

# The “Inconvenience” of the Incarnation

An Inconvenient Christmas – Part 3

Philippians 2:6-8; Hebrews 2:17-18; Matthew 26:36-44

December 17, 2023

In our culture, convenience is a high value. When we’re asked to attend or to help at something, the first question that rushes into our consideration is “How convenient is this?” One can’t help read the Christmas story and realize that every character was greatly “inconvenienced!”

## **DAY 1: God becomes a human being**

*Philippians 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

1. Paul describes the descent of Jesus Christ from the pre-existent Son of God down to Him becoming a human being.
2. The imagery Paul uses to describe this descent reminds me of a time when we were in a hotel on the seventh floor. One night the fire alarm went off. Over the hotel’s loud speakers, we were instructed not to use the elevator, but to use the staircase found at the end of the hall. As we began our descent toward the first floor, we would descend about a dozen steps in one direction and then a dozen steps down in the opposite direction to a landing. Each floor had a landing.
3. Philippians 2:6-8 has a similar structure of “landings” in the descent of Jesus from the “seventh floor” (heaven) all the way down to the “foyer” (his death). List each of His “landings” noted in our verses.
4. The starting place is the deity of Jesus. To begin His descent toward becoming a human being required laying aside His right to be treated as God. How hard is it to lay aside your right to be treated as you wish?
5. What do you think Paul means by “He made Himself nothing...”?
6. He took upon Himself the identity of servant. Is that the image that comes to mind when you think about yourself?
7. J.I. Packer summed up this passage with these thoughts. There was a “voluntary restraint of power; an acceptance of hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice, and misunderstanding; finally a death that involved such agony—spiritual more than physical—that his mind nearly broke under the prospect of it. It meant love to the uttermost for unlovely men....” – J.I. Packer

**DAY 2: He was “made like us in every respect...to make expiation for our sins”**

*Hebrews 2:17 (RSV) Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.*

1. He was “made like us in every respect.”

2. The writer of Hebrews gives several reasons for this.

*... so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest ...*

a. What does it mean that He became a “merciful...high priest?”

b. What does it mean that He “*became a faithful high priest?*”

c. What strikes you about Jesus becoming a merciful and faithful high priest “*in the service of God*”?

d. What does it mean that Jesus made “*expiation for the sins of the people?*”

Expiation and propitiation are terms used to describe different aspects of what is involved in Jesus making atonement for our sins. “The two terms have somewhat different meanings and are sometimes placed in opposition to each other by theologians, though it is also possible to see them as complementary. Expiation speaks of the process by which sins are nullified or covered. Propitiation, taking a personal object, speaks of the appeasement of an offended party—specifically the Christian God—from wrath or anger. Expiation falls under the concept of propitiation. In Scripture it cannot exist without propitiation.”

3. It is rather staggering to consider that Jesus needed to become a human being in order to make atonement for our sins!

4. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

### **DAY 3: He understands what we go through in our temptations**

*Hebrews 2:18 (RSV) For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.*

*Matthew 4:1 (RSV) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.*

*<sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."*

1. What strikes you about this first temptation of Jesus?

*<sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

2. What strikes you about His answer to temptation?

*<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"*

3. What strikes you about this second temptation of Jesus?

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*

4. What strikes you about His answer to temptation?

*<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."*

5. What strikes you about this third temptation of Jesus?

*<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.*

6. What strikes you about His answer to temptation?

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

## **DAY 4: He understands what we go through in our difficulties**

*Hebrews 2:17 (RSV) Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect...*

1. When difficulty comes knocking at your door, it is very easy to slide into despondency. “I get so tired of problems.” You can carry that sense of despondency for a long time. What snaps us out of it? Usually, it’s talking with someone who has been through what you’re facing.

2. Have you been abandoned? So has He.

*Matthew 26:56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

3. Do you know what it’s like to be “dirt poor?” So does He.

*Luke 9:58 Foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*

4. Do you know what it’s like to feel like God is a million miles away? So does He.

*Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

5. Do you know what it’s like to be at death’s door? So does He. (In fact, He voluntarily walked through it!)

6. Have you had big prayers remain unanswered? So has He.

7. Someone, He understands every one of these maladies. Comfort, strengthen, keep going...

*Psalms 34:18 (RSV) The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.*

*Hebrews 4:15 (RSV) For we have not 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.*

8. Sometimes I get quite discouraged with my “progress” in Christlikeness. The proverbial “three steps forward, two steps back” is often how my growth in Christ seems. During this past year, this verse has helped me to not get despondent over my very slow growth. Why? Because Jesus understands and sympathizes with what it means to be human!

9. This provides powerful comfort in despondency, and picks me up to keep moving forward.

10. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

## DAY 5: We gladly surrender to a surrendered Jesus

1. Jesus experienced the dark night of the soul in the Garden of Gethsemane. It involved:
  - s. Facing His coming suffering and death,
  - b. The inability for even His most loyal followers to “stand with Him,”
  - c. His prayer for the salvation of people to be accomplished another way beside the cross was met with “No.”

*Matthew 26:36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." <sup>37</sup> He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*

*<sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

*<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*

*<sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*

*<sup>43</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.*

*<sup>44</sup> So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.*

2. Jesus is willing to do whatever the Father required for the salvation of people.

*v. 39 ... "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

3. Of course, surrendering to the will of God when it involves suffering is what terrifies us! I suppose our discipleship with Jesus is closer to this reality: “I’ll follow You *as long as the following conditions are met...*”

4. And of course, the opposite is true. We find our life when we surrender to His will!

*Mark 8:35 (RSV) For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.*

“The incarnation did not happen merely to let us know that God exists. It happened to bring him near so He can be with us and we with Him.” –Tim Keller

5. What strikes you from today’s devotional?