



Sermon Transcript November 28, 2021

Advent 2021 Journey to the Heart of Jesus The Goodness of God Philippians 2:5-11; Exodus 34:6-9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 28, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so 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.

Exodus 34:6-9

⁶ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. ⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ And he said, If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.

Introduction

When I think of Christmas, I think of road trips. When our kids were younger, Christmas always included a road trip to Pennsylvania. One year it would be to my parents and the next year to Bonnie's parents. These annual road trips were part of what made Christmas special to us. Family . . . Food . . . Rest . . . Good memories. They are memories of home. They are warm memories. They are memories that evoke a smile. They are memories that rest deep in my heart.

Have you ever noticed how the story of Christmas is a story of road trips? There is the road trip Joseph and Mary take to Bethlehem. There is the somewhat brief road trip the shepherds took to see *the baby lying in the manger*. And then there is the rather long road trip made by the Magi from the east. Traveling over hundreds of miles, it was a road trip spanning over several months. I can imagine this road trip evoked the question we often heard coming from the back seat of our road trips to Pennsylvania, "Are we there yet?"

Christmas is a story of road trips. But the most significant "road trip" of Christmas is the "road trip" Jesus made from heaven to earth . . . from earth to the cross . . . from the cross to the grave . . . from the grave to the eternal throne. Philippians 2:5-11 outlines each stop of this road trip for us. *Jesus was in the form of God . . . being born in the likeness of men . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross . . . Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.*" This is the road trip we are going to take this Advent Season.

But there is one more stop to this road trip and it is an important stop. In fact, one could argue that this is the place of destination, the place of arrival. This is home, if you will. Much like our road trips home on Christmas, the trip Jesus made was meant to land and arrive deep within your heart. The heart is the center of our being. I think of the chorus in the *Christmas Carol* that goes like this:

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring him a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him; give him my heart.*

Terry Yount says, "Nothing else will be enough. No other response even approaches the right recognition of God's gracious work of redemption."¹ We humbly give Jesus

our hearts, the core of our being. And yet, I wonder, where your heart is this Advent Season? Has it run cold? Is it a hardened heart? Do you carry a heart of grief this season? Is it a lonely heart . . . a fearful heart . . . a discouraged heart . . . a defeated heart? The road trip of the past two years has been a hard and difficult trip. The road trip of 2020-2021 has been a road trip with quite a bit of car trouble . . . a few flat tires . . . terrible traffic . . . running out of gas . . . arguments and fighting in the car . . . the kinds of things that can spoil a trip . . . they can take the heart out of it.

And so, perhaps you begin your road trip through this Advent Season a little weary . . . in need of Jesus to meet you again at the center of your being, your heart of hearts. I know I need it. I need this road trip. What better way to reengage our hearts in worship and trust and hope and belief and joy than to trace the journey of Jesus that starts in heaven . . . comes to earth . . . lands in a grave . . . only to rise again three days later and to be seated at the center of the universe as Lord of all.

The Form of God

This morning we begin our Advent road trip at the starting point. In Philippians 2:6 we see where this journey of Jesus began. Here it says of Jesus, *“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”* This journey begins in the heavenly realm with Jesus existing *in the form of God*. It starts with the “glory of Jesus.” Unlike you and me, his journey does not begin with a birth date. The journey of Jesus does not begin in the stable or in the manger. Prior to his road trip to earth, he existed *in the form of God*. Bishop Fulton Sheen said that Jesus was the only person in the world who ever had a “prehistory.”²

The testimony of the Bible is that Jesus was present “in the beginning.” We read in John 1, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* Here John echoes the opening words of the Bible. The Old Testament opens by proclaiming, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Then John says of Jesus in John 1:3, *“all things were made through him.”* R. C. Sproul said of Jesus from this passage, “John says, ‘The One I’m going to tell you about, the One in whom there is life, the One in whom I want you to believe, is the One who created you in the first place. Nothing was made apart from him.’”³ Jesus said in Revelation 22:13, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”* Furthermore, when Jesus confessed to the people of Israel that *“before Abraham was born, I am,”* he was confessing that He was the self-existent and eternal God. Jesus has no beginning. Rather, He is the beginning of all things.

This is what Paul was confessing to be true of Jesus when he said that Jesus “*existed in the form of God*”? Actually, the NIV translates this thought very well and captures the essence of what Paul is saying here. In the NIV we read, “*Who being in the very nature God . . .*” It is a term that speaks to His deity. When we are saying that Jesus existed in the form of God, we are saying that Jesus is God. And yet, at the same time, when you hear Jesus praying in John 17:4-5, you get the sense that there was something glory Jesus had before *he was born in the likeness of men* that He was longing to receive again. He prayed to the Father, “*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*”

I want us to consider this morning the glory of Jesus. This is the starting point. Jesus possesses an inner glory that He never relinquished. And yet, there was an outer glory that He laid aside. But perhaps the most overwhelming and humbling thought of all is the glory he wants to share with you and me, with those who “give him their heart.”

The Inner Glory of Jesus

First of all, let’s consider this inner glory of Jesus. This is the primary concern of the passage. When we speak of Jesus having existed in the “form of God,” the tendency is to automatically think of the outer form in which Jesus existed. To simplify the tension for you this morning, I think, when we hear of the “form of God,” we are tempted to wonder about what the outer appearance of Jesus was like before He became a man. What did He look like? What form or shape did He take before becoming a man? But that is not the focus of what Paul is saying when he says that Jesus existed in the “form of God.” It is not a statement so much about His outward appearance as it is of His inner qualities. This is why I think the NIV has captured the point of the passage when it says of Jesus that in His very nature He was God. It speaks first to the inner glory of Jesus.

Lets think about that phrase a little bit this morning. It is a phrase we hear so often, but we have trouble pinning down a concise definition of it if asked. What is the glory of God? What are we talking about when we talk about the glory of Jesus? When we speak of the glory of Jesus, or the glory of God, we are not so much talking about another one of His attributes. For example, a listing of the attributes of God would include His holiness, His omnipotence or omnipresence. We speak of God never changing, being just and righteous. The attributes of God are words that describe God’s qualities. They are what make God, God. But the glory of God takes all of these attributes and recognizes that God is worthy of honor and praise because of who He is. He is worthy

of glory and praise because of His attributes. Wayne Grudem puts it this way. “The glory of God is not an attribute of his being but rather describes the superlative honor that should be given to God by everything in the universe.”⁴

And yet, at the same time, just like the heart is the core of our being, the “glory of God” is describing the core and center of God’s being, the very cause of our worship. It is a description of who God is and what God is like. I discovered something recently about God’s glory that strikes a note in my heart . . . it is something that hits home and causes my heart to respond in wonder and in worship. I discovered this with a group of guys I meet with weekly, reading through Dane Ortland’s book *Gentle and Lowly*.

In Exodus 33, Moses asks to see the glory of God. God responds by telling Moses that he will grant him this request, but he describes his glory in a way that catches you off guard. He says to Moses, “*I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name.*” I think the word I would readily use to describe the glory of God would be his *greatness*. But when God thinks of his glory, the very thing that marks the core of his being, he alludes to his *goodness*. And sure enough, when he passes by Moses he announces himself: “*The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.*”

I like the way Dane Ortland summarizes this. “When we speak of God’s glory, we are speaking of . . . what makes God, God. And when God himself sets the terms on what his glory is, he surprises us into wonder. Our deepest instincts expect him to be thundering, gavel swinging, judgement relishing. We expect the bent of God’s heart to be retribution to our waywardness. And then Exodus 34 taps us on the shoulder and stops us in our tracks. The bent of God’s heart is mercy. His glory is his goodness. His glory is his lowliness.”⁵ Psalm 138:5-6 adds, “*Great is the glory of the LORD. For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly.*” What was the response of Moses to the goodness of God? In the very next verse it says, “*And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.*” He gave God the glory due his name, a fitting response to the goodness of God.

Therefore, when we say that Jesus existed in the “form of God,” we are recognizing the glory of Jesus who is worthy of worship and praise because He possesses all the attributes of deity. Whatever is true of God, is true of Jesus. He existed in the “form of

God.” By His very nature He is God. This is His glory. You must know, when He became a man, He did not cease to be in the form of God. He did not lay aside one ounce of His deity when He took on humanity. In fact, Jesus too announced his goodness to us when he invited us to come to him. *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”* Why would we come to Jesus? He reminds us of his goodness, the essence of his glory . . . *“I am gentle and lowly in heart.”* This is the inner glory of Jesus.

The Outer Glory of Jesus

Now having said this, there is an “outer glory” of God. In the Bible, the glory of God is often equated with a bright light that surrounds God’s presence. We know from 1 Timothy 6:16, that *God dwells in unapproachable light*. In Psalm 104:2, we read of God that He *“wraps himself in light as with a garment.”* We see this glory of God at the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds for it says, *“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”* At the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was, once again, temporarily clothed with an outer glory. His *“clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”*

God has chosen the display of brilliant light as a means of revealing His excellencies and the nature of His glory. The light itself is not God. The light is rather something God created as a means of revealing Himself to us. Remember, God is invisible. Grudem says it well when he writes, “The greatness of God’s being is something that we can never fully comprehend, but before which we can only stand in awe and worship. Thus, it is appropriate that the visible manifestation of God be such that we would be unable to gaze fully upon it, and that it would be so bright that it would call forth both real delight and deep awe from us when we behold it only in part.”⁶ We are told that no one can see God and live. That is how bright the outward glory of God is. Moses was only allowed to get a glimpse of the back of the glory of God. It is a visible demonstration of the greatness of God and His attributes; and it speaks to the wonder and the grandeur of God. *“He dwells in unapproachable light”* because He Himself is incomprehensible.

When we say that Jesus existed in the form of God and was by very nature God, we recognize that it was His right, as God, to hold on to this outward manifestation of the glory of God. It was His right to dwell in unapproachable light. But this is what He laid aside when He took on humanity. This is what our passage is referring to when it says that Jesus *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*. Why did Jesus

lay aside the outward manifestation of His glory? Boice writes, had He not “it would have made it impossible for human beings to approach him.”⁷ Therefore, when Jesus became a man, He veiled His glory. He did not cease being God, but He veiled His deity behind human flesh.

Now, I want you to think about this with me this morning. If the unapproachable light is the outer glory of God that reveals the excellencies of His perfection and speaks to the wonder of His being, what then does Jesus, cloaking Himself in humanity, reveal to us about the Father? Does this mean then, that in his humanity, Jesus was no longer revealing the glory of God? We know that is not true, because in the Gospel of John we are told, *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

In fact, here is the sheer wonder of it all. If the glory of God is summed up with the goodness of God, then you could argue that the glory of God was most seen on this earth, not through glorious light, but through the cross. That is how Jesus described going to the cross. He said in John 12, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”* How so? When Jesus became a man and set aside this outer glory of God, He revealed to us perfect love. It did not cheapen His perfections. Rather it revealed His perfections to us. The goodness of God, the glory of God, was most on display in that the Son of God gave his life so that we can be forgiven and so that we can know God.

That is so contrary to how we think about “glory.” We often think that glory and suffering are incompatible. I wonder what the “road trip” of your life is like right now. Suffering is inevitable and unavoidable. Surrounded by cancer, mental illness, infertility, depression, loss, and ultimately death, we ask how God's glory could shine through such tragic circumstances. For most of us, glory and suffering seem incompatible, just like something cannot be simultaneously hot and cold, wet and dry. But Christ's journey from glory . . . to the cradle . . . to the cross . . . to the grave . . . to the throne reveals a pattern that is stitched throughout the fabric of Scripture. For Christ, Christians, and all creation, the way of glory is the way of the cross. In setting aside his outer glory, Jesus paved the way to reveal to us the glory—the goodness—of God. That is what fills our hearts with wonder and worship. And it gives us hope in our own suffering.

A Shared Glory

It is pretty amazing this morning to spend some time thinking on the glory of Jesus. His inner glory points to His deity which He never set aside. His outer glory speaks of the

right to exist in brilliant light so that His internal perfections may be seen by the eye and thus evoke the proper worship He is due. We could stop here and be satisfied to gaze upon the beauty of Jesus. But I want to share with you one more thought that is rather humbling and quite amazing. It is the heart of Jesus to share His glory with us.

Listen to what Paul wrote about us in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Here he wrote, *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* Paul says we are being transformed into the goodness and likeness of Jesus with *“ever-increasing glory.”* Others have translated that phrase this way—We are all being *“changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.”*

When you come to faith in Jesus, God begins the process of changing you. It is a change that begins on the inside of us and people can see it by our actions. Grudem observes, “Though we do not now find ourselves surrounded by a visible light, there is a brightness, a splendor, or a beauty about the manner of life of a person who deeply loves God, and it is often evident to those around such a person.”⁸ So, when someone who knew your past says to you, “You have changed. There is something different about you.” Give praise to God, for that is evidence that Jesus is sharing His glory with you. He is changing you from one degree of glory to another. Praise God!

But that is not all. He also shares with us that outer form of glory. Think of Luke’s account of the Mount of Transfiguration? Sure, Jesus was transfigured and you could see the bright light of His glory. But standing with Him were Moses and Elijah. Luke tells us that they too appeared in glorious splendor. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, we are told, *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”* What that spiritual body will look like, I am not sure. I do believe, that part of what God has prepared for us has to do with sharing this outer glory with us as we are transformed into the image of Jesus, our brother, who joyfully shares what is rightfully His with us who do not deserve it.

God is incredibly good to us! Imagine, when Jesus came to this earth, He did not just come to save us from our sin, as wonderful as that may be. Rather, He came to restore to our minds and our hearts a sense of wonder for the glory of God. He revealed God to us. But in doing this, He went even further and shared His glory with us. Why? For His love and for His glory. Praise be to God!

Conclusion

As we begin our Advent road trip, let us be captivated with the one *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*. Be captivated with his glory and his goodness. Make sure you see where his glory and goodness were most on display. Let it bring you to the cross. Do you need to come to the cross this morning? It may be your first time. Come! He is *gentle and lowly*. He stands ready to forgive. Has your “road trip” been a difficult one lately? Come! Let him assure you that your suffering is not incompatible with the glory of Christ. In fact, it is in this very spot that his glory is most able to shine as you walk by faith and trust in the one who is changing you and will some day bring you home. Be filled with the wonder of it all. Be in awe with the goodness of God.

¹Terry Yount “Give Him My Heart” *Tabletalk* (Ligonier, December 2021) 24

²Bishop Fulton Sheen *The Life of Christ* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958) 19

³R.C. Sproul *John: St. Andrew Commentary* (Lake Mary: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009)
Kindle Location 128

⁴Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 220

⁵Dane Ortland *Gentle and Lowly* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020) 147

⁶Grudem, 221

⁷James Boice *An Expositional Commentary: Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) 135

⁸Grudem, 221

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What is one thing you are looking forward to this Christmas season. Why?
2. How do you use Advent to prepare your heart for Christ?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Philippians 2:5-11. What is the example of Jesus for us and how does it help us consider the needs of others? (see vs. 5 - What is the attitude we should have towards others?)
4. Read Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:6-7.
If asked, how would you be most inclined to describe God to others? What would be the first thing out of your mouth?

How does God describe himself? What is the first thing out of his mouth?
Does that surprise you? How do you find that to be encouraging?
5. Compare 1 Timothy 6:16 to John 12:23. How does God reveal his glory in each of these verses? What encouragement do you gain from knowing that the cross revealed the glory of God? How does that transform your own suffering?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. How do you see the glory of the work of Christ in each other? Encourage one another with how you see Jesus shining through your lives.

Taking It Home

7. Spend time giving glory and praise to God for one thing you heard in your study.
8. What do you want to do the first week of Advent to keep your focus on Christ?