

# O for a Thousand Lives to Live!

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## Introduction

### The Incarnation and Crisper Lines

- A. We have now finished our dealings with the first two chapters in [Luke](#), referred to as a whole by scholars as the Infancy Narrative.
  - 1. It is a narrative dealing with, above anything else, the wonder of the incarnation, God becoming a man.
- B. For 8 months this awesome subject has been our meditation. And it seemed good to me, before proceeding, to step back for a sermon and attempt to draw crisper lines from all that we've witnessed towards yours and my life.
  - 1. What does Christ's incarnation mean for us?!

### His Incarnation for Our Redemption and Renovation

- A. I feel we've sufficiently drawn the lines from the incarnation of Christ towards our redemption.
  - 1. We've made sufficient note of the fact that He has come to redeem us. He has come to fulfill all righteousness, both in His life and in His death, not merely for Himself but for His people, for me. Redemption.
- B. But there is another line we must draw. And it is one I have not given quite as much attention to. It is a line drawn from incarnation of Christ towards our Renovation.
  - 1. When the eternal Son of God takes on flesh, incarnates, He does not do it merely with a view to man's redemption, He does it also and especially with a view to man's renovation—to renew, remake, rewire, renovate him from the inside out.
- C. This line brings into view the fact that Christ is not merely our Savior, He is also our Exemplar. He is not only the Redeemer of men, He is the perfect expression of a man. He is what we are being renovated into. We are not only saved by Him, we start to look more and more like Him.
  - 1. In other words, then, the incarnation not only speaks to how men get saved by Christ, it speaks to what the church ought to be in Christ.
    - a. Because we have an incarnational Christ, we ought to be an incarnational church.

D. This is why when Paul and others are trying to tell the church what they must do, what they must look like, they often point back to the incarnation of Christ (Luk 1-2), and say: “There! You see His humility, His condescension, His emptying, His love! Christ redeemed you to renovate you, to conform you to His image. We ought to look like that!”

1. The most prominent example of this is probably Phil 2:1-11.

## The Text

“<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:1–11)

## The Basic Structure

A. The basic structure of this text will serve as the outline for this sermon.

1. Taken generally, we can divide it into two parts: (1) The Incarnational Church (vv. 1-5a); and (2) The Incarnational Christ (vv. 5b-11).
  - a. The first deals with what the church ought to be. The second deals with why the church ought to be such a thing and how we will get there.

## (1) The Incarnational Church (vv. 1-5a)

### Redemption Unto Renovation

A. As we move into v. 1 we must recognize that Paul is speaking rhetorically here.

1. The basic sense is this: Since there is “encouragement in Christ...comfort from love...participation in the Spirit...affection and sympathy”—it ought to evidence itself in the qualities that follow in vv. 2-4: we’re “of the same mind...have the same love...in full accord” (v. 2). We’re “[doing] nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility [we’re counting] others more significant than [ourselves]” (v. 3). We’re “[each looking] not only to [our] own interests, but also to the interests of others” (v. 4).

- B. We are those who have benefitted from Christ's redemptive accomplishments. [V. 1](#) connects us to the gospel and our salvation in it. We know His [encouragement](#), His [love](#), His [Spirit](#).
  - 1. But Paul turns from there towards our renovation. If you know these things, it's going to change you! If you read [Luk 1-2](#) and you know this Christ, it's going to change you! You're going to start to look like Him!
- C. I'm not going to deal with these qualities in particular here since they are all grounded in the Exemplar of our Savior which Paul takes us into next in [vv. 5b-11](#).
  - 1. But the basic sense in English, and especially in Greek is that we're going low, coming under another, to lift them up. In short, you're going to be incarnational.

## The Hinge of V. 5

- A. Before we transition to the second heading of this sermon, we ought to deal with [v. 5](#) as a whole.
- B. Here is the hinge upon which this entire text turns. Here is the link between the incarnational church and the incarnational Christ: "[Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...](#)"
  - 1. We can have the mind of Christ, because of our union with Christ.
    - a. We must never divorce renovation from redemption. When we call Him our Example, we do not mean to imply that we follow behind Him in our own strength. May it never be! We are able to follow the example of Christ only because we have the Spirit of Christ ([v. 1](#)).
- C. This is the whole burden of the Lucan corpus of [Luke-Acts](#).
  - 1. In the gospel of [Luke](#) it is Christ's life as a man. In the book of [Acts](#) it is Christ's life in men.
    - a. Here is the reason Luke opens [Acts](#) the way he does: "[In the first book \[the Gospel of Luke\], O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...](#)" ([1:1](#)).
      - i. From which we are to infer, the book of Acts is all that Jesus is continuing to do and teach, only now by His Spirit in and through His church!
- D. We can be the Incarnational Church because we have union with the Incarnational Christ by His Spirit!

## (2) The Incarnational Christ (vv. 5b-11)

- A. As we move now to look at our Exemplar, the Incarnational Christ, you will notice that these verses follow the pattern of Christ’s historical life broadly conceived: (1) Incarnation (vv. 6-7); (2) Crucifixion (v. 8); and (3) Resurrection (vv. 9-11).
  - 1. We will take these one at a time, drawing our line from the Incarnation Christ to the Incarnational Church as we go.

## (1) Incarnation (vv. 6-7)

### The Christ

- A. The two poles that hold together Paul’s thought here are given to us in the parallel language used to describe the Son: “form of God” (v. 6a) and “form of a servant” (v. 7b).

- 1. When once these two “forms” come into focus we have captured essence of Paul’s point, and with it, the essence of the incarnation itself. The incarnation is the Son’s move from “form of God” to “form of a servant.”

- B. Before we can comprehend the depth of His love and grace in the incarnation (“form of a servant”), we must comprehend the height of His glory and stature in His pre-incarnate state (“form of God”).

- 1. It might not be abundantly clear to the casual reader of Luke’s gospel, the profundity of what they are witnessing in chs. 1-2. Luke does not speak clearly of the pre-incarnate state of the Son.

- 2. But here, Paul won’t let us miss this fact: “He was in the form of God...” (v. 6a).

- a. The meaning here is that He was, in fact, God—enjoying all the glories, the riches, the rights that inherently belong to such a being.

- i. This is why He would speak of “the glory that I had with you [God] before the world existed” (John 17:5). Before there ever was a Son of God in the flesh, there was a Son of God with the Father in glory.

- C. And He left it. He left it all. For us.

- 1. In between the two poles we have two supplementary phrases that elaborate on the Son’s move from form of God to form of a servant. He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (v. 6b); and He “emptied himself” (v. 7a).

- a. He did not hold on to that which was properly His but made Himself nothing so that He might come and serve us.

- i. As we proceed in Luke’s gospel, this is all we will see. The Son of God taking on the form of a servant. Casting out demons. Healing the sick. Feeding the hungry. Sitting with the outcast. Forgiving the sinner.

D. There is really no way to conceive of the humility and love of our Lord in His incarnation. All we are left with is pathetic analogies.

1. The incarnation is like the sun surrendering its glory to become a candle that it might light the way for a man. It's like the Pacific ocean surrendering its majesty to become a glass of water that it might refresh the thirst of a man. It's like the mighty Everest surrendering its place at the top of the world to become a mere foundation slab upon which a man can build a home for his family.

a. And these analogies are nothing compared to the reality that the eternally existing and infinitely ascendant Son of God surrendered His place in glory as God to become our servant.

## The Church

A. And to the church Paul says: *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (v.5)*. Does that just take your breath away?! What might this look like in your life?

B. To find illustrations, we need only read around this text in Philippians:

1. Paul—Consider Paul's own example, which we're given just a few verses later: *v. 17: "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all."*

a. "Is my life being spent on you? Am I emptying myself for your benefit? Am I coming under to serve and lift you up? Yes, and I love it!"

2. Epaphroditus—*"<sup>25</sup> I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,<sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.<sup>27</sup> Indeed he was ill, near to death" (Phil 2:25–27)*.

a. You have to love this! "I am so sick that I'm dying, but I'm worried about you, because you've heard that I'm sick and I bet it's stressing you out."

i. When I was turning blue as Megan drove me to the hospital, was she stressed? Yes. Was I worried about it? Not exactly. But these guys are so living for others, that even their sickness is a reason to be concerned, not for themselves, but for their friends!

C. What about you? Is there an incarnational impulse in you? Do you come over those in your life as master, or do you come under as servant?

## (2) Crucifixion (v. 8)

### The Christ

- A. As we read through Luke’s gospel, illustrations of the servitude of the Son of God abound. But all of the illustrations are like little tributaries flowing downstream towards a single and lowest point of all: His death on a cross: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (v. 8).
- B. This text is a descending staircase for the Son.
  - 1. He starts in the form of God, but He steps down into humanity; but not just any humanity, He steps down further into the form of a servant; but not just any servant, He steps down further to be a suffering servant who will be obedient to the point of death; but not just any death, He steps down further to surrender Himself to death on a cross.
    - a. And all of this is for us! As B.B. Warfield so eloquently puts it: “God has reached out loving arms and gathered into His own bosom that forest of spears which otherwise had pierced ours” (p. 6). He’s dying in my place for my sin.
- C. Our focus in Luk 1-2 has been on the incarnation. But I wonder if we realize that the incarnation presupposes the crucifixion. While the crucifixion may follow the incarnation with reference to His earthly life, it precedes the incarnation with reference to His agreement with the Father.
  - 1. This is why John could write of “the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8b).
    - a. Whatever else this text means, it at least means this: The Son was sent to die. He took on flesh (incarnation) to be slain for us (crucifixion).
      - i. He didn’t come like some immigrant from another country hoping for a better life. He already had a better life than we can even conceive of with the Father in glory. No. He came to die. So that that life He so enjoyed with the Father in glory, might be enjoyed by us, sinners though we be!

## The Church

- A. And to the church Paul says: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (v. 5).
- B. Let me ask: Does our incarnation presuppose our crucifixion? In other words, are we dead? Have we died with Christ? Are we putting to death the deeds of the body? Are we trusting in His cross and taking up our own?
  - 1. You get this! What keeps us from incarnational love? From moving towards the needy person, the annoying person, the enemy, the friend, the neighbor, the spouse? Why is incarnation so hard? I love my life, I love my self. I’m still alive.

- a. Until I die to myself, until I am crucified with Christ, until I take up my cross and follow Him, until I'm dead to me, I can't live for you.
- C. We have no idea the joy we keep ourselves from because we're trying so desperately to stay alive. We're like men thrashing about on the surface of the sea, trying not to drown, trying to stay alive, one more breath, but we have no idea that, if we'd just let go, under the water, there's a world of glory awaiting us. Beyond our death is truest life.

### (3) Resurrection (vv. 9-11)

#### The Christ

- A. The Son's story doesn't end with His descent into death: "Therefore God has highly exalted him..." (v. 9a). In the resurrection the Father flips the descending staircase on its head and the way down is shown truly to have been the way up! The depths of the Son's shame become the height of His glory!
- 1. The Son could live with such reckless abandon because He trusted the Father. He knew His Father would be there for Him in the end.

#### The Church

- A. And to the church Paul says: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (v. 5).
- B. We must admit that we are often kept from incarnational love because we are fundamentally uncertain at this point: Will God really take care of me in the end?
- 1. We don't have time to concern ourselves with the needs of others when our own seem so pressing. We worry about our careers, our finances, our retirement, our relationships, our health, and on we could go. How could we possibly have time to worry for another?!
- C. But hear the words that Jesus would speak to we His anxious little sheep: "<sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33a</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail..." (Luke 12:32-33a).
- 1. Go crazy with your incarnational, crucifixional love. Because my Father has your back, and in the resurrection, you will not regret a single penny you gave to another, but O how you will bemoan all the pennies you withheld!

### O for a Thousand Lives to Live!

- A. Let me close by reading you a quote from B.B. Warfield as he reflects profoundly on this text: "He [Jesus] was led by His love for others into the world, to forget Himself in the needs of others, to sacrifice self once for all upon the altar of sympathy. Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, His followers, not away from but into

the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will be we to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them. It means forgetfulness of self in others. It means entering into every man's hopes and fears, longings and despairs: it means many-sidedness of spirit, multiform activity, multiplicity of sympathies. It means richness of development. It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives,—binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours. It means that all the experiences of men shall smite our souls and shall beat and batter these stubborn hearts of ours into fitness for their heavenly home. It is, after all, then, the path to the highest possible development, by which alone we can be made truly men...Only, when we humbly walk this path, seeking truly in it not our own things but those of others, we shall find the promise true, that he who loses his life shall find it. Only, when, like Christ, and in loving obedience to His call and example, we take no account of ourselves, but freely give ourselves to others, we shall find, each in his measure, the saying true of himself also: 'Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him.' The path of self-sacrifice is the path to glory."

- B. There's one sentence in there I want to read one more time, because it's the sentence that in ways inspired this whole sermon: "It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives,—binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours."
  - 1. Living one life is just so cliché. So boring. Everybody's doing that—Get up, worry about yourself; go to work, worry about yourself; come home, worry about yourself. One life.
    - a. We could be living thousands! But this means following after our Incarnational Christ, we must be an Incarnational Church. May Jesus grant us to be such a church in this city and world!