

Text: Phil. 2:1-13

Title: "Imitating the mindset of Christmas"

Time: 12/11/2022

Place: NBBC

Introduction: A couple of years ago I had the privilege of seeing the last Christmas chapel of Trinity Christian School that my daughter Kara would participate in. The presentation I enjoyed the most that morning was a readers' theatre presentation that asked the question, "Why a manger?" They noted that the manger of Bethlehem into which Christ was born was undoubtedly a cold, dark, and dirty place for a child to be born. So why was Christ laid in a manger? Why was there no room at the inn? Why did they have to go to the barn? Why was He born in such a small town like Bethlehem, which had so little capacity for lodging its guests from out of town?

Well, one Bible answer to the question, "Why a manger?" can be found in our passage this morning. In verse 7 Paul describes our Lord's Christmas birth this way: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." That word *servant* is the New Testament term for a *bond-slave*, the lowest class of servant in the ancient Greek world. When the Luke passage tells us that there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn of Bethlehem, we can be sure that it was not because the inn was crowded with a lot of bond-slaves staying there. No; there was never any room for bond-slaves in that inn, room or no room.

So the humble circumstances of Christ's birth help us to understand that the Son of God became a bond-slave on that first Christmas day. But our passage is clear that Paul refers to this truth because we are called to imitate what He did on that day (v. 5).

Just as Jesus was called to be God's bond-slave on Christmas, so also every Christian is called to be a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:1). What kind of a bond-slave will we be on Christmas morning? One key to fulfilling the calling we have to be our Lord's bond-slave is to let the mindset He demonstrated on Christmas rule our lives. I have titled the message this morning, "The mindset of Christmas," and I want us to learn three things from the example we have in the Christmas mindset of Christ as the bond-slave of God to make us better bond-slaves for Him.

I. The mindset of Christmas focuses on others, not self (vv. 1-5).

Illustration: I will not soon forget one Rose Meadow service when I asked the group that had assembled, "What is the theme of Halloween?" Someone responded, "Being scared." Then I asked everyone what the theme of Christmas was, and someone else said, "Love."

Application: Well, those are good answers. Paul refers to Christmas in this passage because He wants church members to love and care for one another more than they love and care for themselves (2:1-5). What Christ did on that first Christmas day, He did for the church, not for Himself: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).

When Mary laid Jesus in the manger, it was the beginning of Christ giving Himself to the church in love. This is what bond-slaves of Christ do. This is what their mindset causes them to do. It is the mindset of Christmas, and it is a concern for the interests, needs, and care of other church members, and not of self.

So much of what we are called to be and do as a local church challenges our hearts at this very point. Even attending our assembly times challenges us this way. It would be easy for me to stay home for selfish reasons, but difficult to stay home for the sake of other church members. At times, we do have to stay home in order to adequately care for others. But so often when we neglect an assembly time, our focus is on our own interests and not those of our church family. The mindset of Christmas is a concern for church members, and not for self.

II. The mindset of Christmas demonstrates humility, not pride (vv. 6-8a).

Illustration: B. B. Warfield was the professor of didactic and polemic theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887-1921 during an age that saw the rise of liberalism and a strictly naturalistic approach to religion. He was a great defender of the faith.

In one of the better-known sermons on this passage called "Imitating the Incarnation," Warfield had this to say about the words *form of God*: "No others could be chosen which would more explicitly or with more directness assert the deity of the person who is here designated by the name of Christ Jesus."

We might come to a different conclusion as English-speaking readers reading the phrase *form of God*. In English, we know examples in which something may have the form of a thing but not really be that thing. We might say that a car that has been in a serious wreck has taken on the form of an accordion or pancake knowing all the while that the car is still a car, not an accordion or a pancake. And so

someone might try to tell us that Christ had the form of God, but He was not really God.

But when Paul speaks of Christ as *the form of God*, he is using a language that was conditioned by Aristotle to think of reality in two categories: matter and form. Warfield explains it this way: "'Form,' in a word, is equivalent to our phrase 'specific character.' If we may illustrate great things by small, we may say, in this manner of speech, that the 'matter' of a sword, for instance, is steel, while its 'form' is that whole body of characterizing qualities which distinguish a sword from all other pieces of steel, and which, therefore, make this particular piece of steel distinctively a sword. In this case, these are, of course, largely matters of shape and contour. But now the steel itself, which constitutes the matter of the sword, has also its 'matter' and its 'form': its 'mater' being metal, and its 'form' being the whole body of qualities that distinguish steel from other metals, and make this metal steel. . . . So too, with God: the 'matter' of God is bare spiritual substance, and the 'form' is that body of qualities which distinguish Him from all other spiritual beings, which constitute Him God, and without which He would not be God. What Paul asserts then, when he says that Christ Jesus existed in the 'form of God,' is that He had all those characterizing qualities which make God God, the presence of which constitutes God, and in the absence of which God does not exist. He who is 'in the form of God,' is God" (*Person and Work of Christ*, 566-567).

Application: And so this passage teaches that the One who was the very God in charge of this universe became a bond-slave.

The phrase *made himself of no reputation* literally means *emptied Himself*, and it is the New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament's truth that the Messiah would pour Himself

out (Isa. 53:12, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”)

The phrase before that tells us that he *thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. The idea here is that he did not try to seize equality with God illegitimately, and it likely refers to His temptation, when Satan offered all the kingdoms of the world to Him. In this way, Jesus Christ was very different from Adam, who yielded to the desire to seize God-status, “You shall be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Now when it comes to our nature, we have these things in reverse. It might have been written of us, “Who being the form of sinful man constantly tries to seize the rightful position of God.” We are naturally proud, not humble. We do not like to humble ourselves and be told what to do any more than we want to live for others and not for self. If our first problem is selfishness, our second is pride. Yet we are called to be completely different from this – we are called to have a concern for humility, not for pride. We should desire to be told what to do that we might be better bond-slaves for Christ.

III. The mindset of Christmas seeks obedience, not comfort (vv. 8b-13).

Illustration: Did you notice Paul’s words at the end of verse 8, “even death on a cross.” I think that this phrase likely sent chills up the spines of these Philippian believers in a way that it does not for us who are so far removed from this brutal form of execution. Crucifixion was a brutal way to die. Remember that we get our English word *excruating* from this form of torture.

Application: The obedience of Christ accomplished atonement for the sinner. Paul speaks of an obedience *unto death* or leading up to death, and then he emphasizes the death itself as an act of obedience, *even death on a cross*. Bible students have two names for these two aspects of the obedience of Christ, which were necessary for us to have a Savior who could save us from our sin.

There is what we call *the active obedience of Christ*, the obedience leading up to His death, by which in thought and motive and word and deed, Jesus lived a perfectly sinless and pure life in complete conformity to the law of God. That law requires that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. This Jesus did perfectly – it was His active obedience; it was necessary so that He did not have to die for His own sins; and it is the righteous record that is imputed to our account before the law of holy God when we call on Him in faith to be our Savior.

And then there is the obedience of Christ's death itself. We call it His *passive obedience*. He obediently endured the penalty due the one who violates the law of God – death, which is separation from God the Father. Jesus cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" The answer was, "Because you have Kevin Hobi's sins on you, and I can no longer stand to be with you – I must pour out my wrath upon you." It is this passive obedience, enduring the wrath of God for my sin in my place, which makes Christ the propitiation for my sins when I receive Him as my Savior. Do we see this morning that Jesus the bondslave was obedient to win salvation for us from our sins?

But Paul has another purpose in referring to the obedience of Christ in this passage. He wants us to obey God's will for

us the way that Christ obeyed God's will for Him (v. 12). The result of our individual obedience is not our personal salvation from sin – that is the result of Christ's obedience. Rather, our obedience results in a salvation of a different kind. Our obedience as believers is necessary for the corporate victory we need as a church over the persecutions of our common enemies who would destroy our testimony. It is the salvation mentioned in Phil. 1:27-30 (see 1:19).

When Paul says that we must obey to work out our salvation, he means working out our victory as a body of believers in the face of this conflict that all believers have in this world of sin. Your obedience will determine my victory, for we are members of the same body. We obey to work out our common victory over the enemy as Christ's church. We encourage one another to live in a manner unalarmed by our opponent. Does your obedience to Christ advance or your disobedience hinder the church's victory over its enemy in this great day of conflict? The mindset of Christmas seeks obedience, not comfort.

Conclusion: As we conclude our thoughts about the mindset of Christmas, I want to go back to that question my daughter and her friends raised in her program. A manger is cold, and dark, and dirty, so why a manger?

They offered a wonderful answer – they said, "Jesus was born into a cold, dark, dirty manger because that is the kind of place where Jesus always brings new birth." The heart of man is like a manger – it is cold without the love of God; it is dark without the light of His truth; and it is dirty with the filth of the sinner's sin. But Jesus stands at the door of a heart like that and is ready to come in and give a new birth.

The promise of salvation is “If any man opens, I will come in,” no matter the cold, no matter the dark, no matter the dirt. Jesus is ready to come into the manger of our hearts. Will our Christmas season know the true joy and new birth of having let Him in? And if He is there as our Savior, will we seek to allow His Christmas mindset to rule our lives? Will we serve others of the body of Christ or self? Will we be humble or proud? Will we obey or seek our own comfort? Our day is in desperate need of believers who have the mindset of Christmas.

For the obedient bond-slave of the Lord, there is a promise that begins with “Wherefore” (vv. 9-11)! For us the same promise reads this way: “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:5-7).

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching