The Mission of Incarnation

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[0:00] Well, so far in our series on the mission of God, we've been looking at the fact that God has come to redeem the world. We've seen that God pronounces himself the only true God, that he comes to redeem people, that he comes to redeem everything, the cosmos, and that he does it through redeemers in the Old Testament.

Through priests, through prophets, through kings, through mediators, there's been tons of redeemers so far in covenant history in the Old Testament.
But at a certain point in history, God stopped sending redeemers because he became one. And that's Philippians chapter 2.
That's what it's all about. It's all here. God the Son became human. He took on servant form. He went low all the way to the point of death, but God exalted him, resurrected him, made him king overall to redeem the world.
It's all here. This is the mission of God. This is the central sermon of the mission of God's series. This is the mission of incarnation. This is incarnation.
[1:07] What's incarnation? Incarnation is to become in fleshed. God become material human being. And it's the central event of all of history.

John Calvin, the famous Reformation Theologian, said that this mystery exceeds all human understanding. It can't be explained. How can God become man?
I don't know. But we're given it as fact. Philippians 2, 1-11 is a sermon in some ways, in and of itself.
It's got all the elements of a good sermon. What is a good sermon? Here, I'm giving you the criteria by which to evaluate this morning. What is a good sermon? A good sermon gives you a theology. In other words, it tells you something you need to know about God.
And then after that, it tells you an ethic. What do you need to do in response to what you've learned about God? And this passage is laid out exactly that way. Verses 5-11, 6-11 tell you what you need to know.
[2:07] It tells you you need to know that Jesus is truly God and Jesus is truly human. And then in verses 1-4, it tells you why that matters to you, what you need to do.

And the answer is you need to think, love, and act like Jesus does, according to his mindset, his incarnational mindset. So there it is.
My job here is done. No, we're going to unpack it a little bit. But there it is. It's all there. We're going to look briefly at these two claims, these two theological claims, in verses 6-8 especially.
And within that, we'll look at two aspects of the Christian mind. What that means for the Christian mind. The two claims are this, Jesus is God and Jesus is human. Jesus is God and Jesus is human.
So first, Jesus is God. Now, the text, I've already said the text teaches that Jesus is the God-man. And you know, it's worth knowing where the outline comes from.
[3:08] Jesus is truly God, truly human. I'm drawing the outline from one of the oldest confessions in our church history of this idea that Jesus is the God-man.

From the Council of Calcedon, they wrote a symbol of Calcedon in 451. And this is what they wrote. We then teach all to confess, one in the same, the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same, He is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly human.
Our church believes that. We confess that with the old councils, with the church of all ages, with the church all over the world. We confess that. Now, where did they get it?
Where did the council get the idea that Jesus is truly God? And Philippians 2, 6 to 8 was a central text for them. And today, to see this claim, to see that this claim is in the text, we have to be

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grammarians.
So we have to step back into our early secondary school grammar. Computer turned off. Secondary school grammar. We have to be grammarians. And it's so important to get it, because it's so important to get this text exactly right.
[4:21] Exactly right, because there's huge things at stake to seeing exactly what the text says about Jesus' identity. So Jesus is fully God. If you come with me to verse 6, it says, who, though he was in, who, though he was in, in the form of God.

While he was in the form of God, or who was in the form of God. Now there's two things to address here about this little phrase. Who was in the form of God.
First of all, it says, he who was in the form of God. Now you might be tempted to think, because that's a past tense verb, that it sounds like it's saying Jesus was in the form of God, past tense, but he's not anymore.
But that's not exactly what the text is saying here. You see, here's our early secondary school grammar. This verb is a present participle.
What does that mean? It means that in English it's an I-N-G verb, like John is running, John is swimming, right? It's a present participle.
[5:26] That means it's an ongoing I-N-G verb action. In other words, simply, it's the word being. In other words, it's not he was but being in the form of God.

Present tense, you see. It's not that he was in the form of God, but being in the form of God. He is the form of God. So that's the first thing. It's not past its present tense.
He is the form of God. The second thing is the little phrase, the form of God. This little phrase, form of God is an old translation.
The KJV uses it, and so we brought it forward. But the word form means something different to us than it did in Old English and in Greek, the original language of the New Testament, right?
So what does the word form mean for us now, today? If I say something is in the form of something, what does that mean? It means that it appears a particular way.
[6:23] Its outer shell, its husk has taken a certain shape, right? So in other words, if you take water, water can appear to us in three different forms, right?

So now we're going back to our early chemistry class. It can be a solid. It can be a liquid. It can be a gas. It has three forms or three states, as they would say.
But all the while, no matter which one of those forms it is, at its core, it's always hydrogen dioxide. It's always H2O. The molecules don't change.
They just speed up or slow down to change the outer appearance, the form. That's the way we use the word form. Now the Greek idea of this word that we translate form is the complete opposite. Complete opposite. When they use the word form, they're talking about the H2O, not the solid liquid gas. They're not talking about what appears to be the case.
[7:22] They're talking about the true core, what something really is. It's utmost being. It's true nature. So in other words, the NIV nails it.

The NIV says it this way. He being the very nature of God. He being the very nature of God.
You see, he wasn't God and then became not God. He is God and he is the very nature of God. In other words, at his essence, Jesus Christ, at his essence, he is God.
That's the claim that's being made. Why is this important? Why is it so important for us to draw out these little grammatical details out of the text?
Well, there are two problems to address about this. One is the academic problem or the scholarly problem. It's not just a scholarly problem because if you read any books on the New York Times bestseller list about Jesus, then you'll have encountered this problem.
[8:23] One of the most recent is Philip Pullmans. If you've seen that, the author of the Golden Compass Trilogy, The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ.

At the back of his book is a problem that a lot of scholars will say, and that's this, that no one in the first century, around the time Jesus died and resurrected, no one believed that Jesus was God then.
The way that the confession that we read earlier from 451 came about, that Jesus is God was laid, it started off as a legend. That legend grew and it grew and it grew and it grew.
By the second century, people were saying, Jesus is God, but nobody that actually hung around Jesus actually thought that. That's a very standard view of the way the New Testament came about

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and the way the legend of Jesus as God came about.
It was a second century development, 100 years or more after Jesus. You can't see it in the English, but they should have printed it like this in our English Bibles.
[9:31] But in the Greek, the Greek Bible, verse 6 to 11 is typeset differently than the rest of the text. It's typeset like a poem.

In other words, if you look at it, it looks like you're reading a hymn. Most scholars would say that's because this is a hymn. Verse 6 to 11, this confession about Jesus is an early hymn.
It's an early creed, it's an early confession. It was floating around the Mediterranean. People were singing it in the churches. Why is that so significant? It's significant because of this.
Paul is quoting it. This isn't original to Paul. He's quoting an early song that was being sung in the early church. This letter, we think, was written as early as 15 to 20 years after Jesus' death.
You know what that means? You know what that means? It means during the time of eyewitness testimony people still being alive in and around Jerusalem, in and around the Mediterranean, people in all the churches were singing a song that said Jesus Christ is truly God.
[10:45] What does that mean? It means that you can't say that this was a legend that developed in the second century. Within 15 years, this had revolutionized the entire world.

Philippi is a long, long way from Jerusalem. And there's no internet. This song had traveled. It was all over the place. The confession, Jesus Christ is truly God, it was all over the place.
So no matter what you think about Jesus, who you think he is, you have to wrestle with the fact that the claim that he was God revolutionized the world within at least 15 years of the fact of his death. No one else had ever done anything like this. There had been tons of teachers, tons of rabbis, even tons of people that had claimed to be the Messiah, but no one had turned the Mediterranean, the entirety of Europe, upside down like this in 15 years, you see.
The second reason that getting this claim right is so important is because of a cultural problem today. It's very common to suggest, you've all heard this, it's very common to suggest that Jesus is a likable guy.
[11:56] Jesus is a swell fellow and everybody loves, everybody likes Jesus, right? I mean, they like his teaching, you know, they like his moral examples, they like his parables, we use them all the time in pop culture, everybody likes Jesus.

But the problem with that is if this passage is just saying, if Paul is saying, no, Jesus Christ is God and that's what he claimed to be, you see, what's not available to you is to simply like him, is to simply think he's a swell fellow.
That's not an option because he's extreme. He claimed to be God, he's extreme. You see what's being demanded?
An extreme statement like that demands an extreme response. It's an all in sort of a thing. It's an all, no matter what you think about Jesus, you don't have the option to say he's a swell fellow, he's a likable guy.
He wasn't a likable. He ran people out of the temple with a whip. He came and said that my message will divide family member from family member.
[13:05] He preached a message of judgment alongside a message of resurrection. He made extreme claims and they all depended on the fact that he really is God.

You know, this brings us back to C.S. Lewis's very famous, well critiqued, but very famous Trilemma. Lewis in one of his early BBC addresses put it this way.
I'm trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.
He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make a choice, you see.
[14:03] Either this man wasn't as the son of God, or else he's a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet, and you can call him Lord and God.

Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He's not left that option open for us.

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Paul is being very clear here. Jesus Christ, the claim is, he is the very nature of God. Now, this gives us the application, the ethic that Paul is giving us with this fact that he's claiming that Jesus is God.
He's giving us, in this first point, two aspects of mindset, two ways it says in verse 5, to think like Jesus thinks. You see, if you look with me at verse 2, complete my joy, Paul says, by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
That little phrase, being of full accord and of one mind, that's the ethic he's saying. I want you all, based on this confession, to be of full accord and of one mind. A better way to say that is it literally says, everyone be of one soul, or of one heart, and of one intellect about this.
[15:23] You see what he's saying? He's making a heart claim and a truth claim. He's saying, based on this confession, I want you all to be of one heart about something and of one mind about something.

Right? But what does he want you to be of one mind about? What does he want the church to be of one mind about, based on this? Well, about the truth claim. Simply about the truth claim. He's simply saying, you need to be the church.
Christianity depends on us being of one mind about this singular confession that Jesus Christ is God. And without it, he's saying we don't have the Christian religion.
He's saying you must be of one mind about this particular truth claim. Alec Moyer, a very famous and excellent biblical scholar, puts it this way.
Paul is emphasizing in this text a unison of minds, of the same mind, of one mind literally. Think the same thing, think the one thing. The priority task is agreement on the truth that Jesus is the very nature of God.
[16:33] Now that's the first mindset he's asking, the mindset of truth. The second mindset that he wants us, based off this confession that Jesus is God, is the mindset of redemption.

What redemption is on offer here in this passage? What kind of a salvation is Jesus offering in this passage? That's the question. And if you look at verse one, it's immense.
Look at verse one of me. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort for love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy. Now very subtly in the first verse, the type of redemption that Paul has just told us he's talking about is a redemption that's if you are in Christ Jesus and you are participant in the Spirit.
In other words, what he's introduced is the dizzying doctrine of the Trinity. He said the redemption I'm talking about, what I'm talking about with Jesus being this God, man, the redemption that's on offer is a Trinitarian redemption.
We could put it this way. God the Father sends the Son, this is the mission. The Son redeems through death. The Spirit unites people in the Son to share in his life.
[17:56] And Muayyar again puts it this way. With Christ, with the words Christ, love and Spirit, indeed the concluding phrase, the fellowship of the Spirit, Paul has set us to thinking about the Trinity.

May it not be therefore that Paul is reminding the Philippians here of the great Trinitarian activity of salvation whereby they are in Christ, the experience of the Father's love and the fact that we have been woven into a fellowship with which the Holy Spirit is the author and the dweller.
Look here's the point. He wants you to realize something about redemption. That redemption is Trinitarian, that it's an action of the whole of God, God, Father, Son and Spirit.
And you know what that means? You know what that means? Salvation is not simply Jesus came and died for your sins.
That's true, but that's only one side of it. It's much bigger than that. Jesus didn't come just to die for your sins, but he came to die for your life.
[18:59] You see? In other words, the promise in this passage is that if Jesus is truly God, what's on offer here is a salvation where you participate in the Trinitarian life of God.

Now that's a massive difference than just Jesus died for sins. It's Jesus died for sins and resurrected for your participation in the life of God himself.
Now if that's a new idea, you have to let that sink over and you have to give that idea some time and look throughout the New Testament for it. It might not come all today and that's okay.
You see why it's so important to say that Jesus is truly God? Why is it so essential? Because only a Redeemer who is truly God can offer a salvation of participation in the life of God.

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See, the salvation on offer to you is participation in the life of God. It's to be, it's to share an eternal life with God. And only a Redeemer who is God can offer such a God-like salvation to us.
[20:11] All right, so that's the first thing. Jesus is God. Jesus is truly God. The second and final thing. Jesus is fully, truly human.

Now if we go back again to verse 6, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.
Now there's two things again to say about this. It says that who, he, who was the very nature of God, being the very nature of God, did not count equality with God.
And here's the verb, a thing to be grasped. Now what does that sound like to our very 21st century English years? It sounds like Jesus was on a corporate quest to climb the ladder.
He did not consider being equal status with God, something to be grasped out for and taken hold of. It sounds as if Jesus was not God and he was trying to climb up in the ranks until he finally could grasp hold of God's equality and be like God.
[21:21] But a better way to say this is that he did not account equality with God an advantage to hold on to. You see the difference? It's not that he's reaching out and trying to grasp being like God.

It's saying that he did not account for himself an advantage to hold on to being like God. It's not an advantage that he wanted to hold on to. You see, this is the implication.
What that means is when it says that he did not account equality and advantage to be held on to, equality is a status. It's the status of kingship. That's what it's saying.
It's the status of kingship. In other words, when he empties himself, what is he emptying himself of? He's not emptying himself of the fact that he's God. He's emptying himself of his status as king.
You see the contrast in the passage? He is God, but he did not consider holding on to his status of creator king, something to hold on to. He made himself nothing. He emptied himself by what?
[22:25] Taking on a new status. And what's that new status? It says the form or the nature of a servant, the servant humanity.

So what's being contrasted here is not that he used to be God and when he became human he's not anymore, but it's saying that he is God and he is human and the transition is from his state of being king to his state of being servant.
You see? That's the transition that he's made. An old professor of mine used to say that this is addition by subtraction. This is the mathematical formula of addition by subtraction.
In other words, he added a human nature. Jesus, who is the nature of God, added a human nature, but while he was adding a human nature he was subtracting a status.
He was moving from creator king to lowly servant. You see? Addition of a human nature means subtraction unto servanthood.
[23:29] He is truly God and he is truly man, truly human. Now this has two huge implications for our mindset today, the mindset that Paul wants us to see.

And the first is this. It's the fact that Jesus Christ is a human means that Jesus Christ is material flesh. Jesus Christ is material flesh.
He's a human being. He's embodied. Why is it so important? Paul pronounces in our incarnation that he didn't just come to save your soul.
He came to save your embodiment. He came to save material reality too. In our tradition we don't simply believe that Jesus became man, but that he stayed a man.
Do you know that? We believe that Jesus cried. We believe the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ right now is a man. He's in space time somewhere.
[24:34] He occupies a space even now. He remains a man, a human being forever and ever into eternity.

You know what this means? This means that matter matters to him. Matter matters to him.
In the incarnation, at the point of incarnation, God pronounces a judgment on humanity. And the judgment is we are not worthy.
We are not good enough. We could not redeem ourselves. But we have to say more than that. We have to say more. And what is the more that we have to say? The more we have to say is that at the very same time as the incarnation is a pronouncement of our judgment that we're judged.
It's also a pronouncement of affirmation, of love, you see. It's the pronouncement, yes, you're judged, but God so loved the world that he would come for you.

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[25:35] It's an affirmation that God cares enough about us to save the world, to save the material, to save all of who we are as embodied spirits.

Everything about us. He cared enough. It's not the pronouncement that you're a worthless worm. It's the pronouncement that he loves you so much. He thinks you're worth so much that he came to save every aspect of who you are.
He came to save you not just from your soul's condemnation because of sin, but from your back pain.
From every element that comes upon you as an embodied person. Christianity is the only religion in the world that at its center has a material physical redeemer like this.
It's the only religion that has huge implications for caring about this space-time reality, you see. You aren't saved to be in disembodied spiritual being.
[26:36] You aren't saved to float above the clouds with wings. You've been saved for a material existence with Jesus Christ. Now you see, you see, what's the nature of redemption?

The nature of redemption is that Jesus comes to save you to share in the very trinitarian life of God. Now how can an embodied person share in the trinitarian life of God when God is a spirit by the fact that Jesus is not only God, but also man, you see.
That that salvation in the life of God is a salvation with a human person. You're going to eat breakfast with him, you see.
You're going to drink wine at his table, not as a symbol, not as a metaphor. This is a fact. It's not a symbol.
We all feel the weight of the material curse from Genesis chapter 3 on this embodied world. If you're a homemaker or not, I mean everybody has a responsibility to take care of the place they live in, to take care of their flat or their house.
[27:50] We spend our whole lives fighting the dirt and the dust. We do that because of the pronouncement of Genesis 3, from dust you came into dust, you shall return, God sets dust against us.

He sets the nature against us in the curse. It's not working for us any longer, it's fighting against us. We spend our whole lives fighting it. You spend your whole life vacuuming dirt and dust out of your carpet and washing it down your sink.
Well, that's what I do. I get in trouble apparently. You spend your whole life fighting the dust, fighting the dust from which you came, you see.
The material world that was made for you to serve us. We spend our whole lives fighting it because of the curse. And then what do you get for fighting it your whole life? You get put six feet under it, six feet under the dirt.
And then the dirt takes you, the dust takes you and it makes you part of itself. Jesus didn't come to free you from the dust, from the dirt.
[28:52] He came to put the dirt back in its place. He came to restore good embodied existence with a good material creation where the dust no longer rules over your vacuum or your body in the grave.

You see. Jesus is fully human. And what does that mean? It means he came to save all of you. Everything about you, you see.
But this also means that he knows what it's like to be you. He knows what it's like to be tempted. He knows what it's like to pray and have his prayer be answered with a no that happened to him.
He knows what it's like to have back pain. He knows what it's like to suffer as those kids on that video we saw are suffering. This is why it's so important to say Jesus is God and Jesus is human, you see.
Now finally, the final mindset briefly and we'll be done. And this is the most important. Why does it matter to say that Jesus is truly human? Well the mindset that Paul most wants us to take home with us today is the mindset that he adopts of servanthood.
[30:01] In other words, in this passage something amazing happens. If you do any type of scholarship, if you're a historian, which there are a number of you in here that actually are, you know that you're told never psychologize about history.

So when you're writing history and studying it and researching it, you never want to say what was that guy thinking and then write it down as if you have access to his mind. You just deal with the facts. You be as objective as possible.

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But in this passage we have access to the very psychology of God. We're being brought up into the decision life of God. You see what Paul is saying is this is Christ's mind and you need to think like him.
You're being offered a glimpse, a revelational glimpse in this passage of how God thinks. It's unlike anything else. It's something that we can never produce in our own historical research.
And here's how he thinks. It's in verse 7. He considered it no advantage to be held, to be a king, but he took on the nature of a servant. He went from king to servant.
[31:04] And in verse 3 to 4 there's the parallel for us. Have this mindset amongst yourselves, people, of humility, no rivalry, not seeking your vain glory, of thinking others better than yourself.

This is the incarnational mindset. Now briefly the word for servant in this passage is the little Greek word doulos. And in doulos in the land of Philippi where this letter is written, that meant something, very particular.
Context matters here because of the reader's experience. One commentator says this. In the Roman colony of Philippi society was shaped by rank and prestige and position.
A social pecking order was extremely important in climbing the social ladder was how one got on in the world in Philippi. It was a miniature Rome. They planted it to be that way. Julius Caesar planted it to be that way.
The root from which Paul draws this term for humility here is used in Philippi to describe the mentality of those at the very bottom of the social ladder.
[32:08] It was used to describe a slave's mindset. It evoked images of someone shabby, someone begging with no account. In Philippi this word for humility was not a virtue like it's being used here.

It was a liability. This kind of humility was a liability where we do not look out for our own interests but we seek to serve others.
The mindset of Christ, the mindset of God here is being presented as something that was the opposite of virtue in Philippi. In Philippi this mindset of servanthood was a social liability.
Not unlike our own culture. The word is selfish ambition. Selfish ambition was a social virtue and for Jesus it was a social liability.
Now there's two brief dangers. One is you might listen to this passage and think it's saying, count others more significant than yourself which means count yourself not very significant.
[33:12] That's not what he's saying. That's not what he's saying. It's not think less about yourself but think of yourself less.

That's the mindset? Don't think less about yourself. Jesus was secure in his identity. He was God. It's not saying think less of yourself but think less about yourself.
You see? And the second thing is the Christian mindset that's on offer here is not one that is ambition less. The difference in Jesus' virtue of humility, servanthood, slave likeness in the Philippians virtue of self ambition is not that one is ambitions and one is not.
It's that the objects of ambition are entirely different. The Christian mindset has ambitions to be sure but they're much bigger ambitions than the selfish ambition ever could be.
The selfish ambition just wants to climb the corporate ladder and wants to do political power plays. What's on offer here is the Christian mindset is an ambition that's much bigger than that.
[34:24] What's the ambition? Cosmic redemption to change the whole world. It's a huge ambition. You see it's not that he's saying get rid of your ambitions.

It's that he's asking what's the object of your ambitions? What's the object of your ambitions? Are they small? Is it just about you? That's small time stuff.
What's on offer is a huge ambition to participate in the life of God to change the cosmos to redeem everything material spiritual existence.
We'll close with an illustration. One commentator writes a story about that Ken Hughes tells the famous conductor. Ken Hughes tells the story of a conductor of a symphony orchestra who was once asked what is the most significant instrument to play and he responded second violin.
I can find plenty of people who want to play first violin but no one wants to play second violin with any enthusiasm. That's a problem. And if we have no second violin we have no harmony.
[35:30] And Paul is saying to us here in these verses second violin is not something I want you to settle for it's something I want you to make your ambition.

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For when we take second place for the sake of others we have accomplished the grander ambition of harmony. We make a beautiful sound that glorifies God and reaches the world.
And yet it's true that if we have this kind of humility it's going to cost. It's going to mean the death of your pride and it's going to be hard. And Lewis puts it this way in the weight of glory.
It would seem that our Lord finds our ambitions not too strong but too weak. We are half hearted creatures fooling about with small time ambitions when infinite joy is being offered to us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.
You see you are far too easily pleased with your selfish ambitions. The mission of our incarnation that's at the center of all of history is that God became man for the explosive cosmos altering reality that humans beings can fully share in the very eternity in life of God.
[36:50] And this ambition is the purpose of your existence. You put away small ambitions for the sake of the promise of never ending joys.

This is what it means to think like Jesus, to think incarnationally. Let's pray together. Father we ask that you now would remove our selfishness and that you would point us to the fact of Jesus the God man to see what it means to be redeemed and how to act, how to think, how to love.
We ask that you would make us people like this, like Jesus Christ, with his mind and his heart. I will ask you this in his name. Amen.

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