

**"Pressing on with the Mission"
Don't Waste Your Christmas
Philippians 2:5-11**

Introduction

- [Video] One thing that deeply concerns me, even more so than getting the facts and details of the Christmas story correct, is getting the meaning of Christmas story correct.
- Friday evening I was playing with Ethan and Micah while Miriam was here practicing with the choir. The boys have this stuffed Santa and over the last few years we've played this game where I pretend to be Santa, puppet-like, and Ethan and Micah try to beat Santa up. We're a strange family. I know.
- Anyway, at one point in the evening the game evolved into a Q&A with Santa, me, in a crazy high falsetto voice, asking the boys about Christmas and them giving their answers; it was a kind of like a Christmas catechism.
- *Santa*: Who is Christmas about? *Answer*: Jesus.
- *Santa*: In what city was Jesus born? *Answer*: Bethlehem.
- *Santa*: Why did Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth? *Answer*: A census.
- *Santa*: What is the name of Jesus' cousin who was born to Elizabeth? *Answer*: John the Baptist.
- *Santa*: What did the angel announce to the shepherds? *Answer*: A savior is born.
- *Santa*: How many wise men were present at Jesus' birth? *Answer*: None.
- This went on for ten minutes—at least. And then I hit them with the money question.
- *Santa*: Why is Jesus' birth important? *Answer*: Because Jesus saves us from our sins.
- They did pretty good. It's one thing to say "I know the Christmas story" and get the story right. It's a totally different ball of wax to say "I know what the Christmas story means" and get the meaning of the story right. As they grow, the next question they need to be able to answer is how. How is Jesus able to save? What is it about his nature that enables him to do what he does; the answer to that question get at the very heart of the meaning of the Christmas story.
- When you talk about Jesus and Christmas the most important thing has to do with Jesus' nature. Right? Who is this Jesus born in a stable? What about him makes his birth significant—something to be celebrated? In a nutshell, we waste Christmas if we don't get Jesus right. [Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **The Jesus of your Christmas must have two natures or you've wasted Christmas**
- I was doing some research this week on Christmas waste. We tend to produce 20-30 per cent more waste at Christmas than any other time during the year.

- At the end of the Christmas season 1.9 billion Christmas cards dumped into the garbage. The number of packages and cards and letters sent between Thanksgiving and Christmas—20 billion. Think of all that packaging. In 2002? 20.8 million Christmas trees cut that needed to find their way into landfills.¹
- Not that these things are bad. I'm not saying that. We send cards and packages. We cut down trees. What I am saying is this. Of all the things that can and might waste at Christmas, by far the biggest is our view of Jesus. The biggest Christmas waste of all is getting Jesus wrong.

Transition

This morning I want us to look at **Philippians 2:5-11** because this passage, more than any other passage in the New Testament shapes our understanding of Jesus and helps us not to waste Christmas. While this isn't a Christmas passage per se this passage has profound implications for how we understand the Christmas story. Listen to what is said about Jesus. **The Jesus of your Christmas must have two natures or you've wasted Christmas.**

Organizational Sentence

- **Listen for Jesus' two distinct natures**
- **Philippians 2:5-11.** *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
- If the Jesus of your Christmas, if that baby in the manger isn't the Jesus that's described here you've wasted Christmas. [Slide #3] In order for us to not waste Christmas **Jesus must be God in the fullest sense of the word.**
- [Slide #4] And he must be **human in the fullest sense of what it means to be human.** He must have these two natures united in his one person or else Christmas is wasted.

Transition

Look at **verse 6.** **Jesus is God.**

Main Points

- This whole section, starting with **verse 6**, is most likely is a very early hymn about Christ. If you have an NIV translation notice how the text is offset as poetry. Paul incorporates this hymn into his letter to make his point. Paul's point having to do with unity of the body, remember?
- Paul's train of thought goes something like this. If the circumstances in the church call for pressing on with the mission and if pressing on with the mission is impossible without unity

¹ www.uscensus.gov, "Facts and Figures" for the holiday season 2005.

and if unity is impossible without humility then what does humility look like. And the answer is Jesus.

- And so Paul quotes this hymn about the humility of Jesus and along the way, through this hymn, we get this incredible insight into what the earliest Christian believers believed about Jesus. Look at [verse 6](#). *Who, being in very nature God*. The earliest Christian believers believed that Jesus was God.
- One of the hardest things to grasp about Christianity is this distinctive teaching which is different from all the other religions of the world. Christians don't believe that Jesus was "like God" but really not. Or that Jesus spoke better than anyone the wisdom of God—which makes him special. Or that Jesus is an example of a man who realized his full potential, his divine nature and became enlightened—like a god. Christians don't believe that Jesus grew into deity—that he assumed deity at some point in his life. Nor do Christians believe Jesus to be an avatar—an appearance of god. None of those things.
- The earliest Christian believed that Jesus in his very nature was God. He was God living out a truly human form.²
- The word *nature*, [verse 6](#), literally reads *form*. Jesus was the *form of God*. It's a word that's used to describe the true, exact nature of something—the outward display, the full expression of something.³ To be in the form of God is equivalent to being God.
- Paul says this Jesus was in his very nature God. I can't help but think of the words [Hebrews 1:3](#) uses to describe Jesus when it says that [Jesus] *is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*. Or [Colossians 1:15](#), *He is the image of the invisible God*. Or [Colossians 2:9](#), *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*.
- This belief about Jesus is consistent with what Jesus says about himself during his life, right? Remember what Jesus says in John's Gospel? [John 10:30](#). *I and the Father are one*. Or Jesus' words to Philip in [John 14:9](#), *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*.
- Again, the implications for Christmas are huge. It means this baby who most definitely puked and slobbered and cried and messed his diaper—this baby was in his very nature God—the complete and full expression of what it would look like for God to become human—one of us. He must be this or Christmas is wasted.
- As with my boys, the more important question is why? Again, it's one thing to know the details, the events of the story; the more important thing is the meaning. Why is this important?
- Jesus must be fully God because "only someone who is infinite God could bear the fully penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him—any finite creature would have been incapable of bearing that penalty."⁴ Only God can save us from the predicament we're in. Only God can bring us back to himself. We can't fix what's wrong or get to him on our own. "He came to pay a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not

² Fee, p. 213.

³ Reinecker, p. 550.

⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 553.

pay.”⁵ If Jesus isn’t fully God we have no salvation and ultimately no Christianity. The Jesus of your Christmas **must be God in the fullest sense of the word or you’ve wasted Christmas.**

Transition

Which brings us to the other thing Jesus must be. “Remaining what he was, he became what he was not.” In addition to being God **he must also be human.**

- Listen again to **Philippians 2**. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!*
- Remember how just a few minutes ago we talked about the word *nature*, or *form of God*, from **verse 6**? That same word is used again in **verse 7**, *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*. To be in the form of something is a term of equivalency—equality. Jesus’ nature is that of full humanity.
- Let me just say a few words about the other phrase in **verse 7**, *He made himself nothing*. What does that mean? It doesn’t mean Jesus gave up his deity. Nor does it mean that Jesus limited himself of his divine attributes while in the flesh. Think about it like this.
- I like how **D.A. Carson** puts it. “An animal that waddles like a porcupine, has the quills of a porcupine, and in general has all the attributes of a porcupine is a porcupine. If you take away all the attributes of a porcupine, whatever you have left is not a porcupine. Likewise, if the Son is stripped of the attributes of deity, it is difficult to see how he can in any meaningful sense still claim to be deity.”⁶
- The Bible affirms that Jesus in his life on this earth is **completely and fully, totally God**. He retains all the attributes of deity. He knows everything, **John 21:17**. He’s still all powerful, **Matthew 8:26-27**, *even the winds and waves obey him*. Jesus gives up nothing in becoming human.
- That phrase, *made himself nothing* means that Jesus chose to deprive himself of his rights as God. He made himself nothing. “He became a nobody.”⁷ “Without ever abandoning who he was originally, he adopted the mode of existence of a slave.”⁸ He became human *being made in human likeness* as **verse 8** says.
- When we think of the word *likeness* we think of something that’s similar or representative; but something that is distinctly different than the original. Likeness here means “he became in all respects like other human beings.”⁹ He is fully human in every way. “Jesus is truly man, but not merely man.”¹⁰

⁵ Carson, p. 42.

⁶ Carson, p. 45.

⁷ Carson, p. 45.

⁸ Carson, p. 46.

⁹ O’Brien, p. 225.

¹⁰ O’Brien, p. 226.

- The earliest Christian believers didn't believe that Jesus, as God, appeared to people as human—but wasn't really human. They didn't believe that Jesus had a human body but not a human mind or spirit. They didn't believe that Jesus was this union of two separate persons—a human person and a divine person—and that these unions remained separate in Jesus throughout his life. They didn't believe that Jesus only had one nature—that Jesus was this weird concoction of the divine and the human and the combination of the two resulted in a new, single nature. No.
- The earliest Christians believed that Jesus was the perfect union of two distinct natures, God and human, in one person—the property of each nature being preserved but those two natures not parted or divided into two persons. Perfect in Godhead, perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man—at the same time—in one person. In all things like us but without sin.¹¹
- Why am I hammering on these things? Why are these distinctions and nuances important? Why can't we just acknowledge that these things are too difficult to understand and just leave it at that? Here's why that's insufficient. It's not only sloppy and lazy not to attempt to worship God with our minds, it's intellectual suicide. It's deadly to the Christian faith.
- If all we are content to do is affirm with the Christmas story that Jesus is God and man and say nothing more about what that means, we've wasted Christmas. We've done no better than the devout Hindu. The devout, thinking, intellectually honest Hindu nods his head in affirmation at the statement that Jesus is God and man. But in nodding yes the Hindu understands something very different about who Jesus is.
- Last I checked, we're not Hindus. Paul says here *who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*. Jesus is God made flesh—but still God. Not God trapped in flesh so that he has to be freed from it like the Hindu would say. Rather, Jesus who is himself God, purposefully, intentionally takes on flesh—for a reason.
- The glory of Christmas, the wonder of Christmas is that this Jesus, who was from all eternity God himself, *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*. In other words, “Jesus did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage.”¹² No selfish ambition on Christ's part to keep and to hold. No grasping after and clinging to his status. No exploitation of his rank as deity. None of this being dragged kicking and screaming at the thought of becoming flesh. The expression *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped* emphasizes that Jesus refused to use for his own gain the glory that he had from the beginning.¹³
- Listen to how [Moises Silva](#) puts it. “The divine and preexistent Christ did not regard the advantage of his deity as grounds to avoid the incarnation; on the contrary, he was willing to regard himself as nothing by taking on human form.”¹⁴
- The glory of Christmas is that Jesus uses his position for our advantage—not his. “The eternal son did not think of his status as God as something that gave him the opportunity to get and get and get. Instead, his very status as God meant he had nothing to prove, nothing to

¹¹ Taken from Chalcedonian Creed 451 AD.

¹² O'Brien, p. 215.

¹³ O'Brien, p. 216.

¹⁴ Silva, p. 99.

achieve. And precisely because he is one with God, one with this kind of God, he ‘made himself nothing’ and gave and gave and gave.”¹⁵

- He gave of himself to the point of death. [Verse 8](#). *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
- Which brings us full circle. It’s one thing to know the story—the details, the events, the facts and to affirm those facts. It’s another thing to know the meaning of the story. Why in the world in this thing called the Christian story does God die on cross? Was he weak? Did he goof up? And with regard to who Jesus is, why say that Christmas is wasted if Jesus isn’t fully man?
- If Jesus had not been a man, in every sense of what it means to be human, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty that was due to us.¹⁶ The cross is no accident. It’s intentional. Purposeful. Willful. Because we are alienated from God by sin we need someone like us to be our substitute. But he must be more than us otherwise he’s no help either. Jesus accomplishes this. [Hebrews 2:17](#). *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*
- You’ve wasted your Christmas if in any way Jesus’ humanity is compromised. [1 John 4](#) reminds us how we can *recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.*¹⁷ For the Christian story to work Jesus must be fully God and fully human. For the cross to work both natures are necessary. For the Christmas story to mean anything more than just the routine birth of a baby boy under some slightly unusual circumstances Jesus must have two natures.

Conclusion

- [A.W. Tozer](#) once said, “Christ came to bring peace and we celebrate his coming by making peace impossible for six weeks of each year He came to help the poor and we heap gifts upon those who do not need them.”¹⁸
- What you and I need, more than anything else this Christmas, more than a new pair of socks or a tie or a kitchen utensil, more than the altruistic goal of being generous to those in need, what we need is to recognize our spiritual poverty before God. We have nothing to offer. He’s offered everything. We have nothing to give. He gave everything. What we need is a Savior who in our spiritual poverty heaps upon us Christmas riches unspeakable. What we need is Jesus. Whatever you do don’t waste your Christmas.

¹⁵ Carson, p. 45.

¹⁶ Grudem, p. 540.

¹⁷ 1 John 4:2-3.

¹⁸ A.W. Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit* (Wingspread Publishers, 1993).