

Heaven's Glory in Earth's Stable

2 Corinthians 8:9

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2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV – 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.

ILLUSTRATION

Many of you might have seen an episode or two of the tv series called, **“Undercover Boss”** It just renewed for a 10th season. Apparently people enjoy watching high-level execs dress down and take on the level of their employees. On this show, the CEO or executive of a company disguises himself or herself as a potential new employee. During their time, they interact with their employees on a personal level. They walk in their employee’s shoes and learn how to relate to them in a way that was not possible before. At the end of the show, the boss reveals himself to his employees to their shock.

INTRO

While I’m not advocating the show, I believe that God advocates the principle.

The ultimate episode of undercover boss took place 2000 years ago. There were no cameras to record the event and the advertising campaign involving singing angels, though glorious, only reached a handful of poor shepherds. There was no fancy hotel room to house the star of the show, only an unsanitary trough. The cast was less than perfect and the setting was less than glorious. The disguise was a masterful one... after all who would ever recognize the Ultimate Boss of the universe in the body of a little helpless baby?

[Philippians 2:6-7] 6 (Jesus) who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

The one BIG difference is that God didn’t come down to visit mankind to conceal Himself, but rather to reveal Himself in a way that every man, woman and child could relate with and understand.

Hebrews 2:17-18 NLT – Therefore, it was necessary for Him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

The God who created the dust now laid upon it. He who formed the earth now felt it beneath his toes. He felt human pain, both emotional and physical. He knew the pain of loss AND THE EXUBERANCE OF HUMAN JOY, He suffered 40 days of temptation directly from Satan himself, and the God who engineered the atom limited Himself to the laws of nature that He created... the mighty God put on a weak and fragile human body.

This is a powerful reality, and it is what Christmas is all about. If you haven’t noticed, the first half of the word Christmas is “CHRIST.”

QUOTE

It has been said that throughout history, many children were born that became kings, but there has only been one king who became a child.

APPLICATION

Before Jesus arrived, there had been 400 years of Israel's history in which God had been silent. Silently waiting. In those 400 years, I imagine there were many who lived their entire lives in the hopes that they would hear once again the word of the Lord... or better yet, be the generation to behold the coming of the Messiah who would be the rightful Savior and King of Israel.

Yet, generation after generation passed with silence. All that one could hold on to were the prophetic promises of the past, in the hopes that God would choose to move and speak to the world once again...

And 400 years after the last inspired prophet penned His final words, in the small and humble town of Bethlehem God broke His silence with a whisper in the form of a baby's cry. It was loud enough for the humble and the waiting to hear it, but quiet enough for the self-righteous and self-absorbed to be deaf to its reality.

CONTEXT

When we think about the first Christmas, we rightly exalt the significance of that day. The day heaven met earth. The day that the divine touched the dust. The day that brought the hope of salvation to the poorest shepherd and to the richest magi. But we often don't take the time to step back and remember the bigger picture of God's plan that is represented in the Christmas story.

- Like an iceberg, that night in Bethlehem was the more obvious, visible expression of a massive design and eternal plan that God had written from eternity past.
- When we think of the Christmas timeline, we often recount the events of Mary and Joseph, King Herod, the wise men, angels, and shepherds. But the true Christmas timeline covers a far greater scope.

Tonight, I want to journey along the true Christmas timeline. To mix things up a bit, I want to start at the end of the timeline and work my way back.

ILLUSTRATION

Tonight we will look at a survey of scripture going down the following timeline:

The Conquering King

The Crucified Lamb

The Cute Baby

The Coming Savior

The Changeless God

1. The Conquering King

APPLICATION

The Bible speaks of the reality that one day, one very REAL day, Jesus is coming back, cleaning house, and changing everything back to the way He always intended it to be. Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ on earth, Easter celebrates His resurrection and ascension into heaven. I think we should have another holiday that celebrates in advance His return to the world! Maybe we will call it, **"RESTORATION DAY."**

You see Bethlehem 2000 years ago was only the first of two times that the feet of Christ will touch the earth.

In Revelation 19, we get a whole new Nativity scene. No mangers, no wise men, no shepherds, no stable, and no silent night... the only two elements these events have in common are **Jesus and maybe a horse.**

This is no Santa riding behind Rudolph the red nose reindeer! This is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords riding in battle array upon a valiant war horse!

Look at this picture:

Revelation 19:11 NKJV – Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

Revelation 19:12 NKJV – His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

Revelation 19:13 NKJV – He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

Revelation 19:14 NKJV – And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Revelation 19:15 NKJV – Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Revelation 19:16 NKJV – And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

APPLICATION

Wow! Now there is a sight! Not baby Jesus, not a helpless infant in a manger, not Jesus the meek and humble servant, but King Jesus in all of His glory, splendor, and might. The angels will not be singing gloria, but will be arrayed for battle declaring the great and mighty day of the Lord's wrath and reign.

In portraying the infant Jesus in His humility and humanity, we often forget the glory of Jesus as conquering king who reigns over all!

- At His name demons tremble and flee, and in His presence angels tremble and worship.
- The very sight of His return will be so fierce that men will run and hide themselves in caves to try and escape the brightness of His glory.
- His glory is so vast that every eye of every human left on the earth will see Him at one moment in time.
- The earth itself will melt away with fervent heat.
- King Jesus leads His heavenly army comprised of all His saints in full battle array to victory over all unrighteousness.
- There is no power that can match Him, there is no glory that can compare to Him. The mightiest that man has to offer will melt away like wax before Jesus even lifts a finger.
- This is the King whom the grave could not contain and death could not hold. AND HE IS COMING BACK AGAIN.
- This is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and this is my Savior!

This week I read an old forgotten Christmas carol. It was written in the 17th century and put to music to be sung on Christmas in the early 19th century. The title is foreboding.

The first verse begins,

***“Awful thought of endless doom! Skies are rent, the Judge is come:
Clouds His throne; around Him stand Angel guards, a countless band.”***

APPLICATION

We might understand why it is no longer a popular favorite among carolers, and while the title is blunt and a little brash, that song holds some sobering truth.

The same Jesus that humbled himself to become mankind's savior, is the same Jesus who will come back with authority and resolve to take His rightful place as their king.

2. The Crucified Lamb

INTRO

Before Jesus could establish His physical kingdom on earth, there was a matter of eternal importance that first had to be dealt with. Man, who rebelled against their creator and who was alienated from God had to be reconciled and restored to fellowship.

- According to God's perfect and holy standards, the only way for true forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to take place was by the sacrificial shedding of innocent, perfect blood to pay the penalty of death for sin.
- John the Baptist referred to Jesus as, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."
 - The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.
 - The lamb was a symbol of sacrifice. Sin has to be atoned for or paid for. Under the Old Covenant, a lamb would be sacrificed to temporarily pay for and cover the sins of the people.

But how to permanently, once and for all, do away with sin???

- Jesus came as the pure and spotless lamb, the lamb without blemish or spot. He died in our place for our sins and presented His own blood on the altar in heaven before God to pay for our sin once and for all.
- Of Jesus, it could be truly said that He was born to die.

Isaiah 53:7 NKJV – He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

ILLUSTRATION

You see sin is the breaking of God's law (to miss the mark) and the falling short of His perfection.

- **Minute Maid park**, the home of the Houston Astros, has the longest distance to center field in baseball. 436 feet is the distance you have to hit a ball if you want a home run in center field.
- Even if the best home run hitter didn't hit the ball out of the park, I seriously doubt he would complain that the wall is too far. It isn't the wall's fault that it is where it is but rather the player's inability to have enough power to hit it that far.

In many ways, this is the dilemma that man faces with God. God is the immovable wall of perfection and glory, and man, in all his strength, will never find himself good enough or righteous enough to reach that wall.

EXAMPLE

Trying to open the girl's doll boxes at Christmas years ago. You need a degree in opening Barbie boxes. I can't open a Barbie box, but I'm going to find a way to earn my own way to heaven?

APPLICATION

This is because of sin. So what's the answer? How can there be peace between man and God? God sent a pinch hitter. Someone who had the ability to meet the standard. He stood in for you, he accomplished what you could not accomplish and allows you to receive the benefits from it.

“There’s no more devastating message than what the cross says about you. There’s no more comforting promise than what the cross offers you.” - Paul Tripp

QUOTE

2000 years ago the perfect son of God lived a perfect life you could not live, died the death that you deserved and now offers a gift that you could never earn. This is salvation.

3. The Cute Baby

INTRO

It was this Jesus who 2000 years ago took on human flesh and came to this earth a helpless baby, dependent upon the humans He came to rescue from sin and death.

Luke 2:7-11 – And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

APPLICATION

Which of us, having held a baby, haven’t been overwhelmed with the sense of frailty and vulnerability? You can get the most macho, muscle clad man and give him a baby, and all a sudden he becomes the gentle giant, paranoid about how he’s holding it.

This was the divine nature in human skin, the Word of God made flesh, the divine mind, melded into 2 pounds of grey and white matter we call a brain.

- Vulnerable yet completely in control
- Frail yet perfect in strength
- Dependent, yet the one we are all dependent on.

And that cute baby became a toddler. What a wonderful gift to Mary... probably a constant source of frustration to Jesus’ siblings. “James, why can’t you be more like your brother!”

Isaiah 9:6 – For unto us a CHILD is born, unto us a son is given...

A CHILD

A Child: What do you think of when you think of a child?

- Some see a child and think, “Messess.”
- Some see a child and think, “Work”
- Some see a child and think, “cute.”
- Some see a child and think, “Expensive.”

According to the latest annual “Cost of Raising A Child” report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average cost of raising a child up until age 18 for a middle-income family in the U.S. is approximately \$245,340. If you have more than 4 kids, you can consider yourself a millionaire!

APPLICATION

But Isaiah envisioned a child who wouldn't make messes for us, but clean up the messes we make; a child that wouldn't create for us more work, but would accomplish an ultimate work on our behalf; a child who wouldn't be a cost drain on us, but rather pay the cost of our salvation of that we could never afford; and in this cute little child, there was a mighty warrior with the gentleness of a lamb and the courage of a lion.

APPLICATION

So how would Jesus come to earth? If I was God, I think I would have made sure it was in the most prestigious setting. A real red carpet entrance into the world.

- Well, instead of the red carpet, Christ chose a dirty stable, full of animals.
- Why? Because Jesus didn't come the first time to be the king of the world but to dive into the refuse of mankind. He came to establish a spiritual kingdom by taking the lowest of men and bringing them undeserved grace, forgiveness, and redemption.
- **Jesus came as the lowest that the lowest might declare glory in the highest.**

This also shows the true humility of our God. If Jesus would humble Himself from sitting enthroned as God to being a baby, dependent on an earthly mom and dad... Surely you and I can humble ourselves today, let down our pride and confess our need for Him.

APPLICATION

Why is this idea of Jesus being a child so important? Because it tells us that we have a God, that though He is infinitely above us, He came to be one of us.

He came from the highest and became the lowest in order to take the lowest and bring them to the Highest!

- In Christ, God subjected Himself to human frailty without partaking in Human sin. He became one of us to go through the whole human experience. He is a God Who truly relates with us, not just as a creator relates to His creation, but as a Father relates to His son, as a person relates to a friend, as one who suffers relates to one who is suffering, as one who is joyful relates to one who is rejoicing.

EXAMPLE: Your concept of someone changes when they come and sit across from you.

- When you can see someone's pupils, the imperfections of their skin, smell their breath, hear their whispers, watch their joy, observe their grief... it all does something to humanize someone.
- Jesus is God humanizing Himself for our sakes. When I say humanizing, I mean coming in a way that makes us see God in a way that we can understand.
- He was fully man, and yet, at the same time, was fully divine. He was a man without the guile, the deceit, the greed, the lust the pride, the selfishness...
- Imagine it. Did His disciples ever think, “I'm drinking the same cup as God?” Did Mary ever say, “I'm potty-training the creator?”
 - This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard... lowly shepherds guarding the king of kings?
 - The reality the King of Kings becoming a child is humiliating, yet He humiliated Himself for us.

4. The Coming Savior

As we go down the timeline, things become even more amazing. For thousands of years before Jesus was born the Jewish people were awaiting a coming messiah. The promised One who would save His people both spiritually and physically.

God, through the prophets of Israel, declared the coming of the Christ (The Messiah) hundreds, even thousands of years before He appeared.

I encourage you when you get a chance to go read Isaiah 53 to get a detailed account of the crucifixion 700 years before it happened.

Isaiah wrote these words inspired by the Holy Spirit 700 years before Christ came to earth:

Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

When Jesus stood in the synagogue (Luke 4) and opened the scroll, He read the Words that were prophesied about himself.

Isaiah 61:1 NKJV – “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

APPLICATION

Isn't that amazing! What's even more amazing is the fact that these are only a couple of the over 400 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled when He came. Coincidence? I think not.

In fact, if we even go back further, all the way to Genesis 3, we see the very first prophetic word concerning the coming of Christ (proto-evangelism):

Genesis 3:14-15 – So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

APPLICATION

You see, a woman doesn't have a seed. The seed of life comes from the man, and yet the woman's seed refers to the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus by Mary.

- Though Satan bruised Jesus' heel on the cross, Jesus crushed his head by conquering death and rising from the grave on the third day forever proclaiming victory over sin and death!

Pretty amazing stuff right? But now we arrive back to the very beginning of our timeline which will really blow our minds because we get to the very beginning of Christmas only to realize that there really is no beginning.

5. The Changeless God

APPLICATION

SO, let's go all the way to the beginning. Flip over to Genesis 1:

Genesis 1:3 – Then God said...

1:6 – Then God said...

1:9 – Then God said...

1:11 – Then God said...

1:14 – Then God said...

1:20 – Then God said...

1:24 – Then God said...

1:26 – Then God said...

What does that have to do with anything Josh? Do you notice a trend? How did God create everything? With His Word... God “said.”

Now turn to John 1:1

John 1:1-4 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...

John 1:14 – And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

APPLICATION

The Word of God that spoke all creation into existence became flesh and dwelt among us!

Who can this Word be?

Well, remember how we started at the end? Let’s go back there and read something again in light of all this.

Revelation 19:12 NKJV – His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. Rev 19:13 NKJV – He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

This is the mystery and magic of Christmas. As the apostle Paul put it:

1 Timothy 3:16 – And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

APPLICATION

You see the Christmas timeline is all about Jesus. **He is the beginning and the end and everything in between.**

- 4 times in the book of Revelation, Jesus introduces Himself as: The Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
 - Not that He has a beginning and end, He IS the beginning and end. Before there was a beginning He was. When time as we know it ceases, He will continue to forever be!
- On that insignificant night, in an insignificant town, to a bunch of insignificant people, the most significant event in the history of the universe took place...

QUOTE

On the first Christmas, the infinite became an infant.

ILLUSTRATION

The first Christmas is all about incarnation. It wasn't just a righteous man, a prophet, or a religious founder that was born, it was the incarnation, God draped in the tapestry of human skin!

You know, the true Santa Clause (which is dutch of Saint Nicholas) was a firm believer in this truth.

- Saint Nicholas was the bishop of Myra in the 3rd and 4th centuries. He was famous for his gift-giving and self-sacrifice in the name of Jesus to those in need.
- The historicity of this next story is debated but is well-argued on both sides.
- It is reported that Saint Nicholas, being a bishop in the 4th century, attended the First Council of Nicea, called by Constantinople in 325 AD. The purpose of the council was to take an official stand on the issue of Jesus' deity.
- Nicholas was a staunch and ardent supporter of the triune nature of God, and the divine nature of Jesus in human flesh. Arius, another charismatic bishop (who was really the first Jehovah's witness) was dead set on undeifying Christ. Upon giving a drawn-out speech to the council, it is reported that Saint Nicholas became so passionately angry, that he got up, walked over to Arius in front of the entire council, and smacked him across the face.

I can see it now, **"Santa Clause: Giver of gifts by night, heretic slapper by day!"**

CONCLUSION

We've clearly scratched the surface, but one thing is clear, there is NO logical way you can write of the coming of Christ as a myth, fairytale, or inflated story of the human imagination.

- The truth of the matter is that all of human history, past and future centers on the person of Jesus Christ and His revelation of God's eternal plan to forgive, redeem, and restore broken humanity to Himself.
- So where does Christmas really begin? I think we find it said best in our passage this evening:
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2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV – 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.

"The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." -C.S. Lewis

Jesus left the riches and glory of heaven and eternity to suffer so that we, through His great sacrifice might know and understand the riches of His glory and His inheritance.

This Christmas, stand in awe of Jesus, His glory, His humanity, His sacrifice. Don't turn CHRIST-mas into ME-mas. Take time to give yourself as a gift to God for the greatest gift that He has already given to us... Heaven's glory in Earth's stable.