

Incarnation Shows Divine Humility

Not a thing to be grasped: the humble God and the throne of grace

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 11, 2022
PASSAGES	Philippians 2:1-11; Isaiah 45:22-23; Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 4:15-16; Matthew 11:28-30
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:08:04 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Christ did not appear glowing above Jerusalem demanding worship; he became a baby. Philippians 2 says he was truly God and did not treat his equality with God as something to exploit for his own benefit, but emptied himself by becoming truly human, even to death on a cross. That humility is part of who God is — and it is why we can come to him boldly, weak and tempted, without cleaning ourselves up first.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Spiritual disciplines and God's mercy go together: we love because he first loved us, grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness, and kindness leads us to repentance.
- ◆ The incarnation reveals divine humility: Jesus was nursed, went through puberty, and suffered temptation and weakness like us.
- ◆ "Same mind" in Paul's letter does not mean a statistical median of opinions; it means the mind of Christ.
- ◆ "A thing to be grasped" means something you already have and could exploit. Jesus did not use his divinity for his own advantage, but for ours.
- ◆ "He emptied himself" does not mean he stopped being God; it means he took the form of a servant.

- ◆ Every knee bowing to Jesus fulfils what God swore of himself through Isaiah. He was never for a moment not divine.
- ◆ Because our high priest has been tempted as we are, the worst moments are exactly when we should draw near to the throne of grace.

► 1:08:04

On the third Sunday of Advent, Matt began by revisiting his recent invitation to wage spiritual combat in the Lord's grace. It grew, he reminded the church, out of his own story: unable to stop compulsively checking the news, he asked a sister in Christ to share anything God gave her, and she called back thirty minutes later — *be careful not to look at things that don't shine with God's glory*. It was not new information, "but there was grace in it, and it blasted it off me."

Victory by grace

► 1:10:19

He sensed it was an invitation for everyone: choose an area — repentance, unforgiveness — and let God's grace set you free. "It's not too late." And one victory has led to others, because God's grace is not "unlimited and stingy." When did Jesus cast out a demon and then hand over an invoice — "that'll be twenty shekels"? "He longs for victory for your life maybe more than you do."

► 1:11:34

But wasn't he mocking "do better" as the cry of dead religion just last week? Yes — and these go together. What are the best spiritual disciplines? Prayer, worship, repentance, generosity, loving people authentically. Yet we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19); his grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness (Titus 2:11–12); his kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). God wants us to walk in victory through a greater capacity, by the Spirit, "to drink deep of his love, to sense his grace and to know his kindness." ("Just pretend this is a really good transition.")

A humble God

► 1:13:16

Last week, the incarnation proved God's commitment: he does not start what he will not finish. It also shows he is truly humble. "He didn't just appear as a fully grown man, glowing, floating above Jerusalem, shouting, 'Worship me, do it now.' He became a baby. He let a woman breastfeed him. He

went through puberty. He suffered temptation and weakness like we do.” Philippians is centred on humility, and Christ is its greatest example.

► 1:14:22

“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 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 the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11 ↗

► 1:15:45

“Same mind” does not mean taking a poll and finding a median — “statistics words, out of my affection for Evan” — but being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) to the mind of Christ. Paul’s point in verse 5: let this be your mindset, the one that was in Christ Jesus.

The professor’s students

► 1:16:52

Matt was reading his Bible in a coffee shop when a stranger asked if he was a Christian. The man was a professor teaching a history of religions class, and his students flatly refused to believe that Christians think Jesus is God. Would Matt, as a favour, come and tell them? “Yes, I will do that. When do we start?” Sure enough, they thought Jesus was a demigod adopted into deity or something separate. If you already think that, you can twist this passage to fit, “but the truth is, this passage says the opposite.”

“Form of God,” “form of a servant”

► 1:18:34

He took the form of a servant: he became genuinely human, born of a woman, living, eating and dying, skipping none of the human experience. And he was in the form of God: “God truly, authentically, utterly, not leaving anything out.” “Equality with God” simply restates “form of God.”

► 1:19:36

The tricky phrase is “a thing to be grasped.” It might sound like something he lacked and longed for — as if he humbly declined to claim divinity. “That’s not what Paul’s saying at all.” It is one Greek word, used only here in the New Testament, so Matt went looking in other Greek literature.

► 1:20:34

In the ancient Greek novel the *Aethiopica*, a scheming servant trying to bring two people together sees their both being at the temple as “a thing to be grasped” — not something she wishes were so, but a real situation at hand to exploit. Later she tells a young man not to pass up a woman who yearns for him: here it is, seize it. A fourth-century bishop says a servant made a son will not go back to menial work, because he regards his sonship as a thing to be grasped — something he has and can take advantage of.

► 1:22:32

So Paul is saying Jesus did not consider his divinity something to exploit for his own benefit. Every example Paul gives the Philippians — himself in chains, Epaphroditus and others — lays aside something rightfully theirs for the gospel. It would make no sense for the central example to refuse something that was never his. “Would it be humble for me to say, ‘You know what, guys, I’m not a millionaire?’ It wouldn’t, because I’m not.” Or to stand in a Tesla factory boasting that you won’t just take a car. “It’s not humble, sir, and if you do you’ll be arrested.”

► 1:24:18

Instead he exploited his divinity for *our* benefit, by truly becoming man. And “he emptied himself” does not mean he ceased to be God. Paul defines it in the same sentence: “by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,” and humbling himself to death on a cross.

Every knee

► 1:25:24

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Compare what God says of himself:

► 1:26:01

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’”

ISAIAH 45:22–23 ↗

How is that fulfilled? By every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. “Not for one moment in his life was he not divine.”

Two lessons

► 1:26:39

First, as Paul urged the Philippians, follow his example. If he refused to exploit his divinity, we should not exploit our tiny earthly titles. What privileges do we demand? Not political rights — protecting the weak and poor from tyranny is right — but the craving to be recognised: “I’m a big deal, don’t you remember what I did?” The Spirit can speak to us about that.

► 1:28:08

Second, and more important, it shapes how we see him. God the Son could have come with lightning and heavy metal, shooting fire from his hands. Instead he chose to be born weak and helpless to a poor family who had to flee, did what his parents asked, and was surely mocked. When people said he had a demon (John 8:48), he did not answer with laser eyes. “He let people think what they thought, say what they say, and murder him.”

A merciful high priest

► 1:29:37

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery... Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

HEBREWS 2:14–18 ↗

► 1:30:57

We think, *I’m in a rough patch and tempted; I should clean that up, and then he’ll receive me warmly.* “This is not that at all.” He knows hunger, weakness and mockery, and went through it all so that, uniting himself to fallen humanity, he might unite us to God. “Jesus Christ is our reconciliation... our perfect prayer... our forty-day fast... our propitiation... our righteousness... our purity and our holiness.” He

stooped so low “so that he could redeem from the bottom up. Do you fall somewhere between the bottom and the top? I have good news for you: you’re pre-qualified.”

► 1:32:29

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. It is easy to feel free to talk to him when things are going well. But if you have made a big mistake, “or two or five,” that is precisely when you most need to know you can approach him boldly. “No, you don’t have to clean yourself up first.”

Gentle and lowly

► 1:33:53

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

MATTHEW 11:28–30 ↗

► 1:34:41

That includes religious people striving to earn the love, affection and forgiveness he already gave before we were born. And the narrow road? “It is way too hard to walk the narrow path alone, but he made it, defined it, and already walked it, and invites you to join in that victory” — by breaking his body and inviting you into it.

► 1:36:02

It sounds preposterous. Matt’s bucket-list goal is to preach the gospel so that people accuse him, as they accused Paul, of saying you can just do whatever you want. What is preposterous is that the victory, intimacy, presence and fire we try to buy by logging hours are already in Jesus, who drew near to us. Every religious muscle resists it — “I’ll pay him back, I’ll shout Hillsong in my closet if I have to” — but Jesus was found among tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10–13). Today, Matt suspects, he would speak fluent redneck. Whoever you avoid, “Jesus probably would” seek them — rich fancy people included.

► 1:37:54

So pray, without a shade of embarrassment, for the Spirit’s power to teach us to drink deep of his love and enjoy intimacy with Jesus. “He’s not stingy. He’s not living hand to mouth in heaven... He’s not stuck up, he’s humble. He wants you to enjoy intimacy with him. That’s why he made you.”

► 1:39:26

With the church standing, Matt appealed to Jesus, who baptises with the Holy Spirit and fire ([Matthew 3:11](#)), to pour out his Spirit “to give us capacity to enjoy you” — then caught himself, repenting of praying as though God had not already done it: “Give us eyes to see and ears to hear what you’ve already done for us, the mystery hidden for ages, finally revealed in Christ.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [1 John 4:19](#)
- [Titus 2:11–12](#)
- [Romans 2:4](#)
- [Philippians 2:1–11](#)
- [Romans 12:2](#)
- [Isaiah 45:22–23](#)
- [John 8:48](#)
- [Hebrews 2:14–18](#)
- [Hebrews 4:15–16](#)
- [Matthew 11:28–30](#)
- [Matthew 9:10–13](#)
- [Matthew 3:11](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said spiritual disciplines and God's mercy go together. How has God's kindness, rather than pressure, moved you toward change?
2. What strikes you most about the humility of the incarnation — the infancy, the ordinary years, the mockery, the cross?
3. Jesus did not exploit his divinity for his own benefit. What "titles" or recognition are you tempted to insist on?
4. When you have failed, what keeps you from drawing near to the throne of grace, and how does Hebrews 4:15–16 answer it?
5. How will you take Jesus up on his invitation to the weary, "Come to me," this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZwmodqzPkY&t=4084s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.