not have been our Savior and there would be no gospel. The union of the divine and human natures in one Person lies at the foundation of the gospel. Both natures are essential to the gospel. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “For the gospel to be the gospel, Jesus has to be acknowledged as both true God and true man,” (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 64).

Still, the question remains, why does Jesus have to be both true God and true man? Why couldn’t God have forgone the “trouble” of the Incarnation and just saved us? Listen to the Heidelberg Catechism:

15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true and righteous man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.

16. Q. Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A. He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin. He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others.

17. Q. Why must He at the same time be true God?

A. He must be true God so that by the power of His divine nature He might bear in His human nature the burden of God's wrath, and might obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

Thus, for the gospel to be the gospel, for there to be Good News of great joy, for there to be a Savior, Mediator and Deliverer, Jesus has to be both true God and a true man.

II. WHAT DID JESUS ACCOMPLISH FOR US IN BECOMING THE GOD-MAN?

There are numerous blessings Jesus brought about for us in becoming the God-Man. I will briefly mention 3.

A. CHRIST MADE A PERFECT SATISFACTION FOR OUR SIN.

God's Law contains both precepts to be obeyed and penalties for failure to do so. The penalty of the law is as important as the precept. For example, it would be useless to mandate "Do not murder" if there wasn't a penalty attached to this law. We have all disobeyed God's law, every day of our lives. As a result, we stand guilty, condemned and liable to the penalty/curse of God's Law. Paul in Galatians 3:10 says, "all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." This divine curse/penalty is the result of our disobedience (v. 10).

As we have just seen, the justice of God (reflected in God's Law) requires that man pay for his sin. This, however, is impossible because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others (or himself!). Thus, God took on human flesh in order to suffer the full penalty of the Law in our place on the Cross. As the God-Man, Jesus came to make perfect satisfaction for our sin. Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" As our substitute, Jesus suffered the consequences of our disobedience and paid the penalty in full that our sins deserved (i.e., passive obedience).

Therefore, the Good News of great joy is that all who trust in Jesus as Savior can say, "Because the sentence has been fully served, God's justice toward me is satisfied. I have no penalty to pay for my sin, past, present or future. Thus, we never again have to live with a sense of fear of punishment." Jerry Bridges writes,

"As believers we must steadily keep in mind that Christ has satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. Never again should we fear the retributive justice of God. Yet many believers do live under a sense of fear of God's justice. We know we sin continually, and sometimes the painful awareness of

our sin almost overwhelms us. At such times we still are prone to view God as our judge meting out absolute justice. We fail to grasp by faith the fact that Christ Jesus has fully satisfied God's justice for us...We must not allow the accusations of satan or the condemning indictments of our consciences to bring us under a sense of God's unrequited justice. Instead, we should by faith lay hold of the wonderful truth that God's justice has been satisfied for us by our Lord Jesus Christ," (*The Gospel for Real Life*, pp. 45-46).

An application of this is often played out in our marriages. I want you to think with me for a moment this morning and ask: What does the Incarnation have to do with a healthy marriage?

To begin with, one thing is for certain, if you are married you fight—experience conflict. Sometimes—perhaps often—you fight unfairly and intensely. Thus, at times you become painfully aware of your sin to the point that it almost overwhelms you. We often find ourselves caught up in what Dave Harvey calls the “fog of war” (see *When Sinners Say I Do*, p. 52). Harvey explains that the “fog of war” is when everything in the midst of battle seems chaotic and nothing makes any sense.

I would add an additional thought. In the fog of war, people do things that are completely “in character.” But, they think it was out “of character”—things they swore they would never do. The truth is, however, this really is me (i.e., my flesh, old Adam rearing his ugly head; what I am apart from union with Christ). The fact is the fight originated from my heart. Listen to James 4:1-2, “<sup>1</sup> “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.” Dave Harvey writes, “The cause of our marriage battles...is neither our marriage nor our spouse. It's the sin in our hearts—entirely, totally and exclusively, without exception” (*When Sinners Say I Do*, p. 51).

Here is where the good news of the Incarnation is so good. Marital spats are why the Incarnation was necessary! Often when the “fog of war” clears out and the reality of what we have said and/or done sits in, we are inclined to view God as our judge meting out absolute justice. In moments like this we often fail to grasp by faith the fact that Jesus has come in the flesh to fully satisfy God's justice for us.

Therefore, we allow the accusations of satan (intentionally not capitalized!) or the condemning indictments of our consciences to bring us under a sense of God's unrequited justice. We do this because we somehow think—though we may not consciously voice it—we can atone for our sins and satisfy God's justice ourselves by feeling crushed under the law. To this Martin Luther says, “We are so weak that we more readily follow the feeling of sin and death than this laughter and joy of the Gospel,” (*What Luther Says*, p. 740). Such an unbelieving response to our sin hinders rather than restores and strengthens our marriages.

The good news of Christmas—the Incarnation—is that we can by faith lay hold of the wonderful truth that God’s justice has been satisfied for us by our Lord Jesus Christ—the God-Man! Such a wonderful truth provides the basis and power for a healthy marriage. We no longer have to live under the crushing guilt of our failures toward one another. Rather, in faith, we can confess our sin, repent and turn to Christ for grace and forgiveness.

B. CHRIST FULFILLED PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR OUR REBELLION AND DISOBEDIENCE.

Jesus not only satisfied the Law’s penalty against us, He also fulfilled the Law’s precepts for us (i.e., active obedience). The baby in the manger was not only born to die—as is often pointed out. The baby in the manger—the God-Man—was also born to live for us! The gospel reveals that God became man in order to establish perfect righteousness for our rebellion and disobedience. Romans 5:19, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Going back to the marital spat illustration. Jesus became a true and righteous man in order to undo all that we have done wrong in our marriages! Jesus—the perfect man—perfectly obeyed the Law’s precepts and fulfilled all of them completely. For example, in John 8:29, He confesses, “...I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.” In Matthew 5:17, Jesus exclaims, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

The Good News of great joy the angels announced to the shepherds consists in the fact that because of Christ’s perfect life, we disobedient, unrighteous, sinners can be consistently treated as if we are perfectly righteous (i.e., treated by God as if we have perfectly obeyed the Law every second of our lives). The Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 60, beautifully captures this glorious truth when it states that God “imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.” This grace is available to all who accept this gift with a believing heart. So, in terms of our marital battles, because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, it is as if we have never fought in our marriages but rather always loved our spouses perfectly!

Jesus took on human flesh in order to obey in our place and to suffer the consequences of our disobedience and rebellion. As our perfect Mediator, Jesus now intercedes for us and covers our disobedience and rebellion. He not only frees us from all guilt and condemnation but now also regards Christ’s perfect righteousness as belonging to us. Now we can say that in God’s sight when Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s Law, we perfectly obeyed as well. When Jesus perfectly loved people we now are in God’s sight viewed as perfect lovers of our neighbors—all because of Christ’s imputed righteousness!

What does the Incarnation—the gospel—mean then for our marriages? Listen again to Dave Harvey,

“...no matter how defeated we feel in the battle, we are overcomers because of two amazing expressions of the grace of God. We stand forgiven in God’s court because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ—God no longer views us in relationship to our sin. And we are welcomed as righteous in God’s house because of the imputed righteousness of Christ! (“Imputed” means that God counts the righteousness of Jesus as our own.) God sees you as more than a forgiven sinner. He sees you as a holy person. Even though the power of sin continues to operate within you, its reign has been broken and God no longer sees you in reference to it. Please understand this: No matter how intense your battle with sin may rage, you fight as a forgiven sinner. You fight on the side of God, and God always wins in the end (*When Sinners Say I Do*, p. 57)!

These gospel truths are possible only because God took on human flesh!

C. CHRIST COVERS OUR IMPURITY WITH PERFECT PURITY.

God became man so that His perfect purity could cover our impurity. In Psalm 51:5, David confesses his sin and acknowledges, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Jesus, however, never made such a confession. This is why the Virgin Birth is critical to the gospel and to our salvation. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “The Incarnation of Christ was by the special operation of the Holy Spirit bringing about conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. By this means, God broke the natural connection with sinful humanity and ensured that the humanity of Jesus was exactly the kind that was needed for the work of salvation: perfect,” (*According to Plan*, p. 63).

Not only did Christ die to free us from the penalty of sin, not only did Christ obey to establish perfect righteousness for our rebellion, but He was also conceived in perfect purity in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit to cover our impurity and sanctify our defiled human nature!

Robert Bruce, in 1589, wrote,

“For, as you see, Christ Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, and that by the mighty power of His Holy Spirit, so that our nature in Him was fully sanctified by that same power. And this perfect purity of our nature in His Person covers our impurity, for He was not conceived in sin and corruption as we are, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, who perfectly sanctified our nature in Him, even in the moment of His conception. Thus in that He was thoroughly purged, His purity covers our impurity,” (*The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, p. 25).

Some of you this morning are crippled in the present because of unlawful shame that you carry from the impurity of your past (or perhaps even present). Even though you have confessed your sin, repented and turned to Christ, you still live with a nagging sense of shame and remorse. But, as Paul says in Galatians 5:8, this persuasion does not come from Him who calls you! Christmas is a celebration of God becoming man in order to free us from the shame that cripples our lives! Jesus was not conceived in sin and corruption as we are, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, He perfectly sanctified our nature in Him, even in the moment of His conception. Thus by virtue of the Incarnation Jesus' purity now covers our impurity! We do not stand before God defiled in filthy clothes of unrighteousness. Rather, we have been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).

**REFLECTION:**

We live in a sin-cursed world. There is not a corner of existence where sin and the curse are not found. Thus, we are full of need! The message of the Incarnation—Christmas—is that God took on human flesh to meet our need far as the curse is found. Dane Ortlund, in his book, *Defiant Grace*, writes,

“The ancient Greeks told us to be moderate by knowing our inclinations. The Romans told us to be strong by ordering our lives. Buddhism tells us to be disillusioned by annihilating our consciousness. Hinduism tells us to be absorbed by merging our souls. Islam tells us to be submissive by subjecting our wills. Agnosticism tells us to be at peace by ignoring our doubts. Moralism tells us to be good by discharging our obligations. Only the gospel tells us to be free by acknowledging our failures. Christianity is the unreligion because it is the one faith whose founder tells us to bring not our doing, but our need.”

Is your need freedom from fear of punishment and from God as your Judge? Remember Jesus perfectly and fully satisfied the Law's penalty so that there is no punishment to be meted out on you. 1 John 4:18 promises, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

Do you need freedom from an unlawful sense of guilt and false condemnation because of your ongoing failure to live up to God's requirements? Remember there is forgiveness and covering for all of your disobedience and rebellion because Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law in your place. Who then “<sup>33</sup> shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Do you need freedom from a crippling sense of shame for your moral failures (past or present) and from your awareness of the impurity of your heart and life?

Remember Jesus was conceived in perfect purity and that His purity covers your impurity and sanctifies your defiled nature. In Hebrews 10:22, the author exhorts, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

The “fog of war” can sometimes become quite thick. In fact, the “fog” can become so dense we don’t know which way is up, down, North, South, East or West. We can get lost in the fog. But, the good news of the Incarnation is that even though we may not know where to go, Jesus does! You see Christianity is not about us trying to find God, trying to climb ladders to get to heaven. Rather, Christianity is all about God coming to us in Christ, the God-man—to find us and restore us to Himself. We may not know the way out but Jesus does! He comes into the “fog” of our lives and leads us out.

The message of the Incarnation and Christmas is simple: Just bring your need because in Jesus, the God-Man, we find perfect satisfaction, perfect righteousness and perfect purity. The Good News of Christmas is that God invaded this sin-cursed, foggy world as the God-Man—Immanuel—to find us in order to restore us to Himself and to usher in a new age which extends as far as the curse is found!

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