

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 24 – GOD JOINS HUMANITY, THE INCARNATION]

Last time we took an overview of the Trinity's counterattack on the forces of evil that want to disrupt God's plan to make man in His image.

- ◆ God's plan of redemption revolves around three main steps if it is to overcome the broken relationship between God and mankind.
- ◆ These are, 1) the Incarnation, 2) the Atonement, and 3) Reconciliation.
- ◆ We also saw each person of the Trinity bring their own unique aspects to the process.
- ◆ Paul spells out each of these roles in his benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.***
- ◆ The love of God flows from the Father to His Creation, Jesus embodies the grace of God through the Incarnation and the Atonement, and the Holy Spirit draws us into the fellowship of love that is the Trinity.

We have already seen how the shadows of this plan have been hinted at throughout the Old Testament, but now with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem we begin to see the reality-taking place.

- ◆ Important in the context of the earthly birth of Jesus is the heavenly message the angels brought with them from God as it gives us an interesting insight into the mind of God and His faithful commitment to His wayward and rebellious children.
- ◆ This was the divine message delivered to the shepherds on the outskirts of Bethlehem.
- ◆ The shepherds were settling down for the night, wrapped in their blankets drifting off to sleep when suddenly all heaven breaks loose.
- ◆ ***Luke 2:8-14 (NKJV) 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.***
- ◆ We have talked about the Word of God coming to Israel through human prophets, but here at this critical point in salvation history, in order to give the message additional authority, the Word of God is delivered by a holy angel.
- ◆ ***V.10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid."***
- ◆ The first words God has for mankind after the birth of Jesus is, "You no longer need to be afraid."
- ◆ Granted they had just received an almighty scare, but there is a deeper message in that statement because up until this point in human history, mankind needed to be afraid.
- ◆ This is in contrast to the first beginning, when the words echoing in Adam and Eve's ears as they were being marched out of Eden by God's angels were, "Be afraid"!
- ◆ Because of our sin, because of our self-will and because of our stubbornness to live independently of God, humanity has been living under the curse of the law which leads to God's righteous judgment which in turn leads to spiritual death.
- ◆ Because as we will see, our acceptance is no longer contingent on our works or our self-salvation but on God's salvation.
- ◆ Up to this point in salvation history God's people lived under the law and the upshot of that little exercise was to show that when we try to make ourselves right with God (self-salvation) it ends up in total and utter failure.
- ◆ So God says, and this was His plan from the beginning, you cannot make yourselves presentable to participate in the life and love of God on your own merits so I am going to do it for you.
- ◆ Now with the coming of Jesus this whole bad news scenario has been turned on its head.
- ◆ ***V.10 ...for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.***
- ◆ What was bad news for humanity is now through God's efforts about to be turned into "good news."
- ◆ Notice too that the promise is now expanded to include "all people."
- ◆ What started with individuals like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob then expanded to include the nation of Israel is now thrown open to "all people."
- ◆ And who is it that makes it "good news"?
- ◆ ***V.11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."13 And suddenly there***

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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!"

- ◆ Notice that last sentence as it reveals God's attitude towards His wayward children despite centuries of rejection.
- ◆ Something dramatic happened on the world scene when God became man, and it was not bad news, it was good news.
- ◆ It's unfortunate that what God calls "good news" is unfortunately peddled by many Christians today as "bad news."
- ◆ However, in a dramatic display of power, we witness the heavenly host interpreting the coming of Jesus in a totally different way.
- ◆ Humanity is about to witness the extraordinary lengths to which God will go in order to restore the relationship with his creation.

Despite man's repeated rejection of his overtures, God's commitment to His children is unshaken. So when God decides to rescue humanity from his sinfulness he doesn't come as a conquering king but rather as a baby in a manger.

- ◆ What an inappropriate way for God to reveal himself to mankind.
- ◆ No press releases, no media attention, no miracles, no powerful demonstrations of shock and awe, but rather a helpless babe in a manger.
- ◆ But this is Jesus' modus operandi throughout His earthly ministry.
- ◆ He trades His glory in heaven for a manger, a donkey and a cross in an effort to prove God's love for His children.
- ◆ The point of all this is, despite man's distorted mindset about an angry wrathful God, God is not mad at anyone!
- ◆ He loves every one of his children and wants to redeem every last one of them, if possible.
- ◆ Now that doesn't mean He is not angry at our sin in the same way a parent gets angry at his children when they disobey him or see them doing something that is going to hurt them.
- ◆ Because God is love, even his anger is governed by that love.
- ◆ But that doesn't mean he stops loving his children. And isn't that what the most famous verse in all the bible tells us (John 3:16).
- ◆ God the Father is so committed to his children, He is willing to give his most precious possession, His Son to make it possible for the relationship between God and man to be restored.
- ◆ In reality, because of the Trinitarian doctrine, God is really giving Himself to the world.
- ◆ How Jesus arrives on earth demonstrates the true character of God and his intentions – to save mankind not through force but through love.
- ◆ ***John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.***
- ◆ God is not a vengeful and wrathful God eager to throw unrepentant sinners into the fires of hell as sometimes portrayed by Christianity. Instead He wants to save the world.
- ◆ For some reason unknown to us, but which is rooted in his nature, God gives himself to us, attaches himself to us, and acts to rescue us.
- ◆ Though we deserve wrath, saving grace comes instead.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.***
- ◆ Such is his love for us Christ willingly empties himself in order to save us.
- ◆ If the first creation was about making man in God's image, the second creation is about making God in man's image.
- ◆ The early church father Irenaeus tells us, "Christ became what we are, so that Christ might bring us to be even what he is."
- ◆ The early church summed it up this way in what is called the *mirifica commutatio* or the "glorious exchange" - The Son of God became the son of man so we the children of humanity might become children of God.

The perception that God is against mankind is a falsehood and the fabrication of man's fallen nature.

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- ◆ Because of our fallen nature, mankind's natural response to God is one of fear, resentment and ultimately hatred.
- ◆ As we saw with Israel, the closer God draws to mankind and the contrast between a holy God and sinful mankind increases the more intense this resentment and resistance grows.
- ◆ Such is humanity's damaged and distorted mindset; he interprets God's overtures of grace as threatening and judgmental.
- ◆ It's a product of the same mindset that ridicules Christianity today (John 15:18).
- ◆ To some degree Christianity itself has contributed to the problem by being overly judgmental.
- ◆ If Jesus had shown up as a conquering king it would only have reinforced this false notion.
- ◆ Instead, in one of the most unimpressive entrances of all times, the all-powerful, all-wise God of the universe shows up as a baby in a barn in an obscure little village in a third-rate nation under Roman occupation.
- ◆ Instead of showing up as a conquering king with unlimited power, He shows up as a helpless baby with boundless love.
- ◆ He shows up as one of us. It is no longer a matter of power, where one partner in the relationship is more powerful than the other.
- ◆ Jesus uses a new type of power the world has not seen nor experienced – the conquering power of love.
- ◆ In fact throughout his whole life Jesus rejected the impulse to use His superior power.
- ◆ In the account of the temptation, Jesus refused to respond to Satan's taunts to use power to prove He was the Son of God. **"If you are the Son of God turn these stones to bread" (Matthew 4:3-4).**
- ◆ He refused to respond to the taunts of those who ridiculed at the crucifixion when they asked the same question, **"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).**
- ◆ It is not his almighty power that makes our God different. It is his unconditional love and his willingness to become weak even giving up his life in order to save those who have rejected Him.

But it is because of this willingness to become weak, in other words, to become a human being; He is in turn elevating the worth of human beings.

- ◆ By Jesus joining himself to humanity as God, He opens the door for humans to have direct access to the same Spirit that flows in the life of the Godhead itself.
- ◆ Jesus as "the way and the truth and the life" gives humanity access to the divine life (John 14:6).
- ◆ We will come back to this reality at a future time.
- ◆ But for now this event, called the *Incarnation* of God adding humanity to His divinity demonstrates how committed He is to restoring mankind's broken relationship with Him.
- ◆ He desperately wants shared love to pass over the vast gulf between God and his creation.
- ◆ He wants to be in communion with his people.
- ◆ And Jesus is the one who makes it possible.
- ◆ We finish with a beautiful Eucharistic prayer from the Scottish Episcopal Church that contemplates the miracle of the Incarnation.

*Father of all, we give thanks and praise
That when we were still far off
You met us in your Son and brought us home
Dying and living, he declared your love,
Gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory
May we who share Christ's Body live his risen life;
We who drink his cup bring life to others;
We whom the spirit lights, give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
So we and all our children shall be free,
And the whole earth live to praise your name;
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*