

The Mystery of Incarnation (8 of 9)

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound mystery of the incarnation and the moral growth of Jesus as a model for believers in their spiritual journeys.

Duration: 1:03:37

Scripture: John 3:3-16, Acts 9:4, Acts 9:6

Topics: "Incarnation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of relying on God's guidance and the leading of the Holy Spirit in preaching, teaching, witnessing, and praying. The speaker highlights the need for a living God who can provide the necessary words and insights in the moment. The sermon also touches on the idea that God's work is appointed and established before the foundations of the world, and that believers are called to be part of a composite glory for which God waits. The speaker encourages seeking the root causes of issues and healing them in order to fully manifest the sons of God.

Transcript

I'm going to share from Forsyth, P.T. Forsyth. Peter is his first name. Hardly known by anyone, even out of his own congregational church in which he was a minister and a teacher, died in 1921.

So his principal work took place at the turn of the century. I have one book where a series of lectures that he gave to Yale divinity students on preaching. There's another book that's an old-time classic called *The Soul of Prayer* that should be in every believer's bookcase and in their hand.

I've never read anything more powerful and more penetrating, more profound on the subject of prayer than P.T. Forsyth's *The Soul of Prayer*. And somewhere in the course of that book, he says that the whole purpose of our faith and our being is prayer, that the soul of prayer is the soul of the faith, not just an adjunct. So he's a remarkable resource that I bumped into almost accidentally, a little classic called *The Cruciality of the Cross*.

Very cross-oriented and probably one of the most original thinkers that I've had the privilege to encounter. But his language is often difficult and he's wrestling with static concepts and formed and hard doctrinal things like the two natures of Jesus that go all the way back to the fifth century determination of the councils of the church of how to understand how deity and humanity could be reconciled. And that they laid the foundation for the church's present understanding, which is rather fixed and static.

But here comes a man who wrestles and comes up with a way of perceiving the remarkable issue of incarnation in a way that just blows your mind. So you'll have to listen closely. What is considered his most significant work is the book that I have in my hand, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*.

And there's a publisher now in Oregon who has reissued most of Forsythe's works. So you don't have to go scrounging for some used copy. You can get them freshly printed and it will stretch you.

If we had all kinds of time, I wish we could go through many chapters of the book, but we have in the shortness of our time just to deal with the last chapter or so. So Lord, if there's such a thing as asking for special grace, though grace itself is special, we're asking for a special special or a grace of graces that we should be able to obtain from this remarkable saint. Something, my God, of the riches of his own wrestling and coming through with a perception of the mystery of Christ, his person and his place of incarnation, the unprecedented event that has taken place in time and history of God coming down into the earth and taking upon himself the form of a man.

And that there are implications for that union of deity and humanity that go even beyond the atonement affected by it. That there's other things that should be understood because we bear something of that mystery in ourselves, God in our flesh. So Lord, make this rich.

And prompt such responses and questions as will forward the deeper understanding. And as I just prayed in my little walk, that you'll give answer to the distress and the cries that came out from this morning in a way and beyond what they could have thought would have been appropriate. In the same way that you gave Nicodemus an answer that utterly perplexed him, that did not seem to have any correspondence to the questions that he asked.

He asked from an earthly plane and you answered from the heavenly. So today also answer from the heavenly plane and in so answering, bring us up to that plane. We thank you and give you praise in Jesus name.

It should be remembered that human personality is not a ready-made thing, but it has to grow by moral exercise. One of the things that distinguishes the writings of P.T. Forsythe is the word moral. It comes up almost on every page and it's a word that has become extinct in our contemporary life.

Whoever speaks about moral, what does moral mean? It's like an echo out of a past that doesn't have any present cogency. And yet, as I have said, and in the message that I gave in Albania that someone graciously transcribed, the issue of what is moral is the issue of what is man. Strip man of what is moral and you have an animal.

It is the thing that is moral that distinguishes the humanity of man. So I quite understand his frequency in the use of that word, because before, just a line above where I began to quote, we have man's movement to God and man's action on God, either in the way of aspiration and prayer, or in the way of acquiring from God moral personality. Can you see why I drew? Moral personality.

Like wow, all we knew before was personality. And in Brooklyn, poisonality. But moral personality, that what is the component that really distinguishes what is human is personality, is at its heart the moral component, that there's a moral personality.

And if Jesus is anything, he's that. Jesus was a moral personality, not moralistic. That's the difference.

That's false piety, like the length of your skirts and how you're dressed. No, that's moralism. That's religious contrivance.

Moral is a much deeper word. And you don't wear it on your sleeve. It's intrinsic.

It's in your deeps. It's what you are. It's the distinguishing mark of your humanity.

But if we're not conscious of it, and we overlook the occasions by which moral personality is formed or grows, how shall we attain it? If we're just a bunch of dum-dums, and one day is like another, and we never see an issue or a crisis in its moral meaning, how then shall we obtain that meaning? And most of us don't see it. So, it should be remembered that human personality is not a ready-made thing. You could say, I can't help it.

I inherited this from my parents. I grew up in Brooklyn. I can't help it.

But you can help it. And there are issues that come before us, usually as crisis, that require some response that has to come out of our deeps that is more than the issue of practicality or expedience, but the issue more of rightness. What is right in a case like this, where you don't have a book to which you can turn and find a prescription, but you have to find it in that moment, in the measure of the knowledge of God that you have, and the union with him.

There's where the moral personality is formed. And that's where this writer says, Jesus's moral personality was formed. He did not come full blown.

He grew in grace and stature by facing these issues and responding. So, it has to grow by moral exercise and chiefly in the kingdom of God by prayer. The living soul has to grow into moral personality.

So, here's prayer invoked as the milieu, the mode by which the moral things are obtained. How do you know what to say and do? Well, you turn to the most high, the soul of prayer, not just your formal time before coming out for the day, but in a certain sense, you're continually breathing prayers Godward, as I just did now, taking a little walk for how to commence here. What he brought with him was such a soul as was bound morally to grow under his life's vocation, to the personality that was the complete and final revelation of God.

Isn't that a remarkable thing that the father would trust that something had to be worked out in the career and history of Jesus, in his own personality as a human being, as a man, and the issues that would be before him, by which in his history of moral responses, he would grow into the form of the son of God that reflects the father. That this is not some fixed thing that is ironclad, but there's a dynamic here even of the father's trust. Talk about faith and the son in which there's a moment by moment and an event by event dynamic of life and reality in which something is formed over a history that by the end of that history, what you have is the expression of the father perfectly.

What a difference this view is than to think that it's all canned, all mechanical and all given. This shows the issue of faith, the issue of prayer, the issue of relationship, the issue of autonomy, the issue of being a human being faced with crises that require decision. Hey, that means he at every point was like us.

That's how he became a high priest. If it came all fixed and in a capsule and it was all determined before he left heaven to come to earth, what does his earthly tenure mean? Just providing a body that can be put up on a cross? We have not sufficiently considered the remarkable, the magnitude of the, I don't have a

word for it, the adjectives fail, of what is represented in this incarnation that is not fixed, but that there's an element, a great element of reality being propounded by episodes given by the father and in the reality of being in the world by which a moral man grows in stature and grace in dependency of the father. That is an example for us and a pattern.

He's the pattern son and this gives us a greater glimpse of what sonship means. It's not going to be any mechanical for us, a ready-made thing, if it was not that for him. We will grow morally by the issues that we face and which we turn to God and so he had to grow under his life's vocation to the personality that was the complete and final revelation of God, the agent of man's redemption.

If he hadn't grown to that, what he had sacrificed on the cross would not have been sufficient. He had to complete the true man and true God to be true sacrifice. So this is not some light question of his getting it together.

It's more than the issue of how it pertained to him. It's the issue of how it pertains to us, how it pertains to the father. He had to come to a certain formation that fulfilled his vocation or his destiny, but he didn't come to it mechanically nor automatically.

He came to it in a life existential dynamic of responding as a man without the access to his deity, which he had laid aside those prerogatives and had to work out before the father in response and in speakings the kinds of things that he did. So by the time that the cross came, he was the complete son. That's what Forsythe is saying.

Well, where does it say that? It doesn't say that. We're given only the sparsest biblical information, but it requires a holy ghost immersion into the mystery to seek out what this incarnation means and represents. And I don't know of anyone who has probed it more deeply than this man.

And I appreciate the reform writers and John Murray, but they are so exacting. They are so precise. They haven't moved a bit from the Nicene Council and the Chalcedon.

All they're doing is expressing the classic theological doctrinal view of the issue of divinity and humanity, but it's not an insight into the mystery. It's just a reiteration of the conclusions to which the church councils have come in order to avoid threatening heresies to the faith. So they just gave the bare skeleton, praise God for it.

What this man is doing is coming in deeply into it. I'm trying to understand what that mystery represents. So a soul of Godhead is the necessary postulate of the redeemed personality.

The redeeming personality is the necessary foundation for the growth of that personality is the necessary condition of the finality of his work. Is that so Mr. Forsythe? And what's the necessary condition for the finality of our work? I'm teaching you guys how to read. Yesterday was how to examine a text.

Today is how to read, which is to say, when the writer is making certain statements, we need to ask as we're reading, well, then what's the implication for me? Because certainly there's got to be an implication. So what is he saying? That the agent of man's redemption, the soul of Godhead, was the necessary foundation to the growth of that personality and it is the necessary condition of the finality of his work. That the issue of his personality and the formation of his humanity and manhood is not just some isolated subject in itself, how interesting, but the necessary condition for his redemptive call, for his vocation.

He had to be true man and true God to be the true sacrifice. And if he missed it and did not come to a fullness, it would have been inadequate. Well, then what about us and our vocation? What about our calling? What about the things that make for our finality and our completion? Is it altogether unrelated to his or is it altogether profoundly related? Therefore, he should be himself an object of study because in studying how he attained to the fullness of his manhood in the light of his vocation and calling has got to give us some insight in the things that are intrinsic to our call.

We're not getting fancy to be fancy, but when you probe the deeps of the faith, it is going to require a stretching and a hearing and dealing with words. So it was a personality that differed from all others by finding its growth to lie in the unaided and sinless appropriation of that which it already was. What are you saying? He's finding and attaining by a process of growth that which he already was.

He was already the son of God. There's no taking that away. He was that eternally with the Father before he came to earth, but now coming to earth in his humanity and by process of the life of his humanity, he's finding out or becoming what he already was.

Well, what were we already who knew us from our mother's wombs? There's a mystery even to man as if God already foreknew us as if we had some kind of an existence or he foresaw that there's a knowledge that we've become what we already were or intended to be. Do you have that sense? You can pray for strange men like myself who think that what they are about in God, whether in whatever nation or situation, is a work to walk in that was established before the foundations of the earth were laid. And not just some impromptu happenstance to which we have to kind of find our way by the grace of God.

We're walking in works established before the foundations of the earth were laid. So there's a certain pre-knowledge of God in the mystery of our call. And mystery is not a bad word, dear saints.

The American church is conspicuously lacking in an appreciation for mystery. I'm not talking about detective stories. I'm talking about those things that lie too deep for words that need to be intuited or apprehended if we are to have a commendable sense of God and ourselves in his purpose.

There's mystery. And when you have a sense of mystery, you'll find yourself so much less prone to becoming exasperated or impatient or how come and why. You just let those questions.

There's something being worked beyond your ability to know what to understand. And that is God's work. But that he had to do it and that it's not automatic, that it requires prayerful decisions and exacerbating crises that tear your heart out and that you feel the moral weight of it and the moral anguish of it.

He's the pattern son. But astonishingly, we are called in great measure to that same pattern. He's working out something for us and we need to follow that pattern son, emulate that pattern son.

I recognized that it was not a snap for him. Now he had no advantage unavailable to us. Even in the miracles that he performed were available to him through the measure of his faith as they are available to us.

See, it's one thing to have a phony, synthetic emulation of Jesus like, well, he's an object of admiration. What can you say? He's God. Of course he had the power.

He had the ability. We can't hope to emulate, you know, be like that, but we can admire him. There's much more here than just admiring.

There's a pattern here that we need to observe that will encourage us in the attainment of our sonship and the fulfillment of our vocation by the same means by which he obtained it. That's the point. But if he's God, then he couldn't help himself and always had the right word and the right act.

And there was no moral groaning, attention of faith, then all we can do is admire him, but we can't be benefited by him. See what I mean? He's the ultimate son. This is the pattern son.

You want to know what sonship is? Study him. And if he did not obtain it through what he learned in obedience to suffering, how then did he obtain it? And if it took a suffering of obedience for him to obtain it, what will it take for us? Well, that'll give us a different attitude about suffering. And not just physical, because the more excruciating form of suffering is moral.

Of the kind of cry that we heard this morning. I wonder in that sense, the statement that he made, greater things than I have done, you will do. If this mystery needs now at the end of the age to come into a full and corporate son that merges and takes in the diversity of personalities and all the things that make up individuality, that's a greater work than what was obtained in his own individual sonship.

The inherent mystery is there in him, but to see that now come to full expression in a body is awesome, and that is the ultimate glory of God. Unto him be glory in the church that has come to maturity as sons and can act with the same obedience to the Father as one life, with one voice, and in the same moment as he exercised in his own individual person. What an achievement.

I was ready to throw in the towel after this morning, just hearing the different ones in their condition. Like, wow, who wants to be locked up in Noah's Ark with a bunch like that? You'd go out of your skull. But this is it.

That's what we're here for. That's what we're in. Ben, Israel has been a suffering.

The churches are suffering before it's a glory, and in it you have to deal with the saints in their diverse condition, circumstance, maturity, understanding, and out of their own hearts and the unique histories of their own lives, failed marriages, betrayal, some warp has come by which a woman is now nursing the grievance that is ventilated by gossip. And so you don't just deal with the surface thing, but you seek for the root. She's got to be healed if she's going to be part of this composite glory for which God waits, and nature and creation is groaning until now for the manifestation of the sons of God.

In fact, we should say the manifestation of the son of God, that plural composite entity that Chris is talking about. But the genius of it was already set forth by Jesus. But this is a greater work that this can come in a composite corporate way.

And what does that take? It's not just that we are required. He himself is trusting. In fact, his faith and his trust is far more staggering than our own.

Easier for us to trust in God than for him to trust who has put all his eggs in one basket called the body of Christ or his own son on the earth and all of the temptations and struggles to which that life would pass. And the father trusts, because as I said yesterday, faith is the milieu. Faith is the divine environment in which God himself moves and has his being.

It's not something he requires of us. It's something that is intrinsic to him. So it's a remarkable thing that the father in every way is afflicted with our afflictions as he was with his son.

He knows the struggle. He's not detached. I don't know how to explain it.

We're at the threshold of revelation or heresy. And I'm not sure which way we're going to fall. But if you don't take that risk, you're going to forfeit the revelation.

This is what Forsyth is saying. He came to this by a progress of growth that when it was complete, he was that image. Maybe at any stage he reflected it, but the totality came with the completion of his growth and the same issues with us.

But the father trusted for that and the son did not betray that trust, but it required a dependency on the grace given by the father. And we equally have that dependency. All I can give is my own little paltry experience.

That is to say, does he tell you what that work is? Do you know it in advance? So you have to trust that when you open your mouth, what is being expressed is the fulfillment of that work. After it's finished, you can see maybe something of the magnitude of what has taken place. But the beginning and the continuation is the issue of faith and trust.

So there's a tension because it was established before the foundation that the earth was laid. It doesn't mean that for you it's going to be a snap. For you, it's a total risk.

For you, it's a threat. For you, everything is hanging on the making or the breaking of it only as it comes forth in moral obedience. Got the idea? And when it does come forth, it is that work.

It requires a faith to believe for that, but it doesn't mean that faith means you lean on your haunches and it's all done and you just come and open your mouth and boom, it takes place. There's a dynamic of trust, even word for word. Have you ever watched speakers like that? They stop and you wonder what they're pausing for.

What they're pausing for is the next word, the next thought. They don't have it except as they are giving themselves in faith for the unfolding of it as we are doing even now, right now, this morning, today. That I looked at this book two days ago, put it on the pile, and now I'm opening it for the first time.

Why? Not to say, look, I'm on no hands, but to give God full optimum occasion to give on the spot his spontaneous work and by the life of his spirit. True preaching is that every single time. True teaching, true witness, true prayer.

There's got to be a living God. Isn't that who you're praying to and whom you believe? He's a living God. Okay, Lord, you're on.

This is it. This is finale. This is conclusion.

We can't humanly know what needs to be expressed in the last session. Having heard the cries of this morning, people still in distress, still waiting for answers, still more agitated for having come than had they remained. So Lord, how is that to be met? And one final statement from you at the conclusion of our days, who's sufficient for those things? And so you open and you trust for the dynamic of God himself in his presence and the reality of his spirit and power to bring forth.

And when he brings it forth, it's the work that was appointed and established before the foundations. You know what? If that's true, what kind of admiration ought we to have for such a God? That a work that was

established in his conception before the foundations is now being perpetrated, obtained and performed in this gasp of stuttering and believing and gasping for air and for the word in all of the moral strain and trust that hinges upon a piece of flesh called a man for that work. So it brings the thing established with the thing taking place in its present dynamic.

Well, maybe I'm still a Marxist in my deeps because the root of Marxism is dialectical materialism for anybody who's been to sociology 1A. What is that? That Marx drew from the German philosopher Hegel who had conceived of a dynamic at the root of life called dialectical. A dialectic of a thesis and an antithesis.

Something in opposition and something in the working of these opposites in the dynamic brings forth the new thing. A synthesis. And what is a synthesis? Socialism.

What does it come out of? Capitalism and I don't know what else. So Marx took this philosophy and brought it as a key of history and the understanding of society that was so dynamic that it raptured me. When I was a kid going to Marxist Institute in Manhattan, I can't tell you, I would leave the lectures floating.

My feet were not on the floor. Dialectical materialism. It so spoke to my heart because it touched at something that I think is real.

Isn't it interesting that Marxism and communism has done more in its perverted way with the concept of the community and the cell and people in a bonding of identity for purposes than the church itself knows. So this man is bringing this kind of mentality. There's a dynamic.

We haven't seen it sufficiently and that's why we're so passive. That's why our churches are constituted by overacting men on a platform, the professionals, ministering to a sea of passivity. That nothing is ever required but their presence and their dollar in the collection plate and an amen and a hallelujah in the singing of a chorus.

We're breeding an entire church that is stupefied in stupefaction and narrowness and does not grow because there's nothing required. There's no dynamic. There's nothing incumbent upon them.

It all takes place from the platform. So we lose the genius of the dynamic of the church that Jesus exhibited in the dynamic of his own humanity. That's what this man is saying.

Okay. We need to become dialecticians. We need to see the spontaneous and electric elements that come up in life that need to be recognized and to see the outworking.

That things are not static and fixed. There's hope. There's the presence of God who is the third fold caught in covenant.

His presence in our situations means that our marriage is not hopeless. If God is the third fold, there's hope unspeakable. And there's a dynamic there of how he will express that presence and how we recognize it and yield to it and are tempted in our condemnation of each other for failing as husbands and wives.

It's another mentality. And what to God the church would have it. I would say faith is sacrifice in every instance.

That is to say you can easily lapse into your own humanity in any situation. It's always accessible to have a convenient, practical answer out of your experience or out of your knowledge of thought. If you want to be relieved from the tension of what God's word and God's reality is in that moment.

So the faith means the sacrifice of forsaking the comfort and security of what's available to you in your unaided humanity. And then trusting that what comes is from God and speaking and doing it. So there's only one of multitudes of instances where God will do the untoward thing.

And often in a way that seems to contradict what you think God to do. And even contradict and offend your own taste and sensibility. That would offend you to hear anyone say it, let alone that you should say it.

That's the faith which is sacrifice. That's the faith that Jesus exercised. I only do that which I hear from my father or see from my father.

I never once drew from my own very capable humanity as distinguished as it was. I was other and always totally thrust upon him. I'm a son.

And my object is not to get by in the moment that I'm saved from embarrassment. My object is to glorify and gratify him. So whatever he gives me to speak, Nicodemus comes and says, and who's Nicodemus? He's a ruler of the Jews.

What a plumb, what a feather in anyone's cap that if you gave him step one and step two in how to be saved brother and he receives the Lord and he comes into the congregation and he's an important person in the Jewish community. Terrific. What does Jesus do? He blows it.

He confuses and he bewilders the man and gives him answers that seem totally unrelated to his questions. Except you be born again of the spirit and water, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. God wasn't even thinking along those lines.

Must I, must I pass again the second time through my mother's womb? Shows how literal and material he was in his mindset, though he was a ruler of the Jews, which means he should have been informed about spiritual things. Jesus said, if you're not received from me, these things, how should we receive heavenly things? So he's giving him a heavenly answer to earthly questions and letting the man go in a bewildered state in which you don't know the result because he himself says in John 3 that the spirit blows where it will and you cannot tell from whence it's coming or where it's going. But we want to tell, we need to know, that's what we were schooled in the world.

You don't do something before you know what the consequence is going to be. But in the kingdom, the spirit will list where it will and you cannot know where it came from, know where it's going. You cannot know.

All you can do is be obedient and yield it to that spirit. That's what Jesus was. And what do we find out in his death? Nicodemus is the one who asked for his body.

And if Nicodemus is not in heaven now, I'll eat this book. And he's in heaven because he received an answer from the father greater than his question to a son who is obedient to give it and not fall back on John 3.16 or are you saved brother. See what I mean? Faith is a dynamic of trust and it'll bring you into places where you'll find yourself mortified or embarrassed or you think that even God himself is being contradicted.

How can he say that and do that? And yet it is God and you need to trust. And how do you come to that faith? By suffering, by degrees, by a history. You grow into it.

He's not going to give you a challenge of faith beyond what your present capacity is to which he has led you now. You're not going to be asked to address 60 university students or 100 or 200 black ministers. You're going to be asked to witness to the next door neighbor or to your Jewish dentist or something like that.

The issue of faith will be appropriate to what our history has been until that time. And when you're obedient in that moment, then you go on to the next, the next, and the next. So it's a dynamic life, not static.

In fact, to use Jesus' reply to Nicodemus for yourself may be entirely to the Lord. He didn't give us a one-time prescription for every situation. Now, because he said that to Nicodemus, now we have a formula.

Life is not a formula. That word that was perfect for Nicodemus would be totally out of place with another man on another occasion. So what we need to do is find the word appropriate for the man in that moment and in that situation as Jesus found it for Nicodemus, by a trust of the Father.

That's a dynamic life. So the great question that Saul asked when he was brought down to the earth on the road to Damascus is the question. And Paul lived his entire apostolic life in the light of that question, Lord, what would you have for me to do? So we need continually to be in the tension of that question now every day, like today.

Is this what you'll ever have us to do? Or should we have done something else? Because once it's done, it's irretrievable. And that heightens the risk and the value. Can we have a confidence in that what we are about is what we ought to do? How valid is the question that we're putting forward? Do we really mean it? And if it requires something on our part like embarrassment, humiliation, or the prospect of failure, will we yet obey? It's not pat, it's not snap.

And as far as Jesus knowing his vocation, even that may have been progressively revealed to him as he went on, as he came closer to the approach of his death, he was able to say, I need to go to Jerusalem in their wicked hands. And maybe he didn't know it at the first and the angels therefore had to comfort him. And so we need, this is what it means, true man and true God, true man in trembling, true man in dependency, true man in faith, and all of the kinds of things that we face as men.

It was a personality that differed from all others by finding its growth to lie in the unaided and sinless appropriation of that which it already was. But it was in no fated or mechanical way. The ground of his inability to sin did not lie in the immunity and almost necessity of a nature or rank, but in the moral details, the moral reverberation of his great initial and inclusive act eternal in the heavens.

His renunciations on earth had behind them all the power of that compendious renunciation by which he came to the earth. Isn't that a stagger, is that a thought? The great renunciation was the decision to come to the earth. That's why the crisis was not just his death, but his birth.

The voluntary willing agreement of the son to the father to leave the indescribable blessing and comfort of eternal presence with the father and come leave that and come into the earth was the great renunciation. It was already the cross before the cross. It was already the principle which is intrinsic in the Godhead

itself.

And once you have that behind you, that initial moral resolve and decision and choice, then your earthly walk is the continuing working out of that initial renunciation. I'll give an A for the day and two gold stars if someone can translate that statement into its application for us now. There's a single basic great renunciation that is foundational to the entire subsequent spiritual life and the fulfillment of its vocation.

But if it is not made, then how shall our continuing renunciations have an energy and a source if we have not made the initial one that Jesus made before he came to earth? What's the possible application of that for us? Do we make a decision before we're in the earth now? But have you ever made a once and for all basic renunciation? A really a committing of your life to death that you have no life, no possibility, no future if there's no resurrection, that there's no purpose for you in and of yourself. And you're giving over your future and your hope for marriage, for family, for career as one death. That your baptism was that renunciation.

And if there's anything after that, it's the miracle of resurrection or you're still down there in the water in the muck. How many have made a renunciation of that magnitude? And I'm suggesting that because we have not made it, most of us, our lives are continually spotty, up and down, erratic, one day up, one day depressed, because there was not as foundational a renunciation at the inception of our spiritual life as there was for his. I've never before seen that.

I've never before said that until I'm reading what he's saying about Jesus. Because my practical Jewish mind or whatever it is, is always looking for what's the implication for us? And there is an implication. There was a profound renunciation for Jesus before he left heaven.

And every subsequent renunciation, even to the cross was, so to speak, already decided there. Once you've made that, the rest follows. But if you've not made that, you're going to be choking and spluttering and kicking and howling all the rest of the way.

Let's examine the genius of that apostolic moment, because Paul is the apostolic man that begins with a revelation, the sight of the crucified Christ, the indictment, why do you persecute me? And then, Lord, what would you have for me to do? When does God answer that question? He does. And by whom? And when? It came through Ananias, who was one of the lowliest and most ordinary of all saints, trembling with fear to go to this dangerous man's bedside, lay hands upon him. But when he does, the answer is, tell him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Not what deeds, what great things he must suffer for my name's sake, is the essential answer of God to the apostolic man. What's the implication for us? If Paul is the prototype, the paradigm of apostolicity, and this raises the great question, and this is the great answer, what then for us who have apostolic intention, not to be apostles, but to go in and serve in that mode, in that reality, is a great suffering. Have you recognized that? Do you even have a heart for great things? Do you have a heart for the word great? Because to be called to what is apostolic is to be called to what is great, and necessarily implies a great suffering.

Okay, it was so for Jesus, it was so for Paul, and it should be also for us, but in no fated or mechanical way. His renunciations had behind them all the power of that compendious renunciation by which he came to earth. Have we recognized that as compendious? I don't know, I've never heard that word before.

An enormous renunciation. It's the revelation of God, just the decision to come, shows God's own nature, and the son's freedom, and voluntary choosing to obey the father's will, is the revelation of God himself even before he comes on earth. Just a voluntary decision, heightens our appreciation, and that's why elsewhere in this book he says, in a previous chapter, in which he, a whole chapter is devoted to the pre-incarnate life of Christ, he says the church is suffering, I've got to find that for you.

It's so true. It may be observed in conclusion on examining the pre-incarnate life, that if the influence on the church upon the world is less today than it once was, that loss of effect is at least concurrent with an unprecedented weakening of belief within the church itself, in his life before life, and in his prenatal will. He's saying the church has paid a price for losing, or perhaps never having, a sense of the pre-incarnate life of Christ.

That there's mystery there, there's revelation there, and to ignore that is as much as to ignore the post-resurrection life, namely his ascension. So the coming down into the earth is a profound statement of God, as the much is being raised up out from the grave to the throne is a statement of God. If you miss the one or the other, or give them inadequate attention and comprehension, you miss God in the fullness of his glory that is intended for our perception, and our praise, our worship, and our adoration.

We may be losing out on the issue of adoration exactly to the degree that we have been non compass mentis on the pre-incarnate life, and have not understood what it represents, and what it represents in Jesus' voluntary willingness to leave it, to come down into this grimy earth, and suffer not just the physical things, but the moral things of God being compressed into the finiteness of man, and suffering all those things as a servant, and then as a death of the most vile kind as a criminal. So the same author is saying, it could be that the church has lost its influence in the world, and that it's concurrent or in proportion to the weakening of belief within the church in itself, in his life before life, we must consider the pre-incarnate life, because something was transacted there, foundationally, that is later acted out in the earth, but had its first inception in heaven. Because he made it, he can communicate to us something of the moral strength, tested in his own decision, for us to make a comparable decision.

This is the legacy of the humanity of Jesus that we acquire by faith, that in him is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, but also all the fullness of his own history, of his own renunciation. He's the master renouncer, all the way to the cross, and he's calling us to a renunciation also, not just once, but continually. Like not speaking a conventional thing that would please people, but a thing that will stupefy them, or whatever it is the obedience requires, is predicated on a certain grace given to us by someone who has already preceded us in it, and can communicate something of the moral strength necessary for us to perform it.

So without him we can do nothing, we can't even renounce, and maybe that's why our renouncing is so threadbare, because we're renouncing out from our own humanity. We're making a human kind of decision like, I don't know, as if it's a commercial transaction. Why do we do that? Because we have not understood the magnitude of what renunciation is.

If we understood that, that at some measure of what he renounced, giving up his eternal union with the Father, coming into a grim and inhospitable earth in a world that is at enmity with God, and that our renunciation bears something of that same weight, we would know that we can't make it humanly. In fact, we can't do anything humanly. We're utterly dependent upon him who has gone before us.

And you know what? What an appreciation. What a deepened admiration that he's not left us orphans, and he's not left us destitute, that we don't have to play the game of Christianity as Rotarians and Elks, and as if it's some fraternal organization, and we can do this by the numbers humanly. The call to the faith is impossible.

With man it's impossible. God has called us to what is impossible, but if it becomes for you possible, you're out of the faith. If your Christianity is something that you can perform on the basis of your humanity, your resolution, your ability, you're out of the faith.

We can become servants, which is the essential identity of God himself. Of course, servanthood is renunciation, and we should not be ashamed of a lowly calling, which Jesus demonstrated in the washing of the feet of the disciples, not just as a momentary inspiration, but as a statement of what he ever and always was, even before his earthly advent, that the Father himself is a servant. How is he a servant? He sends his Son.

He sends now everything, every good and perfect thing comes down from above. The Father is continually serving. The Son served.

We're called to serve, but we want to be served rather than to serve, so we will reflect our greater David, not just as a model that we emulate, but as a life that we have received that's already conditioned and disposed to those things by his nature. So he's working out his essential nature in the eventualities of the life on earth. He had come to a place of humiliation, humility, in which his supposed knowledge has gone out the window with that revelation of the crucified one whose believers he was going out of his way to persecute.

So what he has to say in one fell swoop, I'm all wrong. Everything in which I've trusted and I've been groomed is totally wrong. I don't even know God.

I'm opposing and persecuting him in my zeal. Lord, who are you? And I think that that is a necessary preliminary to the question of, Lord, what would you have me to do? That we're co-heirs with him if we will suffer with him, so also will we share his glory. That what Jesus exemplified his life, poor experiences, and now commends to those whom he brings to the faith.

And yet, is that not current with us? That suffering is intrinsic to the faith, is unavoidable, and not only as persecution or external suffering, but where that's not available, there's an inward kind that the Lord knows how to allow, even in the ordinary circumstances of our life, our marriage, our family, and our situation, that is even yet more painful and excruciating than that which is external. Okay, well, so even as his earthly acts of individual forgiveness before he came to the universal forgiveness of Calvary, had behind him the cross, which he took up when the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. His relation to God was immediate from the first and perfect, but that did not give him any immunity from the moral law that we must earn by which we earn our greatest legacies.

Let me read that. His relation to God was immediate from the first and perfect, as the Son in his eternal designation with the Father in heaven before he came. But in coming, that did not give him any immunity from the moral law by which we must earn our greatest legacies.

I even wrote it, any magical immunity. His deity did not make him immune or save him from the requirement of being a man in the world, and testing and perfecting the reality of his sonship to the Father

by the things which he suffered and had to experience, because he lay aside those prerogatives. So we must earn our greatest legacies and appropriate by toil and conflict our best gifts.

Here he's not waiting for us to ask the question, he's telling us, if this is what Jesus had to do, how do you obtain your legacy and your best gifts? In the same way, by the moral law, conflict and all that is required in the attainment of maturity, this was only possible if he had to begin with a unique, central and powerful relationship, relation to the being of God apart from his own earthly decisions, so that his growth was growth in what he was and not simply by what he might be. It was not acquiring what he had not, but appropriating and realizing what he had. It was coming to his own unique self.

So he's saying very much about that relationship with the Father, a unique, central and powerful relation to the being of God. So the question is, did Jesus have that by virtue of his eternal relatedness to the Father? Or did he have it by a faith that appropriated and quickened the relationship with the Father? Was the Father a factor in the Lord's life automatically by virtue of his prehistory? Or was the Father a factor in his life by his continual prayer and devotion and the seeking of the Father early at the commencement of every day? The only answer I'm asking is, is even the relationship with the Father a moral issue and not some automatic thing with which he came fitted by his prehistory? Though it was true he had that relationship with the Father's prehistory, but to eventuate and activate that knowledge and relationship with the Father on the earth, it was not by summoning what he already had automatically. It was by devotion.

It was rising early in the morning. It was seeking the Father. It was condescending to the Father.

It was waiting on the Father. That makes all the difference, because then that relationship is equally as available to us. We equally need a sense of the Father behind us as sons, and if we couldn't have it by virtue of natural birth or circumstance already in the earth, we can have it by an attainment through prayer, through fellowship, through communion, which is in fact the critical factor that is so grossly neglected by most of the church today, because we are unwilling, like Jesus, to rise early to seek him.

He was not seeking him for instruction. I know that I know that. He was seeking him for communion.

That's why he said, this kind cometh not out, but by fasting and prayer. Not that it will equip you with a formula. It will equip you with a reality of God and his magnitude and majesty and authority that is so implicit in you by your union with him and devotion that when you address those dark spirits, they know it.

Jesus they know, and Paul they know, and they know you because you exhibit the same inward reality that you have attained by a process of devotion over a course of time. That's why this is so important to ferret out, whereas the church somehow assumes in its unthinking that Jesus had it all together. You know, he came, he was the Son of God, then he did this, then he did that.

Well, what do you expect? Of course. But if we understand that his struggle and the moral issues of his life are exactly identical to our own, and that there's a process of growth through faith and obedience that required a dependency and a trust and a knowledge of the Father that grows by virtue of his devotion is not automatic. That changes the whole complexion of things.

That gives us a deeper appreciation for the Son, a deeper appreciation for the Father, that the Father lets the Son go, like the father of the prodigal son, not to waste his substance, but to let him go, and all of the risks that coming into the world will be. Because the first thing that Jesus has to experience after the

baptism in the Jordan, where the dove came down and the heavens was opened and the voice of the Father cried out, this is my beloved Son, is being driven into the wilderness and tempted by Satan. If you'll be the Son of God, then make stones into bread.

If you'll be the Son of God, do this. If you'll be the Son of God, he's already mocking and questioning the very statement from the Father that he isn't the Son of God. And Jesus can't say, well, listen, he's got to wrestle out these temptations after fasting 40 days and giving the answers to one who is brilliant in his own knowledge of scripture.

So there's an immediate testing as soon as the issue of sonship is struck, which is already a crisis for Jesus. Don't think, because when he finished, what happens? The angels come and they comfort him. There's a solace.

It was such a trial, a test of his nude identity before the most dangerous opponent that it required the comfort of angels to be given him after it. And that's how his career commences. This is loaded.

You know, you can almost come to love a Lord like this, who went through all that for our sake, not just with the atonement, great as that is, or we'd be dead ducks, but also to teach us what it means to be sons and to go before us in the realm of faith that we can believe for ourselves by the same grace. He didn't have to, he could have come automatic, could have performed the things necessary for atonement, taken up back to where he came from, the glory that was always his. He went through a history, a life as a man, and even as a child, when he was with the doctors of the law in Jerusalem, both hearing and answering questions, hearing and raising questions is a precious glimpse of his humanity.

Though he had a brilliant, I'm sure by even the age of 12 sense of things in his humanity, he respected these older men. He respected the sages. He respected these doctors of the law, and he both raised questions.

It wasn't to tempt them or to mock them, but to be engaged with them in his humanity. And then the parents come because he had disappeared and they were vexed with, don't you know you've upset your father and me? He said, don't you know I have to be about my father's business? Don't you understand? You don't have just an ordinary son here. I'm getting the sense that I have a destiny to call in my father's house.

And then it says, he went down with them to Nazareth and he submitted to them. And the next verse says, and he grew in stature and grace before God and before men. His going down was the key to his growth.

Coming down from heaven was the key to his growth. Going down to Nazareth was the key to his growth. What then is the key to our growth? Going down to Nazareth.

Submitting again to conditions that are not conducive to our spirituality, but actually oppose them. Well, what do we have in our American mentality? Discipleship school. Three months.

Go ahead and save the world. Young upstarts. Because we're seeing the older upstarts in such great need.

What can we say about the youngest? So we think we can knock something off the assembly line and send out green and ill-formed young people who don't yet have a history in God. Don't even know what devotion is. And faith for them is a formula.

You believe for this and you call for that. They don't understand faith is an apprehension of the character of God that you know through a history with him in trial. He sweated clots of blood in the anguish of this final thing that completes his course.

If he could avoid it, not because he was a coward or he could not take physical punishment as it would be, but to become sin in so ugly and noxious a way that the father himself had to turn his face and depart from him in any felt sense that he would have to cry out in ultimate despair, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? That's the cup that he hesitated to drink. That I would have to forfeit the sense of my father. I've known it eternally.

It's my life, my union with him, my sense of him is my life. And even for a moment that that has to be taken, that this is what the cross is. Not only it's physical, but it's moral anguish.

I've got to drink that to the dregs. If this cup could pass, but of course it could not. So I'm fond of saying that the blood of atonement in its first expression was not extricated by man, but exuded by the son of man in the garden.

He sweated clots of blood. So deep was the moral anguish of facing that cross and all of its agony, morally as well as physically, that we need to bow before this remarkable sacrifice. And that's why that sacrifice was a sweet savor to the father.

This is more than the blood of calves and bulls. This is the perfected son of God. This is true man and true God giving himself voluntarily to the most vile form of execution that only satanic ingenuity could conceive through a Roman system.

And he knew that in sense when he left heaven, that this would be the ultimate destiny. And he did it voluntarily and freely because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and God so loved the world that his only son was willing to be given. So that's the heart of the faith and the gospel that Paul says is the righteousness of God from faith to faith as it is written.

Okay.

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