

Christmas, 2009 Message

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

- [0 : 00] We have been blessed. It's been a wonderful morning. I really appreciate the contribution that everyone has made to our musical program this morning.
- It's just been absolutely delightful, and I can't tell you how much I personally appreciate it. In the passage that Gary just read, we have set forth, of course, a consideration of the superiority of Jesus Christ to the created angelic beings.
- In that he occupies a position of sonship. And the Son of God is a designation that is, of course, given to Christ in a unique way.
- It is true that all who have expressed personal faith in Jesus Christ are a son of God or a daughter of God. But there is, of course, an utter uniqueness to the sonship of Jesus Christ.
- In that he is the first begotten of the Father. And even that term is misleading because we tend to think in terms of a birth process whereby a firstborn son is given and then the second child or a daughter or so on.
- [1 : 13] It is not like that at all in the Godhead. When Christ is referred to as the first begotten does not mean that he had a beginning.
- It means that he occupies a privileged position that is enjoyed by the first begotten in the ancient family or the Jewish family.
- It was a statement of position, not so much a birth order. So if one was designated as the first begotten, it meant that that one occupied a special place peculiar to all of the others.
- In fact, probably the best example that we have of that is Joseph. Joseph was the eleventh-born son of Jacob.
- The firstborn was, sure it was. Well, the secondborn, Reuben.
- [2 : 29] Reuben, thou art my firstborn, Jacob said to him. Unstable as water. Have you ever tried to carry a glass full of water?
- I mean, right full up to the brim from one room to another without spilling any. It's almost impossible because water is very unstable.
- That's the way Reuben was. And Simeon and Levi were the second and third born and Judah was the fourth born. And ordinarily in the Jewish family, the firstborn son was the principal heir.
- He would, of course, inherit a double portion of the father's estate. And he would also wear the mantle of the headship of the family. So Reuben would be the customary, legitimate one for that role.
- And everyone expected that. But he passed over Reuben. And he passed over Simeon. And he passed over Levi.
- [3 : 37] And he passed over Judah. And he passed over all the rest of them. Came all the way down to the tenth son, whom one would think would be really the low man on the totem pole.

He was the top one. He was Joseph. And no doubt this had to do with the fact that Joseph was the firstborn son of the woman that Jacob loved.

That was Rachel. And he bestowed this special privilege upon him. It wasn't his by the birth order.

But it was his by the decree of the father. It was a position, a rank, a station that he occupied. And when you think in terms of Jesus Christ being the first begotten of the father, don't think of him as having a beginning, which he did not.

Because he was there when the beginning began. He was there before the beginning. So think of him in terms of status or rank or privileged position.

[4 : 52] That's what's being conveyed. And when we read that first chapter of Hebrews, it becomes abundantly clear that Jesus Christ is put in a position of superiority over all created beings because he himself is the uncreated first one.

For a moment, I would ask you to turn to Philippians chapter 2 because we find that this passage emphasizes that as well.

And it sets forth an utterly unique thing about the person of Christ. Actually, the passage is setting forth an example as to what believers are supposed to be.

And Christ is depicted as the epitome or the crowning example of what we are supposed to be.

And I'm reading from Philippians chapter 2. And let us begin just briefly with verse 5, where the apostle said, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 02] And this mind conveys the idea of let this be your attitude. Let this be your mindset. Let this be your modus operandi, your way of operating.

Paul is saying, I want you to adopt this kind of thinking. What kind of thinking? And he goes on to illustrate. It was the mindset or the attitude which was in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God.

Now we are talking about the Trinitarian reality of the Godhead, which is an utterly unique concept in all of religious belief.

It is a conundrum to us. It is something that the scriptures solidly attest to, but something we are simply unable to really appreciate.

We are talking about the nature of God consisting of three persons, yet there being but one God. And this is confusing to a great many people.

[7 : 18] I can understand that because we operate on the basis of what I guess we would call simple mathematics. God operates on the basis of divine mathematics, and I'm sure there is a great distance that separates us.

But we look at the Trinitarian nature of God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Each one is a scribe deity without any question, yet equally without any question, the scriptures make it abundantly clear that there is but one God.

And this one God is set forth many, many places throughout scripture, particularly in the Shema, which the Israelites are required to memorize and to recite.

And just about every Jewish child knew this almost before they could say Mama and Dada. And that is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.

And interestingly enough, in that word one, and the Lord our God is one, in the Hebrew, the one is set forth as a compound unity, not a single unity.

[8 : 26] In the same way that a man and his wife are to be joined together, and they twain shall be one flesh.

It's used the same way. It is a compound unity, not a single unity. And that means it is a unity, but it is comprised of more than one.

And that's what we have in the Godhead. Christmas is all about this unique, utterly mysterious Godhead of one in three and three in one somehow divesting itself in some way we do not understand of a personage within that unity and that personage taking upon himself the form of a human being, one of his creatures.

That's what incarnation means. And when the verse says that Jesus Christ was in the form of God, interestingly enough, the word that is used there in the Greek for the word form is the word morphe.

Morphe. Morphe. From which we get the word morph or morphology. It's even the word from which we get the word mortification.

[9 : 59] Morg and mortuary, and they all come from that same word. It conveys the idea of a metamorphosis.

We have this being of the Trinitarian Godhead morphing, morphing into humanity.

We are familiar with the process of metamorphosis, how the what appears to be a worm is metamorphosed into a beautiful butterfly.

They are one and the same, but yet radically different. And that's the word that is used who being in the form of God, in the shape of God.

20th century New Testament says, though the divine nature was his from the beginning, Phillips renders it, for he who has always been God by nature, and Knox says his nature is from the first divine, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

[11 : 25] Now that makes about zero sense. What in the world does that mean? Thought it not robbery to be equal with God. God, one of the more unfortunate translations of the New American or of the King James and the New American renders it like this, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

His equality with God is understood and accepted throughout all of Scripture. Do I understand that? Of course not.

There are a great many things I don't understand, and this is simply one of them. But stop and think for just a moment. We are talking about a being, the uncaused first cause, this God who is self sustaining and self existing, the one who is just because he is, the one who is as a result of himself, the one who has no beginning.

This one is referred to as the infinite God. Do you know what that means? Infinite?

If that does not completely escape your thinking, you just don't know the meaning of infinite. If you subtract numbers like our Congress is talking about now, trillions, millions is bad enough, billions is mind-boggling, trillions is just out of sight.

[13 : 20] But if you subtract a hundred trillion from infinity, what do you have remaining?

You're right. Infinity. It is inexhaustible. This is the nature of this God we are talking about. Now, does it strike you as peculiar that we are talking about an infinite, uncaused first cause, having things about his nature and character and makeup that we don't understand?

And is that hard for you to grasp? let me ask it this way.

How many things besides the nature of the Trinity do you think that there are about this infinite God that we don't understand? What else is there about him that we don't understand?

Yeah. There's an infinite number of things about him we don't understand. So, why should we be hung up on the Trinity? That's just one of many.

[14 : 44] Some people almost give you the impression that, oh, well, if I could get my brain around the Trinity, if I could just understand the concept of the Trinity, I'd know everything about God.

No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't even come close. That's just for starters. Is that the only thing about God that you don't understand? Of course not.

But it is a sticking point for a great many people because they just cannot get beyond that. And we tend to think in terms of simple mathematics. And when you do, of course, it will not work.

All I am suggesting is this. This infinite God dwells in a sphere wherein his nature and character are simply beyond us.

They transcend anything that we could ever begin to imagine. and the Trinity and its mystery is just one of many.

[15 : 41] Please don't ever think, well, if I could just put a handle on the Trinity, I'd pretty much have God down pat. No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't even come close. He morphed this exalted being morphed, if you will, into humanity.

And he made himself of no reputation. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. It means that the son possessed a status, a position that was in every way, shape, and form of equality with the Father and with the Spirit.

And yet, in that exalted position, rightful position, entitled position that he had, he did not consider it necessary to cling to that and be unwilling to give it up.

That's what he did. This Philippians 2 passage is referred to as the great kenosis. It's the k-e-n-o-s-i-s.

The kenosis. It means the emptying. The emptying. The son in that exalted position of equality with the Father emptied himself, depleted himself of that to which he was rightfully entitled.

[17 : 36] He had to do that to become one of us. In order to morph into humanity, he couldn't bring everything with him that he had and still do that.

He had to make a personal sacrifice. And that's what he did. And I'm not just talking about the cross, I'm talking about before that. He made a sacrifice in the incarnation.

That was the sacrifice. That's where the sacrifice began. When God became man and dwelt among us, that was the beginning of the sacrifice.

Bethlehem was a sacrifice, although we don't tend to think of it that way. We think of Calvary as being the sacrifice. And it was. But the point that is being made here in Philippians is this.

The attitude of sacrifice existed in the deity before he even came to earth. And he just lived it out, beginning with the incarnation.

[18 : 46] He stooped. He condescended to become one of us. He did not consider that exalted position to which he was entitled something to be clung to at all costs.

No! I won't give it up. Why should I? This is mine by right. It is mine by privilege. There's no reason why I should have to surrender this. He didn't say that.

That wasn't his attitude. And he laid it aside. No, he did not cease to be God when he became man.

But he couldn't become man if he remained only God. And he didn't become half God and half man. But he clothed that deity, the effulgence of the glory that Hebrews talks about, the brightness of his image, the express image of his person, the effulgence of his glory.

He draped that and clothed that with humanity. The only reason he did it was because he had a love affair with his creation.

[20 : 12] bound him to it. We cannot begin to express or understand the love of God. That's just one more of his infinite aspects.

This great, great love. love. Could we with ink the oceans fill?

Were every stalk on earth a quill? And every man a scribe by trade to write the love of God above should drain the oceans dry?

That's the kind of love we're talking about. And it all began to be manifested Christmas time, Bethlehem, when he took upon him the form of a human, made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

that's Christmas. I remember hearing a story years ago that was carried on WEEC. And it was a special that Moody Bible Institute produced every year, and the radio station carried them.

[21 : 44] And this particular year, it was a dramatic scene, a radio type drama, drama, and these people were involved with the huge downtown department store in one of our principal cities.

And the dilemma of the year was what could they do, how could they have a window display that all of the community looked forward to every year, because it was always the talk of the town, and they always had such a dramatic display of Christmas things that people would just stand there at the window and ooh and aah over it, and the little children would press their noses against the glass, and they would admire that and everything.

And they had done that for years and years and years, and they had exhausted just about every possible theme that they could think of, and they were really racking their brains trying to come up with something utterly different that would really express the idea of Christmas, and yet would be different from anything that they have ever done before.

And they went to work on the task, and as the scene unfolded, you could only imagine in your mind, because it was all audio, and it was all radio, and people were talking, and comments were being made, and they were standing there in front of the window, and finally it came down to this, and someone expressed, well, who would have ever thought, who would have ever imagined, I must say that this is really creativity on the part of someone, can you believe what they came up with, where did they get such an idea, do you suppose, and these people were talking about it, and of course we listeners were listening in trying to figure out what they were talking about, and then finally the bottom line came, and who would have ever made the connection, that Christmas and the manger could be expressed and displayed in a cross, that's the

Christmas window display for this year, a cross, yes, a cross, Christmas, what Christmas is all about, is Easter, that's what it's all about, incarnation, enfleshment of deity, sacrificial death, burial, resurrection, that's what it's all about, and for people who have difficulty outside of Christianity, who have difficulty accepting this concept, they really ought to give serious consideration to the manifold prophecies that exist going all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, regarding the announcement of this one who was to come, and the circumstances under which he was to be born, and where he was to be born, and what he was to be named, and what he was to accomplish, all of which is explicitly laid out throughout scripture, hundreds, in some cases, thousands of years before he ever came.

[25 : 21] They ought to consider that, and they also ought to consider this, for those who have difficulty accepting the authority of scripture, they ought to weigh this, do you realize that there is no written record anywhere in the world, that so adequately, and so completely, and so accurately, displays how and why things are the way they are today, apart from the scriptures.

scriptures. The Bible really answers it. You want to know why people are the way they are today? The scriptures have the answer.

You want to know why the world is the way it is today? The answer is in the scriptures. The Bible gives the most accurate, detailed account, not only of history, but by way of an explanation as to how we got here, and what it is all about, and where we are going from here.

There is no other record anywhere on the face of the earth that even comes close. To me, this is one of the most compelling arguments for the authority and accuracy of the scriptures.

That silver, that scarlet, scarlet thread of redemption that runs all the way through scripture is there unmistakably, and you just cannot miss it.

[27 : 03] It all points to the theme of redemption, and it all began with Bethlehem, and this incarnation, the dissembling, if you will, of the Godhead, the morphing of deity into humanity, and his coming to earth.

we just can't get over it, and I suspect there would be something wrong seriously if we ever do get over it.

Father, we are so thankful for this time to contemplate absolutely incredible transaction. we do not understand the details as to how this came about.

You've not been pleased to reveal them, but you have certainly revealed the reality and the fact of it, and we have more than enough in which we can confidently and comfortably place our trust and our confidence.

experience. Thank you for this marvelous, detailed, and accurate record we have of your great love affair with creation and your willingness to redeem that which rebelled and walked away from you in order that you might bring us back to yourself.

[28 : 39] Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. we pray that as we continue to examine the scriptures, you will reinforce in our minds and in our hearts what you are about and how you are accomplishing it through the person of your Son.

Thank you for just being able to render an obedient spirit to you, for having the capacity to respond to you with obedience and with love.

We bless you for all that this season means and once again we look forward to the time when this one who was incarnated will come again and consummate that which you began.

Thank you for it all in Christ's wonderful name. Amen. God bless you. Merry Christmas.ek Green Shadow.

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