

You Came From Heaven To Earth To Show The Way

Rich Nathan

December 8-9, 2007

The First Christmas Carols (Advent 2007)

Philippians 2:5-11

This Christmas, like every Christmas over the past few decades, you're probably struggling to find that perfect gift for the hard to buy for man or woman in your life. Should you buy another tie for a man who already has 20 ties and who wears a tie at most twice a year? Or should you buy another bottle of cologne for a woman who has 7 bottles on her dresser already?

Well, fortunately, Neiman-Marcus has come to the rescue again this year to help you find not only the perfect gift, but a guaranteed unique gift; and not only for the man or woman of your life, but also for your kids who already have everything they could ever need. You say, "I doubt that there is anything that Neiman-Marcus could sell me that wouldn't just be a variation of something that my parents or my husband already has."

Really? How about this:

The Dragon Topiary

This dragon-shaped topiary is 100' long; fitting nicely of course into a corner of your backyard. And it is only \$35,000.

Or how about a portrait of your children in chocolate?

Chocolate Syrup Portrait

This is a "his or her" portrait in chocolate syrup. How many of you could say, "Rich, I already have a portrait of my children in chocolate syrup?"

For the outdoorsman, how about a tree tent?

Tree Tent

The advertisers say that this tent silences the whining of even the non-outdoors type who say, "We hate camping!" They go on to say that the tent has a 9' diameter hardwood floor and a groovy round mattress inside. This is a tent with a hardwood floor. Most people don't have hardwood floors in their homes. But you can have it in your tent.

Do you have a loved one who likes classical music? How about for Christmas hiring the Kirov Orchestra to perform the Nutcracker Suite for your loved one and

499 of your closest friends? By the way, this little holiday concert will be hosted for you by Regis Philbin and it only costs \$1.6 million.

Now, some of you are sitting in your seats saying, “Rich, I was thinking about getting you something for Christmas this year. You’ve been a great pastor. What would you like, Rich?”

Well, to be honest, I’ve always wanted my own submarine.

Submarine

I mean it would be so cool to be able to dive down a 1000 feet in the ocean in my own high-density, acrylic bubble. I realize that \$1.5 million may be a little steep for some of your Christmas budgets, but maybe a couple of you could go in together and purchase this submarine for me.

And finally, some of you have daughters who are constantly begging you for a new cell phone. Your poor daughter goes to school with her stuck up friend, Muffy, who is boasting about the fact that she’s had an iPhone from the first evening they came out. Well, why don’t you help your daughter to shut Muffy up forever? What do you think Muffy is going to say when your daughter pulls out the Vertu Signature Diamond Phone from her purse?

Diamond Phone

Can you imagine Muffy just gasping, asking your daughter, “what’s that?” And your daughter could respond, “Oh this? It is just my Vertu Signature Phone that works in over 150 countries. That? Oh, that’s a one-touch global concierge service. Those? Oh, those are diamonds, exactly 7.2k – white and pink. Yes, they are set in 18k gold. My dad had it made for me by a famous designer. There are only 100 of these phones in the entire world. My daddy loves me.”

Dads, don’t you want your daughters to say that about you this Christmas: My daddy loves me. He bought me a jewel-encrusted cell phone.

A couple of years ago there was an anti-gas-guzzling car movement in America that asked the question: Would Jesus drive a Hummer? Well, I don’t pretend to know what the limits are for Jesus in terms of the size car he would drive. But I think I can say with a fairly high degree of certainty that Jesus would not purchase or recommend that you purchase any of the gifts I just mentioned, especially not when a billion people on planet earth make less than \$2 a day. I don’t think that Jesus wants you to spend your money on these Neiman-Marcus gifts.

Last week I began a series for Advent that I’ve titled The Earliest Christmas Carols. And Advent, by the way, is that season in the church calendar that

prepares the Christian church for the celebration of Christmas; that coming of the Son of God into the world. Now, I mentioned last week that embedded in the text of the New Testament are ancient hymns and worship songs. And we find these NT worship songs quoted especially when NT writers focused upon the amazing person of Jesus Christ. Very often when the NT writers attempted to answer the question: Who is Jesus, the approach they took to that question was to get on their knees in worship.

We saw that last week when we looked at Colossians 1 at the hymn that Paul quoted about the supremacy of Christ. We see it in 1 Timothy 3:16 where Paul quoting the words of an early worship song says:

1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, and was taken up in glory.

We see this in other places in the New Testament – in Hebrews 1 and John 1. What the apostles do as they approach the person of Christ, they approach him on their knees. And do you know, I think this is where lots of folks get off track as they try to answer the question: Who is Jesus? We can only approach this marvelous person, Jesus Christ, on our knees in worship.

But many people get off of their knees and attempt to approach God or Jesus Christ through their intellect alone. They try to approach God the way they approach every other subject. Folks try to make God an object of study as if you could lay God out on a laboratory table and dissect him and describe all of his parts.

But friend, you can never approach God; you can never approach Jesus Christ simply through debate and discussion and reason. He is too big for that. He is too great for that. He is too mysterious for that.

Almost all of the heresies for the last 2,000 years have involved individuals who got off their knees in worship and attempted to analyze God through reason alone. And our reason leaves no room for the paradoxical statements that we read about Christ in the New Testament. Because what we read about Christ in the New Testament is that he is at once fully human and also fully divine.

An early church father named Gregory of Nazianzus, to whom we are indebted for his assistance in helping us understand the person of Christ, Gregory said this:

He was baptized as man – but he forgave sins as God...He was tempted as man - but he conquered as God...He hungered – but he fed

thousands...He was weary, but he is the rest of them that are weary and heavy laden...He asked where Lazarus was laid, for he was man; but he raised Lazarus, for he was God...He was bruised and wounded, but he healed every disease and every infirmity. He was lifted up and nailed to the tree, but he was the Creator of the tree of life through which he restores us.

How do you approach the person about whom such amazing things are said? You approach that person on your knees as a worshipper. Today, I'm going to continue this Advent series on The Earliest Christmas Carols. We are going to be looking at Philippians in a talk that I've titled, "You Came From Heaven To Earth To Show The Way." I borrowed that line from the song, "Lord, I Lift Your Name On High." Let's pray.

Philippians 2:5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now, in this text, the Apostle Paul presents Jesus both as subject of our worship and also the pattern for our lives. We read this in verse 5,

Philippians 2:5

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

What the apostle Paul is saying here, is that the Christian life can be summed up simply by the call to be:

Called to be imitators of Christ

We are called to be holy because God is holy. We are to be peacemakers because Christ is a peacemaker and he came preaching peace. We are to forgive other people because God in Christ forgives us. We are to be generous because Jesus was generous. We should be humble, because Christ is humble. We are kind because he is kind. We are merciful because Jesus is merciful. We should tell the truth because Jesus is the Truth. Christians ought to be willing to suffer because Jesus suffered.

One of the most famous books in Christian history is a marvelous book, called *Of The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. I believe that every Christian at some point their devotional life ought to read *Of The Imitation of Christ* along with your reading of scripture.

What Paul is saying in verse 5 is very simply that the life of the Christian is to be more and more conformed to the model of Jesus Christ. A fully mature Christian is someone that a person would look at and say, “You know, that’s what I think Jesus would do in that situation. That’s what I think Jesus would say. That’s how I think Jesus would act.”

About a decade ago, people began wearing these little bracelets, WWJD – what would Jesus do? That’s a great little summary of the Christian life, Paul says. What would Jesus do?

I don’t know what to do with this angry person who is in my life? Well, what would Jesus do? I don’t know if I’m supposed to forgive the person who offended me or not? What would Jesus do? Should I be generous this Christmas towards the poor? What would Jesus do?

If Jesus was in your body, living in your circumstances, what would he do with what he’s given you? Well, let’s consider who is this Jesus who is presented as the subject of our worship and the pattern for our lives? Verse 6:

Philippians 2:6

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

We read this phrase, “Who being in the very nature God...” some translations say, “Who though he was in the form of God...” In the original language, what is being communicated is that Christ was in his very essential character and being none other than God himself. So, the first thing we see about Christ that inclines us to worship him is that Christ did not come down into being on Christmas day. Christ preceded Christmas Day. Before his birth, he was the Eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. There never was a time when God the Son was not. He is by nature God. When you approach Jesus, you ought to approach him on your knees saying in this person Jesus I find God. There in Jesus is Deity. He was not just a holy man, not just a prophet – there in Jesus I find God.

Can you say that? Have you said that?

Now Jesus is held up as a pattern for our lives. We read in verse 6:

Philippians 2:6

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

Christ did not hold onto his high position as God.

Paul does not mean that for a time, while he was here on earth, Christ stopped being God. Rather, Paul is saying that in coming to earth and taking on human flesh, Christ concealed his glory. Now, we see on the Mount of Transfiguration what happened when the veil was lifted. We read in Mark 9:2-3 these words:

Mark 9:2-3

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

By taking on human flesh, Jesus chose to conceal the glory that was rightfully his as the second person of the Trinity. And I believe that what Paul is speaking of in Philippians 2 when he says:

[Christ] did not count equality with God something to be used for his own advantage

...is that he is saying that Christ gave up his right to function as God. This was part of the humility of Jesus Christ. Even though, as the Creeds say, Jesus was always fully God and fully man, nevertheless, in Jesus' earthly life, I believe that he always always always chose to function exclusively as a man and not as God. Now, this is really profound. This is an incredible truth because here you have someone who is fully God who could have regularly chosen all the rights, privileges, and prerogatives of being God including the right to act independently, the right to exercise miraculous power, the right to change stones into bread and to call down angels to assist him at the cross. But his humiliation, his coming down from heaven, involved, at least in part, of Jesus' regular and consistent choice to function not out of his divine nature, but out of his human nature; to function as a human being who got hungry, tired, thirsty, hot, and sweaty, and who was tempted.

And the implications of this are quite profound. Because Jesus deliberately perseveringly, persistently, chose to act as a human being and not as God, he became for us the true model of Christian living. And Jesus is the model, as I said before, in every area including our praying for the sick, because when Jesus healed people, when he performed his miracles, I believe he did so as a man who was by nature both God and man. His miracles were done by way of his consistent choice to act like a man and not like God.

You say, "Well, how did he heal the sick? How did he perform his miracles?"

By listening to God the Father and obediently doing what God was doing, by depending upon the power of the Holy Spirit in total and absolute faith. He did not will people to be healed because he was God. Instead, he depended upon the Father's initiative. Jesus healed the blind and raised the dead the way we would if we acted in total dependence upon God and if we were completely filled with the Holy Spirit.

See, it is not good doctrine to say that Jesus healed sick people because he was God and he could do anything. No. When he was here on earth, Christ was God, but he chose to exclusively act out of his humanity. It is not because Jesus had x-ray vision or supernatural strength or some other supernatural power that he had that we don't. He prayed the way we pray. It is just that his prayers weren't filled with unbelief and they weren't just for show. His prayers weren't fake. He prayed to discover the will of God. And then as he discovered the will of God, he was empowered by God's Spirit to do it.

Christ did not hold on to his position as God. Let me say one thing about our imitation of Christ.

As imitators of Christ: we must not play God.

Christ did not hold onto his high position as God; and, we as imitators of him, are also not to play God. Not to play God in someone else's life; and not to play God in our own lives. How do we play God? We do so in a thousand ways. We try to claim equality with God in a thousand ways. To not play God means that you, friend, stop trying to be the Savior or the rescuer of someone in your life that you care about. Care is one thing; believing that you can fix someone else is entirely different. Some of you get involved regularly in unhealthy relationships with terribly broken people because you have the mistaken view of yourself that you can somehow rescue or heal this alcoholic, this drug abuser, this person who regularly loses their job, or who regularly self-destructs.

You can counsel someone. You can point people toward a counselor – a drug counselor, an alcoholism counselor, a job counselor. Even better, you can point people to the wonderful Counselor and Savior Jesus Christ. But what you can never do friend, in the life of someone else, is fix them. Indeed, we can't even fix ourselves. As mental health experts often say, the secret to mental health is discovering that there is a God and you are not him. How many of you are playing rescuer and Savior for a broken person in your life?

To give up trying to be God means that you give up trying to be the most important person in someone else's life. Here at VCC we are involved in lots of foreign missions activities. There are many people who have left this church to go to foreign countries to plant churches in that other country, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in another country. And many people who have followed God's

call to go into missions have received huge pushback from parents who have said to them, “How could you leave and go on the missions field? What about me?” Mom and dad, I know that this separation is really hard and it breaks my heart as well. But ultimately, your desires are not the most important desires for me to pay attention to. I need to pay attention to the desire of God for my life. I am not called ultimately to follow you; I am ultimately called to follow Christ.

We cannot try to be God in someone else’s life. We cannot pretend that we can protect our loved ones from all pain or difficulty. We have to give that up as parents and say, “I can’t protect my children from every pain and from every difficulty.” We can’t pretend that we can meet all the needs of someone else.

Well, because I love this person, I can meet all their needs. No. We are not God. We aren’t infinite. We’re not infinitely available. We’re not sufficient. Jesus gave up his right to function as God even though he was equal to God. And we must give up our idolatrous claim of trying to play God. For ourselves, we need to admit that we are insufficient to fix ourselves. We need someone bigger than us; someone wiser than us; someone with more power than us to do life well in this world.

We need God. And people that we love don’t ultimately need us. People that we love ultimately need God. And the best thing that you could ever do, friend, is to point people away from yourself, and to point people to Jesus Christ. He is the Savior. He is the fixer. He is the rescuer. He is the protector.

And in verse 7 we read this:

Philippians 2:7

rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Literally, in verse 7 when it says: “Made himself nothing...” The text literally says he “emptied himself.”

The model of Christ: He gave himself away

What an extraordinary model we have in Christ. We have the model of someone who is fabulously wealthy, fabulously successful, has all power, and then did not use his power or status, or wealth for himself. The infinite one, who was infinitely full, emptied himself; he poured himself out. And this, brothers and sisters, ought to cause us to worship him because we are coming very near to the secret of the nature of God – that God is a self-giving, selfless being. God is not acquisitive. He is not grasping. He is not demanding. It is the nature of God for him to give himself away for the benefit of others.

This, friends, is so fundamental to the understanding of God that Jesus showed us. Christ is a giving, self-giving, self-emptying God of grace and not a God who takes and wants and needs and clutches and demands. At some point in your life you are going to have to go through a conversion regarding how you see God. And this conversion is an ongoing conversion because in our sin and in our unbelief, we often think of God as being more like a giant vacuum cleaner who just sucks up worship and sucks up sacrifice, and sucks up our obedience and service, but constantly demands more. Many people approach God as a God who is always saying, “not enough...more...you need to do more.” That is the perfectionist view of God that God is a gigantic cosmic vacuum cleaner instead of what we read here in this text, that Christ is a gigantic fire hose whose entire movement is to pour life and blessing and grace. He was infinitely full, but he poured himself out all the way to empty.

I've seen the spiritual change that comes about when an individual is converted to the Christian understanding of God. I remember talking with one of the members of this church and he said, “You know, Rich, I'm finally beginning to see that God is not standing over me with a stick constantly loading me down with more and more demands. I'm coming to see that Jesus really did reveal God to us when he said in Matthew 11:28-29:

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This is incredible. What Jesus is saying in Matthew 11 is that he is a burden bearer, not a burden giver. If you are burdened, heavy-laden, it is not because you are being weighed down by God. It is because you have not given to God your burdens and the things that weigh your spirit down. Jesus said, “give me your anxieties, give me your guilt, give me your sins, give me your anger and anguish, your fears and your hurts. Come to me and I will give you rest.”

God is a giver. And what God wants most from you is not that you would give him something, but that you would take from him what he offers. Take into your life the forgiveness that God offers to us at the Cross of Jesus Christ. God wants to forgive you. Receive his forgiveness by faith.

Take into your life God's love. God wants you to know how much he loves you. Receive God's love. Drink it in; bathe yourself in God's love. Let it drench your being. Take into our life the powerful grace that God would give you to free you from your addictions. Give Christ your addictions and then take into your life the power of God's Spirit to free you from addiction.

Take God's Word into your heart. Meditate on it. Think about God's Word in the scripture. God desires that you receive everything from him, to always be in a position of dependence and need, to give to God nothing.

Now, we have a great contemporary example of someone who is using high position and great wealth for the benefit of others – that is Bill Gates. Bill Gates is actually changing the way that fantastically wealthy people are approaching their wealth. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Bill Gates was talking about reading a report back in 1993 which was called “The World Development Report.” In that report, he read about all these different diseases that killed people around the world. For example, he said, “I remember seeing the article and it showed that Rotavirus killed over half a million children every year.”

I said to myself, “That can't be true. After all, the newspaper, whenever there is a plane crashing and a hundred people die, they always report that. How can it be that this disease is killing half a million children a year? I've never seen an article about it until now.” Then I read about twelve other diseases, many of which I had never heard of which killed millions of children each year. Gates went on to say,

“A plane crashes in India and the news is flashed across the world. But the same day the plane crashes, 8000 kids died of things that could have been prevented. Which gets the coverage?”

8000 kids a day die of preventable diseases? Every single day nearly three World Trade Centers of kids die of diseases for which we have the cure? 50 plane loads of children go down every year? And Christians in wealthy nations can do something about it?

Listen, may I make a gentle suggestion for those of us here at Vineyard Columbus this Christmas? How about if we cut back just a little in our crazy, excessive purchasing of gifts for the already, well-stocked, overly well-fed, overly well-provisioned loved one or self; that we are buying something else – another X-box game, another Play Station, another gadget; another item of clothing – how about this Christmas if you said, “I am going to take 20%, 30%, 40% of my Christmas spending and I'm going to give it to people who are really in need. I'm going to follow the model of Jesus, who did not use his wealth or position for himself, but gave himself on behalf of others.”

As imitators of Christ: we give ourselves away

Let me suggest a few organizations you could give to this Christmas:

Fruit of the Vine

How about making a gift donation to Fruit of the Vine, our food pantry and urban and mercy ministry here at the Vineyard? FOTV offers free medical and dental

assistance to a few dozen folks every Wednesday through our free medical clinics. We feed a hundred hungry people every week through our food pantry. We assist dozens of homeless men and women who have no permanent shelter on cold winter nights. FOTV goes to battered women's shelters and nursing homes who house the poor. How about making a gift to FOTV?

How about making a gift to Heifer International.

www.heifer.org

Heifer International provides livestock and training so that families can improve nutrition and earn income for health care, shelter and education for children. Each gift multiplies because every family that receives a Heifer animal promises to "pass on the gift" by giving one or more of their animal's offspring to another family in need. Heifer's mission is to provide livestock and training and services to poor farmers and poor communities around the world. And by so doing, ending hunger and poverty. Instead of buying someone another pair of leather boots, why not buy a 3rd world family a llama, a cow, or a few goats and feed an entire family for a year. What do you think you will get more satisfaction from? Knowing that you are responsible for feeding a family for a year, or giving another pair of boots to someone who has too many to wear already in their closet.

Thirst Relief International

How about writing a check to Thirst Relief International? Thirst Relief provides water purifying filters in needy communities around the world. They overcome death and disease that result from the consumption of contaminated water.

Find an organization that you believe in that is working with the poor – in America, internationally – and give part of your Christmas budget to that organization and by so doing, you will be following the model of Jesus Christ. And parents, train your kids to do this. Say, "Kids, this year instead of buying three gifts for each, five gifts, or whatever crazy number you buy for each other, how about if together we buy 20 chickens and give them to a poor family through World Vision, or through Heifer International? How about if we do that, kids?"

Let your children watch you give; ask your children to give with you. Make that a pattern for their lives.

And in verses 7-8, we read that not only did Christ as God empty himself, but Christ as man humbled himself:

Philippians 2:7-8

rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

In verse 7 we discover that Christ not only became human, but as a human being he became a servant, a slave.

The model of Christ: He became a servant

He didn't become, in other words, a wealthy person with tons of advantages, privileges and rights. Rather, Jesus Christ became servant to all. In fact, he said about his mission on earth in Mark 10:45 these words:

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

And he calls us to follow his example in Mark 10:43-44:

Mark 10:43-44

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

As imitators of Christ: we become servants

One of the most striking stories of someone who gave up position and power in order to serve is the story of the late Henri Nouwen, who was both a Catholic priest and a trained clinical psychologist. Nouwen taught at Notre Dame and then for years at the Yale Divinity School, and at Harvard. But turning the 20 years of his teaching and book writing, Nouwen who was a fantastically successful lecturer and writer, who sold hundreds of copies of his books around the world; experienced a growing disquiet inside; the more successful he became, the farther and farther he felt from God. And through some providential meetings, he found himself quitting his job at Harvard as a lecturer and going to work at a community called L'Arche which is an international movement of over 100 communities. They've created homes around the world where disabled people and able bodied people live in community with each other and nourish and care for each other. As Jean Vanier said,

Mentally disabled people are the poor and the dispossessed in the modern Christian world.

Well, Henri Nouwen went to live in this house with many disabled people, some severely so. He writes in his book, "The Road to Daybreak":

The first thing they asked me was to work with Adam – of all names. I had to work with Adam! It sounded like working with humanity. Adam, a 24-year old man, was very, very, very handicapped. He couldn't speak. He couldn't walk. He couldn't dress or undress himself. You never really knew if he knew you or not. His body was very deformed. His back was distorted. And he suffered from continuous epileptic seizures. And, they said, "Henri, we would like you to work with Adam."

I was really afraid. "Don't worry," they said.

Here I was a university professor. I had never touched anybody very closely and here was Adam. Hold him! At 7:00 I went to his room and there he was. I took off his clothes, held him and walked with him very carefully. I was frightened because I thought he might have a seizure. I walked with him to the bath and tried to lift him into the bathtub – he was as heavy as I am. I started to throw water over him, wash him, shampoo his hair, and take him out to brush his teeth, comb his hair, and bring him back to his bed. Then I dressed him in what clothes I could find and took him to the kitchen. I sat at the table and started to give him his breakfast. The only thing he could really do was lift the spoon up to his mouth.

I just sat there and watched him. It took about an hour. I had never been with anyone for a whole hour, just seeing if they could eat. Something happened. I was frightened for about a week, a little less frightened after two weeks, after three or four weeks, I started to realize that I was thinking about Adam a lot and I was looking forward to being with him. Suddenly, I knew that something was happening between us that was very intimate, very beautiful, and that was of God. I don't know how to say it well. But somehow I started to realize that this poor, broken man was the place where God was speaking to me in a whole new way.

Maybe I could say it very simply. Adam taught me a lot about love in a very concrete way. First of all, he taught me that being is more important than doing, that God wants me to be with God and not do all sorts of things to prove that I'm valuable. My whole life had been doing, doing, so people would finally recognize that I was OK. I'm such a driven person who wants to do thousands and thousands of things so that I can finally somehow show the world and myself that I am a worthwhile being. Here I was with Adam and Adam said, "I don't care what you do as long as you will be with me."

It wasn't easy just to be with Adam. It isn't easy to simply be with a person without accomplishing much.

Then he taught me something else. He taught me that the heart is more important than the mind. Well, if you've come from university that is hard to learn. Minds thinking, having arguments, discussing, writing, doing, that's what a human being is, isn't it? I suddenly realized that Adam was not just a disabled person, less human than me or other people, he was a fully human being, so fully human that God even chose him to be the instrument of his love. He was so vulnerable, so weak, so empty. He became just heart, the heart where God wanted to dwell, and the heart through which I could experience God's love for me.

Not only becoming a man, but becoming a servant.

In the model of Jesus, we not only have his humbling as a servant, but his obedience to death, even death on the cross.

The model of Christ: Obedience to death on the Cross

Look with me at Philippians 2:8:

Philippians 2:8

And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

The humiliation of Christ went all the way to death on a cross. There was a Roman philosopher who said in the 1st century:

To bind a Roman citizen is a crime; flog him is an abomination; to slay him is an act of murder; to crucify him – what? There is no fitting word that could possibly describe so horrible a deed.

In the Roman world there was no more humiliating death than death on a cross. Crucifixion was reserved for slaves, for those guilty of treason against the Roman Empire, for especially dangerous criminals. It was a public affair. Crucified victims would hang naked on well-traveled roads. They were subjected to mocking and savage ridicule by passersby. And often, unlike Jesus, crucified people were not given burials. It was unusual that Jesus was buried because often Romans just left the crucified bodies there to rot or to be carrion for vultures.

This is our Jesus, who as God emptied himself, and as man humbled himself. This humbled man was exalted.

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God always exalts the humble, the one who is dependent upon him, the one who casts their entire lot in with God. God always exalts the humbled and so he exalted Jesus and gave Jesus the name above every name. This text is one of the clearest indicators of the deity of Jesus Christ. Because Paul is quoting directly from the prophet Isaiah, where concerning Yahweh the Lord Isaiah 45:23 reads:

Isaiah 45:23

By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.

And so Paul is saying in verse 10 that all of creation will offer Christ worship and homage when he returns.

Our response: Bow the knee now

Every knee will bow then; every knee will bow then, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

This text contains a strong encouragement to your and my response to Christ now. If the first confession of faith a person makes is when they see Christ in all his glory, then friend, that confession will not be a saving confession. It will be an acknowledgement of the glory of God extracted from grudging lips in contradiction to that person's whole life up until that time. The only confession of Christ that is a saving confession is the confession of Christ now while Christ's glory is veiled in heaven. When Christ visibly appears, it will be too late. At that time, the door will be shut.

Now the door is open and you and I are invited in. You know, I speak with people who say, "Rich, I will turn to God when I really need him. Right now, I don't. I don't feel the need for God. My life is going pretty well. I will turn to God when I really need him."

Let me push back at that attitude for just a moment in closing. Friend, how do you know that you will be able to turn to Christ when the bottom drops out? I mean, if you can't believe in a good, kind, self-giving, all loving, all knowing, all powerful God when life is really easy for you, how will you be able to believe in a good, kind, self-giving, all-loving, all-knowing God when you are going through a divorce, or when a loved one dies, or you are diagnosed with cancer, or your kid has trouble with the law? Always in the Bible the time to respond to Christ as Lord is now. I invite you to respond to Christ now. Let's pray.

You Came From Heaven To Earth To Show The Way

Rich Nathan

December 8-9, 2007

The First Christmas Carols (Advent 2007)

Philippians 2:5-11

I. Called to be Imitators of Christ (Philippians 2:5)

II. As God He Emptied Himself (Philippians 2:6, 7)

A. *The Model of Christ: He did not hold onto his high position as God*

As imitators of Christ: We must not play God

B. *The Model of Christ: He gave himself away*

As imitators of Christ: We give ourselves away

III. As Man He Humbled Himself (Philippians 2:7, 8)

A. *The Model of Christ: He became a servant*

As imitators of Christ: We become servants

B. *The Model of Christ: Obedience to the Cross*

As imitators of Christ: Obedience in everything

IV. As Humbled, God Exalted Christ (Philippians 2:9-11)

Our response: Bow the knee