

STOOPING DOWN TO LIFT UP

I. Romans 15:1-7, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Psalm 113:4-7, Philippians 2:3-5

A. How many of you have ever failed miserably at something? How many of you have ever been kicked when you were down? Was there ever a time when you messed up terribly only to have someone come, climb down into your mess, just to help you up and out of it? Do you have a more favorable view of the one who lifted you up than the one who kicked you when you were down? God calls us to be among those who enter into the messes of others in order to lift them up. (Quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

B. We've been exploring the Incarnation and how the notion of God becoming a man might actually be something we embrace in principle. Last Sunday I closed with 2 Cor. 8:9: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."* (NKJV)

- 1) You realize Jesus wasn't a celestial billionaire who came to make us wealthy by this world's standards? God the Son did not leave the glories of heaven to come to earth, be born in a stable, work as a carpenter, and be crucified on a cross, in order to make you tycoons. (Jesus: *"Pick up your cross and follow Me..."*)
- 2) Psalm 113:4-7; Quote by Max Lucado...

C. Romans 15:1-3 Our hearts and actions towards the weak...

- 1) V1-2 *"We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."* (cf Phil. 2:3-5) e.g. OSU QB J.T. Barrett and Michigan QB Devin Gardner.
- 2) V3 *"For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.'" (Ps. 69:9) Christ suffered on the cross at the hands of men who disdained who God truly was. He was taunted, cursed, and insulted throughout His crucifixion by Jewish leaders, Roman soldiers, and the thieves executed beside Him. He endured this suffering for you and me...*
- 3) God stooped down to place His Son in a manger and Jesus stooped as well, loving, serving, washing feet, and finally dying for our miserable failings on a cross!

D. Romans 15:4-7 Living and serving in harmony glorifies God...

- 1) V4-6 *"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- 2) Ever wonder why you were born, why you occupy this rock, the answer's here: *To glorify God.* You were created for this purpose and you've been saved for this purpose--to glorify God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism reads as follows: Q1. *What is the chief end of man? A: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.*
- 3) V7 *"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."* (Welcome: Gk *proslambano*: *"Take to oneself"* OV - Receive, accept, open your hearts to...)

E. Just as Christ coming to us--purchasing our ransom, taking us to Himself, welcoming us into sweet holy fellowship--glorifies God, we do likewise when we stoop to love, leaving what's comfortable to render comfort, bearing the failings of the weak, picking up those who've fallen, building up those who've been torn down, humbling ourselves to minister to *the least of these*. How many of you believe this glorifies God? What does a church family growing in Christlike maturity look like? It looks like this!

* Close with quote by Charles Swindoll and Prayer...

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

Romans 15:1-7 (ESV)

1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (NKJV)

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Psalms 113:4-7 (NLT)

4 For the Lord is high above the nations; His glory is higher than the heavens. **5** Who can be compared with the Lord our God, who is enthroned on high? **6** He stoops to look down on heaven and on earth. **7** He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump.

Philippians 2:3-5 (ESV)

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...

Quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"The Incarnation is the ultimate reason why the service of God cannot be divorced from the service of man."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Quote by Max Lucado

"Let Him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let Him in can He pull us out."

Westminster Shorter Catechism - Question One

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

- The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a catechism written in 1646 and 1647 by the Westminster Assembly, a synod of English and Scottish theologians and laymen with the purpose of educating children and others "of weaker capacity" in the Reformed faith.

Quote by Charles Swindoll

"Some gifts you can give this Christmas are beyond monetary value: Mend a quarrel, dismiss suspicion, tell someone, "I love you." Give something away--anonymously. Forgive someone who has treated you wrong. Turn away wrath with a soft answer. Visit someone in a nursing home. Apologize if you were wrong. Be especially kind to someone with whom you work. Give as God gave to you in Christ, without obligation, or announcement, or reservation, or hypocrisy."

- Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong*, p.p. 400-401.

Film Clips & Other Links

God Became Man To Die - John Piper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD6RDsINMkA>

The Christmas Scale - Igniter Media

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNDtHdG5mVk>

"Babe in the Straw" - Caedmon's Call

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=490qjameQlc>

"A Strange Way To Save World" - Rascal Flatts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQA0mkeKnJo>

Michigan QB Devin Gardner Consoles OSU QB J.T. Barrett Following Injury

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XY9fpoUKJEg>

Bonus Stuff

Theological Note - Romans 15:5-7

The Roman church was a diverse community. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, rich and poor, strong and weak. So it was difficult for them to accept one another. Accepting means taking people into our homes as well as into our hearts, sharing meals and activities, and avoiding racial and economic discrimination. We must go out of our way to avoid favoritism. Consciously spend time greeting those you normally don't talk to, minimize differences, and seek common ground for fellowship. In this way you are accepting others as Christ accepted you, and God is given glory.

- Theological note, Romans 15:5-7, Live Application Study Bible, Tyndale, p. 2509.

Quote by Athanasius

"He became what we are that He might make us what He is."

Quote by Martin Luther

"The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding."

Quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"And in the Incarnation the whole human race recovers the dignity of the image of God. Henceforth, any attack even on the least of men is an attack on Christ, who took the form of man, and in His own Person restored the image of God in all that bears a human form. Through fellowship and communion with the incarnate Lord, we recover our true humanity, and at the same time we are delivered from that individualism which is the consequence of sin, and retrieve our solidarity with the whole human race. By being partakers of Christ incarnate, we are partakers in the whole humanity which He bore. We now know that we have been taken up and borne in the humanity of Jesus, and therefore that new nature we now enjoy means that we too must bear the sins and sorrows of others. The incarnate Lord makes His followers the brothers of all mankind."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"Lying at your feet is your dog. Imagine, for the moment, that your dog and every dog is in deep distress. Some of us love dogs very much. If it would help all the dogs in the world to become like men, would you be willing to become a dog? Would you put down your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, hobbies, your art and literature and music, and choose instead of the intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into the beloved's face and wagging your tail, unable to smile or speak? Christ by becoming man limited the thing which to Him was the most precious thing in the world; his unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father. "

- C.S. Lewis, Radio Address excerpt.

An Invitation to Touch the Skin of Infinite God

by Charles R. Swindoll

<http://www.insight.org/resources/articles/theology/touch-the-skin.html?l=jesus>

Childbirth is something no man can completely appreciate. We can marvel as an observer—a helpless one at that—but we cannot experience it as a woman would. My wife tells me, "I cannot completely describe the feeling that came over me as the doctor held up Curt, cut the cord, and then laid him right across my tummy. As he stretched out, I reached down and felt him and thought, How incredible! This little life came from us!"

Childbirth is enough of a miracle on its own, but this time of year adds a completely new dimension. Long ago in a quiet, crude place where animals sleep, Mary reached down and felt the Life from her body—she reached down and felt the soft, human skin of infinite God.

The humanity of this scene appropriately pulls us in for a closer look. We can identify with Joseph's confusion, Mary's wonder, and the irony of God's quiet arrival in such an inhospitable world . . . all of those thoughts are magnificent to ponder. But we cannot stop there. These are only an entrance to wonders far deeper, far more significant. Just beneath the soft, newborn skin of this beautiful story is the flesh and bone of a theological truth that is older than creation, since the plan was in place long before time began.

The incarnation—God becoming flesh—is a doctrine that is foundational to everything we believe as Christians. Most conservative scholars see with 20/20 hindsight the hint of Christ's birth in [Genesis 3:15](#). Speaking to the serpent in Eden, God said:

"I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Much later, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words centuries before God became man:

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." ([Isaiah 7:14](#))

In telling the story of God's incarnation, the disciple Matthew tells us this:

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." ([Matthew 1:20-23](#))

When the first man plunged all of humanity into sin with his disobedience in the Garden of Eden, evil entered the bloodstream of humanity, polluting all who live in it. And each of us has ratified Adam's tragic choice by adding our sin to his. The result is a world subject to pain of every conceivable kind: hunger, thirst, sorrow, weariness, temptation, disease, prejudice, grief . . . the list would be endless if it didn't end with the ultimate evil: death.

Many struggle with the idea of God because they wrestle against "the problem of pain"— How can a good God allow evil to continue? The surprising answer: because He loves us. He could have ended all evil before the fruit of the forbidden tree digested in Adam's stomach. Let's not forget that the evil we would have God put an end to includes you and me. We brought, and continue to bring, evil upon ourselves and the world, and He would be entirely justified to condemn us to suffer the twisted mess we have made of His creation. But . . . He loves us.

What an awful predicament. God must punish sin. The penalty of sin is eternal death. But to carry out the sentence, God loses the very people He loves. Just as one man led all of humanity into rebellion, another must reconcile us. But who? Who among us does not deserve the penalty of sin? And if one sinless person could be found, what mere mortal would have the power to die the death you and I deserve, yet survive the process so that He could continue to represent us? Why, only a human who is also God could do that!

Two millennia ago, God answered the anguished cry of humanity by making "the problem of evil" His own. God Almighty became Immanuel, "God with us." He lived as we live, suffered as we suffer, died as we die, yet without sin. And He, being the God-man, overcame the power of death in order to give us eternal life.

The plan is complete. Remember Jesus's words on the cross? "It is finished!" ([John 19:30](#)). Mission accomplished. Nothing left for God to do, except allow His creation time to respond. He patiently waits . . . but time is running out. He will not wait forever. He will one day close the door of opportunity, either by your own physical death or by bringing all earthly history to an end.

As you ponder the humanity of the first Christmas, remember that it is an invitation to slow down and think deeper. I invite you to touch the infant skin of the God-man with your imagination. I invite you to wonder as the shepherds wondered and to worship as the wise men did. I invite you to allow the God-man, Jesus, to take your own "problem of pain" and make it His. If you can accept my invitation, you will receive the greatest Christmas present on earth: God's indescribable gift.

- Taken from Charles R. Swindoll, *"An Invitation to Touch the Skin of Infinite God,"* Insights (December 2005): 1-2. Copyright © 2005.