

The Incarnation as Mission

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Philippians chapter 2. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 4, we read, Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interest of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God of things to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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, this is the word of God. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Sherman. If you are new here today, a really warm and hearty welcome to you.

My name is Jeremy. I'm also one of the staff leaders here. And it's so great to be celebrating and thinking through the season of Advent with you.

[1 : 34] So if it's your first time, so glad that you are celebrating Advent with us. We're going through a preaching series on Advent, specifically called the Incarnation, God Becoming Man.

And today I want to begin this sermon with a very closely related topic to the birth of baby Jesus. And that's World War II. World War II.

Does anyone know here what the HBO series called Band of Brothers? Anyone watch it? I see some nods. That's good. You guys are the privileged, the blessed.

If you haven't, go Google it later. It is a phenomenal 10-part miniseries. It's like a historical drama, but it's about war, obviously, World War II.

Steven Spielberg, all those names. Go check it out afterwards. But why do I bring that up?

Basically, what Band of Brothers is about is about the 101st Airborne Division.

[2 : 34] And that's a division of the U.S. Army. Now, you've all heard of probably D-Day, right, in World War II. D-Day is when the Allied Army kind of, you know, embarked on the greatest invasion rescue mission in history.

They crossed the English Channel, landed in the beach of Normandy to retake Europe from Nazi Germany and Hitler. But what's maybe a little less known is that in the days and weeks leading up to D-Day, Allied planes actually flew over France and parachuted the 101st Airborne Division under the cover of night, behind enemy lines into France.

And the mission of the 101st was, I guess, simple but also complicated. They needed to take over key cities and kind of checkpoints and roads.

And so that when that massive army came, when the tanks and the troops and the trucks came over the English Channel, they actually would be able to move inland quickly and strike and move forward.

And so the 101st was small, but their mission was absolutely crucial to the war effort. Absolutely crucial.

[3 : 53] But for those of you guys who've watched Band of Brothers or maybe have read about World War II, you would know that it was brutal. These young men parachuted into chaos, bloodshed, violence, destruction.

Death was all around these young men. But they pressed forward. They persevered for the mission. The mission to defeat Nazi Germany and to liberate Europe from Hitler's iron grip.

And so, friends, I believe, you know, as I've been thinking about this, this really can be a picture of Advent. The 101st coming in to France behind enemy lines.

It's a picture of God coming to us. It's an analogy of Jesus Christ, God becoming flesh. You see, Advent is all about the incarnation.

That's why we've named our series that way. It's about God becoming flesh in the man, Jesus Christ. And there are many different ways we can think about the incarnation.

[5 : 06] A couple weeks ago, Chris talked about how the incarnation is kind of like God moving into our neighborhood and dwelling with us. Last week, Oscar talked about a lot of things.

But one thing that really struck me was it was about God identifying with us. That we know that God, through Jesus, knows exactly what we're going through. He understands us.

And today, we're going to think about the incarnation as God's mission. A mission to win a bloody, brutal war. Also a war that you and I are part of every single day.

You see, God's word tells us that we are in the midst of a cosmic battle between good and evil. Between right and wrong.

And the effects of this war are felt everywhere. They're felt in our city, our society, throughout the world. But at its core, this cosmic battle is fought within our hearts.

[6 : 07] You see, God created each of us to be his children. His children to love him. To worship him. To get everything we need from him.

Because God is God. And he provides all things that are good. He created us to love one another. To support one another. So that no one would feel lonely or broken or hurt.

But we were tempted, scripture says, we were tempted by the lie that God just isn't enough. That we needed to be the center of the universe.

And so the war began. We rebelled against our creator. We rebelled against God. And therefore, all that's evil and broken in this world was an overflow of that rebellion.

From the genocides of our history. To the environmental degradation and destruction. All the way to that maybe daily lingering feeling you have that what I have just isn't enough.

[7 : 06] I need a little more. I'm not quite happy. I need a little bit more. I need to run a little harder. I need to earn a little more. All of this, scripture says, God says it's because that we have, we're trying to grasp onto all these things that we think will make us happy.

Money, sex, power, control, so on and so forth. You name it. But God knows. God knows that only he can satisfy our deepest needs.

Yet we continue to fight against him. We continue to run away from him. And so if God wanted to win this war against evil.

Against the rebellion. You know, he could have done it in a lot of ways, right? He could have gone the nuclear option. And just wiped everything out. Wiped us all out. Snapped his fingers.

Erased us and just started again from scratch. He's God. He's the creator, right? You know, maybe he could have reprogrammed us with a new operating system that just makes us obedient robots or something.

[8 : 15] I don't know. But what we do know is when we look at God's word, what he's revealed of us, what he's told to us, is that he's done something very different. Take a look at Colossians 1 with me.

It says, See, God is in the business of reconciliation.

He wants to win us back. He wants to win us out. He wants to win us back.

He wants us to bring, to adopt us back. Orphans who have run away. So that we can worship him. We can enjoy his love forever. That we can actually be content and happy.

That we can see that the universe was actually designed for God to be the center. Not you and me. So when we take a look at today's passage that Sherman read to us, when we look at incarnation through this lens of mission, this mission into this bloody, brutal war, we see some profound truths about the incarnation, I believe.

[9 : 36] And this is our big idea that I want to start us with. Is that the incarnation shows us that the greatest rescue mission in the history of the world, this mission that Jesus is on to reconcile us, this greatest mission was actually accomplished in the most humble, the most surprising of ways.

Let's take a look at the passage. Feel free to walk through it with me in your bulletin, your Bible. It will be on the screen as well. Philippians 2 verse 6 says this, Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

You see, Jesus was divine. Jesus was God. And equality with God meant that God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, they lived in perfect harmony all through eternity, before even time existed.

They lived in this state of perfect love and harmony. That might be a little hard for us to wrap our heads around, but maybe take a moment and think about the happiest time in your life, the happiest time that you spent with your loved ones.

You know, maybe it was a beautiful beach vacation that you spent with your family. Maybe it was going to a destination wedding to celebrate someone that, you know, you love so dearly and celebrate their special day.

[11 : 09] Maybe it was when you were a kid around Christmas time, and you were opening presents and just feeling the warmth and love of your family. The best of times.

Now imagine being in that state of perfect bliss and then choosing to give it all up just like that.

That's kind of like what Jesus did, except that what Jesus had was infinitely better.

because instead of just our friends and family, he had equality with God. He had absolute contentment. He had the ultimate comfort, privilege, and power.

He had equality with God. And yet he did not count that something to be grasped. This idea of grasping in this passage can also mean that he didn't hold on to it like something he can use for his own advantage.

He didn't think it was something that he needed to exploit for his own benefit. And so this is the first thing that we see about the incarnation that's so humbly surprising.

[12 : 24] It meant choosing to forego personal privilege, to forego personal rights and comfort and pleasure. It meant Jesus leaving behind selfish gain.

And he had every right to hold on to it, right? He was God. He was equal with God. But he chose not to. You know, I love food.

And, you know, when I find it hard even to share food sometimes. You know, when that amazing, delicious, medium-rare steak and frites come to my table, I'll be very honest, I find it hard to cut a piece and let, you know, my wife or my friend share it.

Let alone trading that steak for a bowl of brown rice. You know? And that's just such a small thing that I even struggle with. And I think some of us do, you know?

Joey doesn't share food, right? We find it hard. We find it hard. But look at Jesus. For the sake of the mission, he freely chose to let go of even the privilege of equality with God.

[13 : 34] Isn't that amazing? The next thing we see about the incarnation is that it meant choosing to be a servant. Jesus chose to be a servant.

Verse 7, Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. And that word servant there actually means slave. The one who has relinquished all rights has sold himself to the servitude of others, to put others' needs before him.

It would have been incredible enough, right, if Jesus just gave up his privilege of equality with God and became a nice middle-class person, live in a nice four or five hundred square foot flat, decent middle-class income.

We would have been pretty surprised by that already, right? God becoming middle-class? But no. God says his mission called him to become a servant, a slave, not only one who gave up privilege, but actively placed his well-being to serve those in need, to serve others before his own need.

Jesus himself declared, right, I came not to be served, but to serve. You know, that wonderful, happy place that you were thinking about before with your loved ones?

[14 : 56] Now imagine choosing to leave that bliss, not just to leave it, but, you know, to become a street cleaner, a rubbish collector in the slums of a developing country.

Just imagine that for that second, if that was real. Like, can we even fathom the heights from which Jesus came and the depths to which he went?

All for the sake of the mission. You know, I know this passage, I think we've, many of us have heard this Philippians passage so often, and I admit, I can kind of just read it and be like, yeah, yeah, Jesus humbled himself.

That's great. And it's so easy, I think, for me to overlook and for us to forget just how incredibly mind-blowing that is. You know, I heard once, you know, someone talking about the incarnation that it's not so much like the richest, most powerful man in the world, the woman in the world becoming the lowliest slave.

That would be amazing, right? But it's not even quite that. It's like the richest, most powerful person in world, in history, becoming an ant, becoming a bug, a little bug, so that he could tell all the other little ants about how much he loved them, to communicate with them, to know about them, to relate

to them.

[16:16] Can our feeble minds even comprehend the lengths that Jesus went to to become a man? And I think no, but we can sure try.

And we can sure try to be in awe of this incredible reality that in the incarnation, Jesus chose to become a servant, a slave, for the sake of the mission.

The third thing we see about incarnation is that it meant choosing to engage with humanity. And this is choosing to engage in humanity in its complete fullness.

Not just the good, but the bad and the ugly. Jesus chose to engage in the very ordinariness of life, the most mundane things, and even all the darkness and brokenness.

Verses 7 and 8 says, Jesus was born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

[17:28] Church, what strikes me about the Christmas story, you know, about Jesus becoming human is in one way it's just how ordinary and plain it was. This greatest rescue mission in the history of humanity didn't come with a muscle-clad warrior with his machine gun on an Apache helicopter, guns blazing, to take over and to win.

It began with a baby, an infant, born in a place where the animals lived. And it's easy for us to think about baby Jesus as a passive character, right?

Because none of us know a baby who actually chose to be born where they are and to be born to the parents that they were born to. But I think Jesus is the one exception.

Jesus, equal to God, chose to be born as a baby, chose to be born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. He chose to be born in such humble, impoverished circumstances.

Our Savior, our God, knows what it's like to pass through the womb into the cold air, into the wonder and scariness of this world. Isn't that astounding?

[18:45] That our God knows that? That he's experienced that? What also strikes me about the whole incarnation story is that it's really how easy it is to kind of sanitize it, to kind of make it just suitable for kids' rating or a children's song or a Christmas card.

A sweet baby Jesus lying in a manger with cuddly animals around him. Shepherds, starry night, wise men with the gifts. Now all those things may be true, but there's so much more to it.

Just like the 101st Airborne dropping into hellfire behind enemy lines, the mission of incarnation meant that Jesus chose to be born into a life of poverty, of persecution, of death.

Jesus chose to engage with all of that willingly. You know, Jesus experienced trauma and danger from day one. And he was literally born into a place for farm animals, basically.

He was literally born into a circumstance of poverty. And almost as soon as he was born, King Herod, the king of Israel at that time, he made a decree in order to murder all the boys under two in Bethlehem and in the area because he was afraid of this king that he heard of.

[20:14] He wanted to wipe them out. So all these baby boys are being killed around Jesus in Bethlehem. And so Jesus and his family had to flee to Egypt. And so Jesus now knows what it's like to be a refugee as a child.

Jesus was born into a land that where his people were being subjugated by a foreign oppressive power, by the Romans. Imagine choosing to be born into oppression like that.

And not to mention, the story goes on that Jesus ultimately experienced death himself, something that we'll all face sooner or later. And so there's nothing pretty about Christmas in many ways.

It was brutal. It was hard. It was deadly. And Jesus chose to engage with every aspect of that.

He chooses to go into the mess. Jesus chooses to experience the greatest evils of humanity. He chooses to go from the best possible circumstance to perhaps the worst.

[21:23] All for the sake of this mission. Now why would he do that? Why on earth, why in creation would motivate him to do that?

Scripture couldn't be clearer, I think, than in John 3. I love that Ellen picked that in the song earlier today when we talked about Emmanuel coming to us. Because in John 3 it says, God the Father loved the world so much.

He loved you and me so much that he came himself to save us. That we would not perish. He came himself to save us.

The incarnation wasn't just a mission. It was a mission of love, fueled by love, by the creator for his creation. By the father chasing after his children who had run away.

And so that's our big idea. That this mission of love was accomplished in this amazing way. God coming to us, running after us.

[22 : 34] And when we appreciate the incarnation as God's mission of reconciliation. That's really one way to think about the incarnation. I hope we can appreciate the lengths to which God went to save us.

Just how much he loves us. But church, this isn't just a feel-good story about God's love and then, you know, the end. The mission isn't quite over yet.

So much was accomplished through the incarnation, but there's more. The incarnation was key to God's mission but he doesn't just save us so that we can keep God's love to ourselves.

We, his people, God says, are to continue that mission. Remember, today's passage actually began with this sentence, let each of you look not to his own interests but the interests of others.

The very heartbeat of God's mission is to continue loving others, to continue serving others just like Jesus did. So when we think about the incarnation, it should also be our motivation.

[23 : 48] It should also be the pattern and the power for continuing on this mission to reach everyone who's far from God. And this was where I want this to land for us.

For us not to just look in wonder and awe at the incarnation but to see what does that have to do with me in 21st century Hong Kong. We still have a calling to help others reconcile with their creator.

There's so many people in this city, in this world, even maybe around us right now, who need to experience God's love. And when we see what God has done for us through the incarnation, how Jesus left that place of comfort to come into this brutal world, I think the question we have to ask ourselves is, how willing am I, are you, to leave my place of privilege for the mission?

How willing am I to step out of my comfort zone to reach somebody? How willing am I to use my own experience of suffering and hurt to comfort another?

I think ultimately the question we are posed with is, have I truly experienced God's love and meditated on it and basked in it in a way that helps me to see how much God loves others, to help me to relate to God's heart, his heartbeat, his love for the lost, for the broken, for the downtrodden?

[25 : 27] Have I experienced God in that way? God's love because there may be, I'm sure there may be some pretty unlovable people in your life. Maybe a colleague or boss or subordinate who just grates on you and just frustrates you or people who are just so different from you in your life.

Different language, socioeconomic status, interests, whatever. And maybe you've just worked so hard to get to where you are today sitting in this seat and you've labored hard and you just want to enjoy the comforts of middle, upper middle class, upper class life, whatever, whatever you identify with.

Those things may be true but the incarnation speaks into every one of those realities because we weren't just unlovable to God.

We were his enemies. enemies. We were rebelling against him and yet he chose to love us. And can you imagine how different we are to the God of the universe and yet he came to relate with us to become one of us.

And you remember how rich and comfortable Jesus was before he chose to give it all up? The incarnation is our motivation and our pattern for mission in every circumstance.

[27 : 03] The pastor and theologian Tim Keller, some of you might know him, he once told a story about one of his seminary students. His name was Mark. Now Mark and his wife Heather told Tim one day, we're going to move, we decided we were going to move to Sandtown.

And Sandtown was one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city of Baltimore in the US. And this was back in the 80s and it had been decades since any white people had lived in Sandtown.

Racial division was at its peak between African Americans and Caucasians. But they decided to move into Sandtown and for the first couple years it was pretty perilous.

Mark was interviewed by a local reporter and he said the police thought I was a drug dealer and the drug dealers thought I was a police officer so for a while there I didn't know who was going to shoot us first.

That's how it was. But Mark and Heather didn't go to Sandtown because the rent was cheap though it was. They moved because they loved Jesus.

[28 : 11] They loved his mission. They knew that Jesus loved the people of Sandtown. And so over the years they were able to work with other community leaders to establish a church and all these ministries that began to transform this broken place of Sandtown.

Isn't that such a beautiful picture of incarnation in our world? Of course they didn't incarnate they didn't become God or become Jesus in Sandtown but they reflected this story of incarnation by going into Sandtown.

Two followers two followers of Jesus who chose to live a comfortable wonderful life by going into a place of deep brokenness and danger so that people who were so different from them could experience the love of God.

Now I'm not saying that every single one of us here needs to move to the equivalent of Sandtown. I'm not saying that. but the very serious question I believe God is asking us is are you even willing? Would you even consider it? Are you even willing to consider something like that for the sake of the mission? Are you willing to leave everything behind for me for Jesus for the sake of the mission?

[29 : 36] some of us here are being called to a Sandtown and you know it. Maybe you're even thinking about it. For others God may be asking you to live out the incarnation story in some other way.

Maybe it's in your workplace. Maybe it's in your neighborhood in your building in your community. Maybe it's even in your own home. How much do you really step out to engage and identify in difficult situations?

Maybe with that difficult colleague. Maybe just with your security guard at home. How much do you live out the incarnation in those situations? And I think for some of us the most incarnational thing we could do right now is actually to spend to move towards our own families to spend quality time with them.

To really get to know a spouse or a child so that they can get to know Jesus. You know the incarnation was anything but easy.

Those are hard things to do. Moving out of our comfort zones is hard. The incarnation was like moving into a war zone. So if you feel overwhelmed by the prospect of going to a Sandtown or really just doing anything in mission that is just makes you feel uncomfortable and scared that's okay.

[31 : 12] Because the amazing thing about our passage today is that it actually shows us the power to overcome that. Our Lord Jesus began with equality with God.

He knew who he was. He had the deepest most secure love between himself and God the Father. And from that place he emptied himself to become a human servant.

But then take a look at verse 8. Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him bestowed on him the name that is above every name so 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. Do you see how the pattern of incarnation gives us power and confidence to pursue the mission? See Jesus' past was absolutely secure.

He had everything he needed in the love of the Father. But Jesus' future was also secure. It was through his incarnation that he was able to conquer death.

[32 : 29] That he was able to resurrect to bring honor and glory and worship to God. I think this is so beautifully summarized in John 13.

It says this, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God and was going back to God, he then rose from supper.

You know what he did after that? He knelt down and he washed every one of his disciples' feet. Profound act of servanthood that the master would kneel and wash his disciples' feet.

This astounding sign of servanthood. Friends, obviously, we're not Jesus. But if you are a follower of Jesus, you can have just as much assurance about your past and your future.

Because God knows everything you've done in your past. He knows every good, bad, and ugly thing you've done. He knows all the things you failed to do. And yet, he loves you.

[33 : 42] He came to you with no strings attached. But it's not that only. He also knows your future if you're a follower of Jesus. He's prepared a home for you.

He's prepared an inheritance for you. He's prepared riches and honor in eternity that beats anything you could ever have in this lifetime.

And so, in this moment, in this day, in 2021, you have the freedom to lay it all out for the sake of the mission. Because in the grand scheme, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain for the mission.

The mission to love others, to love them radically and show them how amazing God is. Between our past and our present, secure and assure, we have freedom today.

The incarnation shows us that the greatest rescue mission in the history of the world was accomplished through the most humble of ways. And so, the incarnation also becomes our motivation, our pattern for mission as we remember how Jesus did it.

[35 : 00] But it's also our power, our power to do something hard and difficult. Because it's through incarnation that Jesus also conquered the evil of this world, that he conquered death.

And that's a victory that all of us share in, that all of us can look forward to. Victory over death, eternal riches, and comfort with God. And as I was praying and just preparing for this, it just hit me that Hebrews 12, this verse in Hebrews 12 just sums up everything, what I've said so well.

Take a look at it with me. It says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. A race that includes a life of mission. Looking to Jesus, the founder of our faith, the one who came to us, the one who was God but humbled himself and came to us so that we could have life.

But also the perfecter of the faith, the one who points us to an eternal reality where our lives will be made perfect. Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, endured death, disregarding the shame of all that, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Church, that's my prayer for us. That we would live a life of mission that is empowered by looking to Jesus and looking to the joy that was set before him and for all of us.

[36 : 37] We're going to conclude by going into time of communion. And I think it's just so apt, so perfect to do this because communion symbolizes having a meal with Jesus.

That you've now been welcomed into the family of God. You're sitting at the dining table. That's a symbol of family, of fellowship fellowship in Hebrew culture. But I want us to take a moment and think about who's not at the dining table.

Who's not sharing this communion, this community with us. Who do you know who you would just love to be sitting in that empty seat next to you?

You can see their name on it. The name tag is there. The placard is there. But they're not there yet. And I want to invite us to just take a moment instead of rushing into looking, getting the elements to actually think about that.

Who in your life, or maybe it's a people group, and think about who is not at the table with you right now. Communion is a time for believers.

[37 : 52] And so if you're not a follower of Jesus today, I want to invite you. Why aren't you at the table yet? What do you think about Jesus? What do you think about the incarnation, about this idea that God loved you so much that he came to find you?

I'd love to talk to you more about it. Or I'd encourage you to talk to a friend about it, or whoever brought you about it. So I'm going to invite the stewards to come up.

I want to invite the band to come up. And I want to invite you to just meditate on that truth and think about who's missing from the table in your life.

And who is God calling you to go to? Who might you be able to invite to our Christmas service this Friday and Saturday?

When you're ready, you can come up, grab the elements, go back to your seats, and then afterwards I'll lead all of us in taking the communion elements together.

[39 : 00] , and 2nd, and 6 preserved again. Here we go. V ■■■■■ some family behavior that you know.

This is a