

Incarnation: The Mystery Of Christmas

Marvel of Nature

Dr. David Platt

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Marvel of Nature Philippians 2:7

If you have your Bibles and I hope you do, I want to invite you to open with me to Philippians 2. The stage is set for us to dive into the second facet of the incarnation in Philippians 2. This is the passage that I want to encourage you to memorize over this Christmas season. Philippians 2:5-11 gives us a picture of who Christ is, the incarnation, God in the flesh. We talked last week about how He is the hope of glory. He is in very nature, God. Now, I want us to talk about how He is in very nature, man, not just the hope of glory, but a marvel of nature.

I want us to look at Philippians 2. We'll start in verse 5 and just read through the passage to get an overview, get a glimpse of the context and then we're going to focus in on one verse in particular.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6-11).

Now we unpacked last week verse 6: "He was in very nature God, and did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Now I want us to unpack verse 7, "*But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*" (Phil. 2:7). Every single word in that verse is important and I want us to see what truths unfold here.

The Unique Son...

The unique Son. That's a literal translation of John 1:14 which we looked at last week when it said, "We beheld His glory, the glory of the One and Only" – in the Greek its "monogenous", that literally means the unique son – same type of terminology that we see in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten," or the One and Only, the unique Son.

What makes Jesus so unique? And I want you to see three truths unfold, particularly as we think about Him as a marvel of nature in the incarnation. Three truths unfold that I think if we can get our arms and our hearts and our minds around these truths, it will radically

transform the way we see Jesus, the way we relate to Jesus, the way we walk with Jesus day in and day out through this life.

He is the sovereign Creator, yet He becomes a slave of His creation.

The first truth is this: He is the sovereign Creator, yet at the same time He becomes a slave of His creation. He is the sovereign creator and, yet, what the incarnation is giving us is a picture of one who becomes a slave of creation. The sovereign creator, a slave of creation, put them together here.

Now, what verse 7 says is, "He made Himself nothing." Some your translations may say something more like, "He emptied Himself," which is probably a better translation of the original language here – it literally says, "He emptied Himself." It means that He made Himself nothing, but the words literally say, "He emptied Himself."

Now, it's important to be careful here. Sometimes when people read that Jesus emptied Himself they picture Him as He became a man. God became a man. They picture Him taking off some of His divine qualities. So some of the divine characteristics that He had, He emptied Himself of in order to become a man. But we know that's not true. We saw all last week, as we dove into Scripture, how Jesus is fully God. He is in very nature God, means that His essence literally is God. He exists as God. You can't just take off some things that you are. You are this, and Jesus was God – is God. And so He didn't empty Himself by taking off divine characteristics.

Instead, He emptied Himself by bringing something onto Himself. By taking the very nature of a servant. Now, that word we've seen already. You might circle it. It's mentioned twice. It's the same word in the original language of the New Testament, "morphē"—the "form". It says, "He's in very nature God." You can circle it in verse 6 and then in verse 7 it says, "He took the very nature," same word there, "of a servant."

So what we're seeing is that Jesus had two natures – nature of God and the nature of servant. Not in contradiction to each other but He took on the very nature of a servant. So when you picture Jesus coming to the earth and becoming a man, being born as a man, instead of picturing it like God minus something, He takes something off, it's more God plus something. It's God taking on human likeness, being made in human likeness.

So what we're saying is the truth unfolded that Jesus is one person according to Philippians 2:6 and 7, one person with two different natures. Two natures; a human nature and a divine nature. We're seeing two natures. The nature of God and the nature of a servant.

Now, throughout our time together I'm going to throw out a couple of terms that I think will be pretty new to all of us and you might write these down. We are just going to be so much more intelligent after we walk out of here than we are even now. You might write it down, the first term is hypostatic union. Now, that'll preach, all right – hypostatic union.

Now, this is a term that theologians have used to refer to this truth all throughout church history. That Jesus is one person with two natures and all throughout church history there have been a lot of questions about how this fits together – how can Jesus be one person with both a human nature and a divine nature – bring them together? This whole idea of the hypostatic union... And a lot of heresies have arisen by denying one of those two natures. Arianism and Ebionism were two heresies that denied the divinity of Christ – the deity of Christ, that He's not completely God.

And likewise you had Apollinarism and Docetism that denied His humanity, He's not completely human. Then you have Nestorianism that comes on the scene and basically says it's almost like you've got two persons here, not two natures, but two persons. And they're all in an attempt to wrestle with the question of how it's possible for God to become man. And let's be honest, it's a pretty complex question. It's baffling to the mind – how can God become a man? And what are the ramifications of that? Why would it be inaccurate, then, to say that Jesus is part of God as opposed to having God completely? He is God completely.

And we start to ask questions. How is this baby in a manger able to uphold all the universe as we saw in Colossians 1 as He's sitting there crying in a manger? How does this work together? If Jesus is God and He's praying to God while He's here on earth then is He praying to Himself? How do you fit that together? And I'll be honest with you, this will give you a headache if you dive into it for too long. It's given me headaches all week long.

I've said to folks in the office, as well as to Heather a couple of times, "I just got a headache trying to figure out this whole incarnation thing." And I was just diving in and trying to get my own heart and mind around it when I came across one writer named Arthur Pink. And Arthur Pink is a Biblical scholar who's written a lot of great things. I enjoy reading what he has to write and I came across his explanation of the incarnation. So I thought, "Well this will be good." You know, Arthur Pink will help solve it for me here so I'm trying to get my arms around it and I want to share with you what he said, see if this will help clear it up for you.

Arthur Pink writes, talking about the nature and the person of Christ, he says:

This important distinction calls for careful consideration by a person is meant an intelligent being subsisting by himself. The second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature and gave it subsistence by union with his divine personality. It would have been a human person if it had not been united to the Son of God, but being united to Him, it cannot be called a person because it never subsisted by itself as other men do. Hence, the force of that holy thing which shall be born to thee in Luke 1:35. It was not possible for a divine person to assume another person subsisting of itself into union with himself. For two persons remaining two to become one person is a contradiction.

Well, thanks for clearing that up for me, Arthur. It all makes sense now.

And the thing is, I dove into that whole paragraph and I agree with everything Arthur has said here, but it doesn't preach very well. This paragraph just doesn't preach, so let's unpack this. Let's think for a second, together, about who Jesus is, one person with two natures.

When we don't know what to do, we focus on what we do know to do. When we don't know what to believe, we focus on what we do know to believe. So let's focus on what we do know. First of all, as the Son of God, Jesus is fully God. Fully, completely. It would be inaccurate, based on what we studied last week, to say, "Jesus is in part God." He existed being in very nature, God. He talked all throughout His ministry about how He was equal with God, "I and the Father are One. Before Abraham was born, I am." We see testimony to His deity all throughout Scripture.

And we know that never stopped. We know that when it says He emptied Himself or made Himself nothing, that He wasn't becoming less than God at that point, because Colossians

2:9, which we thought about some last week, says that, "The fullness of deity dwells in Jesus." Fullness, He's not part God and part man, no. He is fully God. We see that throughout Scripture. We dove into that last week. If you missed last week, let me encourage you to dive into that, maybe through listening on the internet or something like that, just to catch that picture because we can't miss that.

Second facet, as the Son of Man, which is another title Jesus is referred to throughout Scripture, we know He is fully human. Not part human, not kind of like us, He's completely like us. Everything that makes us human beings, Jesus had. Physically He had a body, flesh, bones, blood – He was a physical human being. He was born, we are born.

We sometimes have this idealized picture, even of Jesus' humanity. When you come to some of our carols, like *Away in a Manger* – and I was talking with Heather about this and she said, "You're not going to ruin that carol for us." I said, "No, I'm not going to ruin the carol for us but when it talks about the little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes –" Have any of you had a child before that didn't cry, at some point? We've got this picture of this almost angelic picture of Jesus always peaceful as a baby.

He cried. He cried as a man, He certainly cried as a baby. He wriggled and screamed. He was human. And He walked and He was hungry and He got tired, all very real things that we all experience, Jesus experienced. He was fully human, physically. Not just physically but mentally. We know that He grew in His knowledge. Jesus, and this is an astounding truth, the Creator of the universe learned to crawl.

You should think about that. He learned to walk. He learned to do all the things that are basic to growing as a human being. All those things were realities for Him. Luke 2:52, "He grew in wisdom. He grew in stature." He mentally is like us – physically, mentally, emotionally. We know that Jesus experienced a full range of emotions that we experience. He experienced extreme joy and extreme sorrow, both of them. There were times when it says Jesus was angry. Not in a way that caused Him to sin, but He experienced anger.

He also experienced happiness. We see times in Scripture where it says He was troubled in spirit – literally anguished in spirit. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, the point where He is was sweating blood because the emotion was so heavy. Emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually – we know Jesus had a soul. He had a spirit.

So we've got that picture that He is fully human, not just in part like us. Now, that's described when it says, "He took on the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness." Now, here's where the difference is in Philippians 2:6 and Philippians 2:7. At the beginning of verse 6, it says, "Being in very nature God." And we saw last week how that meant He has eternally existed as God, but He was made, was being made in human likeness.

So there was a point in time, it's what we celebrate at Christmas, when He became a man, when He took on human nature. And we know that He died and rose from the grave, a resurrected body, physical body and that He continues to be man. He ascended into heaven, we have pictures of Him in the rest of the New Testament of Him, seated at the right hand of God. Jesus is, forevermore, both fully human and fully God.

So that's the picture we're seeing. And we see it – those two elements of the person of Christ side by side throughout the Gospels. Think about it. Even when it was prophesied that He was going to be born – it said the virgin will give birth to a what? – son. There's His humanity. And you will call His name Emmanuel, which means God with us His, there's deity

– humanity and deity united together. Even the virgin birth, human birth like no other, deity conception by the Holy Spirit. The picture's going together here.

Then we see His life played out. We see Him at some points hungry and tired – His humanity. At the same time we know His deity, His omnipotence is displayed in the way He feeds over five thousand folks or calls people to life that had died, like Lazarus. It's an incredible picture in Mark 4 when the disciples are on the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. They had this storm raging around them, what is Jesus doing? He's snoring over here in the corner. He's tired, He's weak, we see such a picture of His humanity. The disciples are all scared so they wake Him up, panicked. Jesus yawns, kind of stretches a little bit and just raises His hand and said, "Be still." And all of a sudden everything's quiet – humanity and deity together.

Even when we talk about how Jesus was about 30 years old when He began His public ministry. That's what we say. That's His humanity. At the same time as we saw last week, He's a little more than 30 years old in His deity. He's been there since the beginning – "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" – before the beginning, everything revolved around His presence in all of eternity. So we're seeing both of them together, His humanity and His deity all throughout.

Now, our mistake would be to try to explain all of this, because it's really not explainable. How the temporal and the eternal come together. How the infinite and the finite come together. It gets more complex the deeper you look into it. And here's the second kind of term that we're going to learn today and this is not as much a biblical term. The term is "fractal". And this is a geometric term.

Anybody in here a math wiz? Okay, all right, not many are willing to admit that you are stellar in math. Well, this is a geometric formulation. And you know, at this point, that I've just used geometric formulation, I've gone way beyond the bounds of where any preacher should ever go in talking with intelligence about anything. But I looked this up – fractal.

This picture behind me is a fractal. It's a geometric formulation behind a picture, that basically what would happen is if you zoomed in on this picture behind me, if you zoomed in on one part, it gets even more complex. And you zoom in on another part and it gets more complex. You zoom in and the more you zoom in on the picture it gets deeper and deeper and more complex and more complex. I don't know how that works. Some geometry person can help explain that to you if you're really interested but I think there's an illustration there for what we're seeing in the incarnation. Because I'm convinced the incarnation is the mystery of Christmas, that when you dive deeper and deeper into this manger and the identity of this baby, the deeper you get, the more complex and the more beautiful it is.

The point is not for us to be able to explain this. It's not against reason. We know that God is the creator of reason. This is not something that goes against truth, something where we have to throw our brains out the door, but it is a time where we see, with awe and wonder, the fact that Jesus is one person with two natures and what it is is a picture of revelation by humiliation. That's what the author here in Philippians 2—Paul—is trying to communicate to us – that Jesus reveals God completely.

He reveals God perfectly by taking on the very nature of a servant – humiliation. The readers in Philippi who were getting this letter undoubtedly were familiar with slavery and familiar with the fact that a slave has no rights, that a slave surrenders his rights, pride, anything along those lines. He doesn't have that. And that's the picture that Paul uses to describe Jesus.

He became a slave, a servant of His creation. He who had all glory, all dignity, all power, in heaven, He became a man and took on the nature of a servant and became a servant to His people. What does Mark 10:45 say? "The Son of man came not to be served but to"—do what? – "serve". Now that is an infinitely beautiful truth, that Jesus came to serve you and me.

We talk about how we serve Christ but the beauty of the gospel is that He came to serve us and He came to reveal God to us. Revelation by humiliation. We know revelation is the way that God shows Himself, demonstrates His character. He reveals Himself.

Well, we know all throughout the Old Testament that you've got an infinite chasm, a separation that cannot be bridged between man and God. Because of man's sin we are separated from God completely and totally and no matter how moral we are, no matter how intellectual, no matter how smart we are, there's nothing we can do to bridge that chasm. What is the only way that that chasm can be bridged – the only way for deity to be united with humanity? And the answer is the incarnation. The answer is God must take the initiative to reveal Himself to us. There is nothing we can do to get to Him. God must take the initiative to reveal Himself to us and the beauty of Scripture is He doesn't just reveal to us facts about Himself, He reveals Himself. He doesn't just tell us who He is, He shows us who He is.

I remember having a conversation with a girl at a conference where I was preaching one time, and this girl was struggling with some things that were going on in her life and asking a lot of questions of God. And she had all kinds of questions – some pretty emotionally charged questions and then some intellectual questions. Well, how do you know God even exists? How do you know He's even there? Questions that I'm guessing a lot of us have wrestled with before.

And she's asking me these questions, just peppering me with questions and so I rose up and with my apologetic prowess I began to answer all her questions with astute theology and intellectual capacity and it was brilliant. All the things that I was saying – backing it up with Scripture, telling her this and this. This is how we know God exists—pointing it out. And it wasn't doing much for her. And we got to one point in the conversation and she was just exasperated, frustrated, I guess, with the things that I was saying and just kind of took a big sigh and she said, "I just wish if this were true, that God would come down and show Himself to me."

And it hit me that I had been focusing on all the peripheral truths that are true and missed out on the fundamental picture for this girl. And I looked at her and I said, "God has done that." She said, "Really?" I said, "Yeah, that's exactly who Jesus is." God came down. "We beheld His glory", John 1 says. "We saw His glory", 1 John 1. "We've seen Him, we have touched Him, we've heard Him with our own ears."

And as I shared that with her, and began to look at the person of Christ, her eyes began to light up. And she ended up placing her faith in Christ because she'd seen the revelation of God in His person. That is the beauty of the incarnation. When you ask, "Where is God?" Look at the face of Christ. He is fully God and fully man. He has bridged the chasm between man and God and as a result by emptying Himself, Jesus perfectly reveals both deity and humanity to all creation. He perfectly reveals both deity and humanity to all creation.

Some people say, "Well Jesus wasn't just like us. He wasn't human like us, because He didn't sin." And we'll look at that a little bit later, but don't forget that man was originally created not to sin. He perfectly reveals both humanity and deity and this is the most

amazing miracle in all the Scripture and all of history. That's why we said last week the incarnation is the hinge on which everything turns. It's more amazing, such a mammoth truth, even beyond the resurrection, even beyond the creation of the world, it's not as amazing to think about man created in the image of God as to think about God being made in the image of man. What a huge truth that is, that the Sovereign Creator of the universe would make Himself nothing and take on the nature of a slave of His creation. That's the first truth.

He is perfect, yet He pays the price for sin.

Second truth: He is perfect, yet He pays the price for sin. He's perfect, without sin and yet He pays the price for sin. This is what makes Jesus unique.

Now we're getting into the question not so much of who is Jesus – one person and two natures, but we're beginning to ask the question, why? Why did God become a man? Why was it so important that Jesus become man – fully God and fully man, united together in one person? Why is that so important? And it's important right here for the very meaning of our salvation. If this truth – Jesus fully man and Jesus fully God – is not there then we have no reason to gather together. We have no salvation, no Christianity without the incarnation.

Now, I want you to see why that is on two levels. First of all, as man, He alone can substitute for human sin. Now it's this point I want to take you back a few weeks. Remember when we looked at the book of Ruth – and we looked at the picture of a redeemer – one who pays the price to bring someone into his family or to bring this property on. That was a picture in the Old Testament. In order to be a redeemer there were three requirements. One was you had to have the resolve to redeem, one was you had to have the resources to redeem and one was you had to have the right to redeem and that right was earned by being close in kin, by being the next of kin or a Boaz. It was kind of a situation where Boaz might not be able to redeem Ruth because there was somebody closer than him.

And so what we've seen throughout the Old Testament is that the redeemer has to be like those He redeems. And that's the picture we're seeing here. All of us in the room have sin that separates us from God and makes that chasm between us and God. And God, in His holiness, in His justice, is set against sin – His character is set against sin. Which means His character is set against sinners. And God in His wrath poured out on sinners.

How can we ever have somebody that takes that wrath or is a substitute for us if God's wrath is being poured out on humanity because of sin? It would have to be someone from within humanity who could be a substitute for that human sin. And so we've got the first truth that as a man He alone can substitute for human sin because He was fully man but second as God, He alone can satisfy divine wrath.

Now, I want us to put these two together. We're going to use the Old Testament and the New Testament to give us a picture of this. Let's start by going to the right a couple of books, to 1 Timothy 2. Go to the right and you'll come to 1 Timothy 2. And you're going to see Paul, the same author from Philippians, talking to Timothy and he's going to describe Jesus here. He's going to describe Jesus in the context of God's desire to bridge the chasm between God and man, to bring man to Himself—His love for His creation. Look at 1 Timothy 2, you just go to the right a few books, go past 2 Thessalonians and you'll come to 1 Timothy. It says in chapter 2, we'll start in verse 3, *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants"—God wants—"all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

Now listen to verse 5, *"For there is one God and one mediator"* (1 Tim. 2:5). You might circle that word, that's a key word... *"One God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time"* (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Now, you see how Paul here is emphasizing the humanity of Christ, "the man Christ Jesus". And God has ordained in His desire to bring all men to Himself there would be one Mediator between God and man to bridge the chasm and it's the man, Christ Jesus.

Now, just like we would have somebody mediate or reconcile two parties today, in order to be a mediator, in order to reconcile two parties, that mediator would have to be familiar with both parties, correct? It would have to be a go-between, it would have to know this side, would have to know that side, and be able to bridge the gap between the two. If they only knew one side of the story, then there's no way they could be a reconciler between the two sides. They have to be in the middle – a mediator – that's fully God, fully human, Jesus in the incarnation is able to be a mediator. So He's able to be the human substitute, "the man Christ Jesus".

"Now what do you mean, Dave, when you say that He alone can satisfy divine wrath?" Well, I want you to turn to the right and you'll come to Hebrews. Go to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, then Titus then, Philemon and you'll come to Hebrews 2. Now, I want you to look at chapter 2 and this is talking about the humanity of Christ, why He had to be like us and then it gives us a picture of how He can satisfy divine wrath.

Look at Hebrews 2:14, these are some thick verses. We could spend weeks just studying these verses alone. Now listen to what he says, the author of Hebrews says in verse 14 of chapter 2, *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too"*—talking about Jesus—*"shared in their humanity"* (Heb. 2:14). You might circle that word "shared". It's the same word we saw in Acts when we talked about fellowship, "koinonia," He shared. He has fellowship with us. *"He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants"* (Heb. 2:14-16).

Now listen to verse 17, *"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers"* (Heb. 2:17). You might circle those words, "made like." It's the same exact word that we see in Philippians 2 when it says Jesus was made in human likeness, like man. *"...Made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people"* (Heb. 2:17).

So it's emphasizing His humanity, He is like us, able to be the mediator between the two in order that He might make atonement for the sins of His people. Now here's the third term, this is a theological term – thick theological term. It's that word "atonement" right there, literally means propitiation – isn't that a fun word? Let's say that together, "propitiation." All right, you can figure out how to spell that because I'm not going to try to do it in my head. You just write it down and sound it out - propitiation.

What that word literally means is God's wrath being set against sin. Who can make atonement? Who can take that wrath in our place, instead of us? The ultimate problem of all of Scripture is God in His character set against sin by His wrath and His justice. So how can we who have sin come out from underneath that wrath? And what the Scripture is telling us is that He alone can make atonement.

"Now, what do you mean divine wrath?" Well, hold your place here and now we're going to go back to the Old Testament. One time into the Old Testament. Go to Ezekiel—Isaiah, Jeremiah, then Lamentations, then Ezekiel. Feel free to use your table of contents if you need to, right before Daniel. Look at Ezekiel 7 with me and I want you to see a picture – it's going to help us understand what's going on here in the New Testament with the incarnation and Jesus being able to satisfy divine wrath.

Look at Ezekiel 7, we'll start in verse 7, this is God speaking to His people. Because of their sin they stood under His judgment and this is the word that came through Ezekiel to the people, God said this, listen to this, verse 7, this is not the way we usually picture God speaking to His people, but it's what He said in the Old Testament, listen to verse 7, Ezekiel 7,

Doom has come upon you—you who dwell in the land. The time has come, the day is near; there is panic, not joy, upon the mountains. I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes the blow (Ezekiel 7:7-9).

Now, in verse 8 when it said, "I'm going to spend my anger," it literally means, "I'm going to appease my wrath." And He said, "It is I the LORD who will strike the blow." Here we see a picture of God and His holy character set against the sinfulness in men.

And what we see in the incarnation, in the picture of propitiation, atonement, is the fact that there is not one of us, not one of us in all of history who could stand before God and bear the brunt of the wrath of God upon our self for all men. However, if God Himself, in His divinity, God in the flesh, were to take that wrath upon Himself then He alone could satisfy the judgment. And here's the picture we're seeing unfold here.

The God of the universe and the cross of Jesus Christ, because of who He is and His humanity and His deity, the God of the Universe is able, at the same time, to both inflict just suffering and inflict just wrath and to endure just suffering and to endure just wrath. They are both come encapsulated together. And this is not a picture of unreasonable logic. This is a picture of unfathomable mercy.

That God became a man, Jesus, fully God and fully human and Jesus Christ took the wrath of God upon Himself so we would not have to experience His wrath and His justice. He took our place. He was like us so He could be our substitute. He is God, so He could take wrath upon Himself and the picture is the One who is perfect pays the price for our sin and the incarnation is the crux of our salvation.

If Jesus is not fully human and not fully divine, salvation is not possible. But by the grace of God, this is possible. See how the incarnation is a picture of the gospel, humanity and deity united together in this person. Humanity and deity united together in the picture of the cross and humanity and deity, now, united together in hearts all around these seats because we now have been able to bridge that chasm through Christ. We have a relationship with God, we relate to Him, we walk with Him, we enjoy Him, we know Him because of Christ and because of who He is. That's why the incarnation is so important.

And that is an infinitely more beautiful truth than any circumstances of a manger and a stable and wise men and shepherds that we focus on. They can crowd out this truth. We've

got to see the beauty of the person of Christ at Christmas, if we want to grasp the reality of this.

See the fractal? It just keeps getting deeper. The deeper we go and it's more beautiful. I guarantee you this picture in my own life is more beautiful today than it was last year or two years ago or three years ago. The more we know Christ the more we see His worth and the more we're enthralled with His beauty, and the more we are in awe of His greatness. He is perfect and He pays the price for our sins.

He is transcendent over His people, yet He identifies intimately with His people.

Third truth about Jesus, the marvel of nature is that He is transcendent over His people yet He identifies intimately with His people. This is good. He is transcendent over His people yet He identifies intimately with His people.

If you've grown up in a Christian home all your life, and you've grown up in church, and you've not had much interaction with other religions in the world then it's hard to grasp what an incredible truth this is. This is a truth that sets Christianity apart. It sets Jesus apart. The major religions of the world are all grounded in—whether it's a god you call Allah, or whether it's a higher being, ultimate reality in the universe—but it's all based on this ultimate reality being completely other, different from us, above us, over us, and we're down here.

I remember having a conversation with two Muslim men in India. And when we were talking about the person of Christ - and this is where there was so much love as we began to talk about truth and truth that affects our lives for all eternity - and they said, "We cannot comprehend the fact that you would believe that God would come and live among us and be with us. That would debase His character. We would not debase the character of Allah by picturing Him among us, much less picturing Him on a cross, or picturing Him as a baby that cries and wets the manger. We would never debase our image of God to bring Him down to our level."

And the beauty of Scripture is that His greatness is not just in His transcendence over us, His greatness is pictured in His intimate involvement with us, in us, a part of our lives. That's Jesus and it's what sets Him apart that He was made in human likeness. He took on the form of a man, the nature of a man. He became like us.

When it says that He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, it doesn't mean that Jesus exchanged the nature of God which we saw in verse 6, for the nature of a servant in verse 7. Instead it means that Jesus displayed the nature of God by taking on the nature of a servant in verse 7. He became like us and was among us and walked among us and showed us how to live by perfectly revealing humanity and deity together, He is transcendent over us. Yes, He is holy. He is completely other. At the same time He is intimately involved in our lives.

In our likeness. Think about what that means. That means first, that Jesus is familiar with all of our struggles. I want you to go with me back to Hebrews 2. We're going to spend time in a couple more passages in Hebrews that I want you to see. He is familiar with our struggles.

Now, we mentioned earlier that Jesus was without sin. Jesus never sinned. Scripture tells us that over and over again. Jesus never sinned. He was completely without sin, completely perfect, completely holy. There was this transcendence at the same time His immanence,

His intimate involvement with our lives, He lived a sinless life among us on the earth. I want you to see what that means.

When we say He is familiar with our struggles, look at Hebrews 2:18—*"Because He himself,"* Jesus Himself, listen to this, *"he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."* It's even clearer when you get to chapter 4, look at chapter 4. We'll start in verse 14 and then camp out on verses 15 and 16. Look at chapter 4:14, it says, *"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest,"* listen to this, *"we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need"* (Heb. 4:15-16).

Did you catch that? The Bible said, "He has been tempted in every way just as we are." Now, people debate, well, could Jesus have sinned? Well, we know this, we know throughout Scripture He was tempted. Matthew 4, Luke 4, the very beginning of His ministry He is tempted in the desert by the devil. We know He was tempted with very real temptation. We know that there was temptation all throughout. We know there was temptation even from those who were closest to Him. Peter saying, "Surely this will not happen to you. You will not go through this path of suffering." Surely He was tempted in the same way when He prepared to go to the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Will this cup not pass from me." Tempted along the way.

Now, this is where we get it backwards. We think that as we struggle with different temptations in each of our lives, as we struggle with different sins, we think the best place to go when you're struggling with a temptation is to go to someone else who's also struggled with that temptation and struggled with that sin and fallen into that sin. They know how to identify with us. And it's one of the reasons why sometimes we think, "Well Jesus doesn't know what I'm going through as I'm facing this temptation day in and day out. How does He know? He never gave into it Himself."

But it's based on a faulty idea. At that point we're saying that you have to give into sin in order to experience the full brunt of temptation. The exact opposite is actually true though. Jesus never gave into sin and as a result He experienced the full force of the temptation. We give in at this point, or this point, or this point. We don't experience the full force of those temptations. But Jesus did. He experienced the full force of them.

A picture I sometimes think of... Do you remember the legend of Odysseus and he was traveling back from the Trojan War? You may or may not remember this story as he had his guys and they were sailing and they faced different hardships along the way. One particular hardship that was upcoming was the island where the Sirens lived. You may remember the Sirens were the ladies who could sing so beautifully and they would pull boats. Everybody who was trying to go by would be so captivated by the beauty of their song, they would come and they would end up getting destroyed on the rocks there.

Odysseus knew that and so what he did was he had all his men put bee's wax in their ears so they could not hear the Sirens. But then he himself told his men to strap him to a crossbeam and he said, "You tie me to this crossbeam and I'm not going to have the wax in my ears and I'm going to hear that." And he said, "Even if I try to wrestle out, he said, you just tighten that even more."

And so they go through and Odysseus' whole goal was that he would experience the full force of that temptation, of that lure. But the guys who were there with that in their ears who couldn't hear it would keep him. Now that's a picture – legend of Odysseus. Here's the picture of Jesus that is true.

Jesus had no men to hold Him back. In fact He had people around Him that were luring Him away. But all throughout, Jesus faced the full force of those temptations but He had resolved Himself. What kept Him to His cross was not a bunch of men. What kept Him to His cross was obedience, perfect obedience to the will of God the Father. Anyone of us, as we struggle with sin and temptation this week, can go to Him and know that we have a high priest who has been tempted in every way, even deeper than we ever have and the great news I have to tell you is no matter how hard that temptation is this week, there is one who has mastered it and He has the power to give you to overcome that temptation. And He has the power to give you to overcome that struggle and you are not a slave to sin because He has mastered sin, He has mastered death, He has mastered the grave and as your Master, He now enables you to experience all that He did. He enables you to withstand temptation no matter how tough it is. The humanity of Christ is so important for our everyday lives.

He is familiar with our struggles. He is able to sympathize with us in those. He was tempted in every way and therefore, sin has no claim on us because of Him.

Second, not only familiar with our struggles He is familiar with our sorrow, familiar with our sorrow. You remember Isaiah 53. Well, even putting those two texts together Isaiah 53 and we studied Ezekiel 7 when God talking about His wrath came in the end and He said, "I, the LORD, will inflict the blow." Isaiah 53 said, "The Lord crushed Jesus for our iniquities. He was bruised for our sins. By His stripes we are healed." And Isaiah 53 talks about how, "He was a man of deep sorrows."

And we see that even from His ministry in the Gospels. You remember John 11 when Mary and Martha had lost their brother Lazarus and Jesus comes to them and they run out to Him just weeping. And John 11:35, it's that easy verse that we all get to memorize when we're kids but the truth is so incredible, it says that Jesus wept with them. Their tears touched His tears. He's familiar with our sorrows. He knows how you feel.

No matter what life hands, He is familiar with the sorrows that we experience. He's familiar with our struggles and our sorrow and He's familiar with our suffering.

Go back to Hebrews 2 with me; I want you to see this. Hebrews is such an incredible picture of Christ. Look at Hebrews 2:10. Look at verse 10. Again, this is talking about His humanity, Hebrews 2 really gives us a picture of the humanity of Christ. Listen to what verse 10 says, *"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through"* (Heb. 2:10), what? - "through suffering." *"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy"*, in other words God and man, us, that are made holy, *"are of the same family"* (Heb. 2:11). We're together in this thing. *"So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises'"* (Heb. 2:11-12).

Now, right there in verse 12 He quotes from the Old Testament. Anybody know where He's quoting from? Anyone want to call it out? Where's He quoting from? Psalm 22. All right, remember the little note in the bottom of the Bible, gives us a picture there at the bottom, okay. Instant Bible scholar, yes, Psalm 22, of course.

Well, when you remember Psalm 22, for the sake of time we won't turn back there this morning but remember Psalm 22. It's a messianic Psalm. It's giving us a picture of Christ and what unfolds in the New Testament. Psalm 22, we have just seen the author of Hebrews talk about how He is familiar with our suffering. Psalm 22:1. Anybody know what it says? You see that little note at the bottom. It says, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Ps. 22:1). It's the same question that was asked on the cross. He is familiar with our sufferings. Have you ever asked God the question why?

Undoubtedly and especially even in the last week and a half of our faith family, that question has been asked numerous times. There is an article I wrote and put on the website to address some of the things, especially with the death of a one-year-old child, but also just in the whole as we go through sufferings and so if you'd like to look at that it's on the website. But we ask the question "why?" and we wrestle physically, emotionally, spiritually with this question and I want to encourage you that Jesus, fully God and fully man when He was on the cross asked "why?"

He is familiar with our sufferings. He is not immune to them. He is not removed from them. We don't have a distant God who doesn't know what it's like to be a man. He's familiar with the hurts and the pains we go through.

Last technical term I want to use to illustrate this picture, the technical term is sympathetic resonance. We've been in theology and geometry, now we're going to go into music terms, all right? And here's where I'm way out of bounds, I'll admit.

But Oxford Companion to Music talks about sympathetic resonance and here's what that means. If you and I were to walk into a room that was completely empty and had two pianos in it then you could go over to one of those pianos and hit a note, say middle C. You strike middle C and sympathetic resonance means the other piano will gently resound that same note. Even though nobody plays middle C over there, the picture resonates. The vibration, I don't know how it all works, but there's a resounding of that same note in this piano as this piano is struck.

Now there's a picture. I remind you that based on the humanity of Christ, He possessed an instrument like us and He still possesses an instrument like us in heaven. He is fully man. And therefore when a note of suffering is struck in your life or my life, praise be to God. There is a sympathetic resonance in heaven and He resounds with that same note.

Our sufferings are not foreign to Him. They are familiar to Him. He, Jesus, is our sympathetic resonance and when life strikes you here or there, He feels the weight of it in His person. What an amazing God we worship. He is familiar with our struggles and our sorrow and our suffering.

And then because He identifies intimately with us, because He identifies with us the Bible teaches us that He intercedes for us. Now we use the word intercede. We talk about praying, we intercede, stand in the gap. Look at Hebrews 7, last one we'll turn to. Hebrews 7:23 says, "*Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.*" What does this mean? "*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to*" (Heb. 7:25), do what? - "to intercede for them." Did you catch that? Jesus lives today He lives always. He lives to intercede for us.

When we walk through this life and we struggle with this trial or this pain or this temptation, to know that in the middle of that struggle, in the middle of that suffering, in the middle of

our sorrow that there is One who is before the Father interceding on our behalf at this very moment, that He lives to intercede for us, that when we fall and when we sin we have a Savior who stands before the Father on our account and He says, "I will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You are not held accountable for your sin." That when we have sorrow and we have suffering and when things don't make sense, we have One whose spirit groans for us with words that cannot express. And when the world comes crashing down on us, Romans 8:33 and 34 says, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It's God who justifies. Who is it that he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of the Father and is now interceding for us."

Jesus is continually standing on your behalf. He lives to intercede for His people. The incarnation, fully human, fully God bring them together in one person and in this baby in a manger you have the most amazing, marvelous, beautiful picture that man could have never even dreamed of. The sovereign over creation becomes a slave of creation, the One who is perfect pays the price for your sin and for my sin. And the One who is transcendent over everything in the universe is intimately involved in each one of the details of our lives.

The Bottom Line...

The bottom line is this truth; the incarnation is a marvel of nature that incites infinite wonder. If you figure it out, let me know. And let Arthur Pink know. Infinite wonder, that the more you dive into it the more you see its beauty and the more unfolds and incites infinite wonder. But it's not just a cold truth on a page, this intellectual truth. Jesus is the unique Son and He incites infinite worship. He is the unique Son and He incites infinite worship.

I can't even begin to think through all of the different situations that are represented, the hurts, the pains, the struggles with sin, the temptations that you're facing, things that are going on in your life, maybe even things that nobody else knows about. I can't even begin to grasp that but I do know this, because Jesus is fully human and because He is fully divine that He is with us and He stands on our behalf.

I want to invite you with the infinite number of situations that are represented here, just to come face-to-face with Him personally, see His beauty and His mercy and to let Him nurture our hearts and nurture our spirits.

He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He knows who you are, where you are. I want to invite you to spend some time with Him. If you've never trusted in Him to bridge the chasm between you and God then I want to urge you, I want to invite you to trust in Him, trust what we have seen today and believe in Him for the first time and know that He stands ready to forgive you of your sins. Know that He stands ready to give you the hope of eternal life. He has conquered death. He destroyed it. Hebrews 2 says that no one has to ever fear death again because of His humanity and His deity. I invite you to trust in Him.

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