

Counting Christmas

Philippians 2:5-8

December 27, 2020 a.m.

HDBC

Christmas with the Kranks is a movie about a couple who are anticipating their first Christmas as empty-nesters. It's based on John Gresham's book, **Skipping Christmas**. Knowing that it would be sad to celebrate Christmas without their only daughter, Blaire, who has joined the Peace Corp, they decide to skip Christmas and take a Caribbean cruise. In one of the early scenes of the movie we find Luther Krank at his desk adding up all the receipts from the previous Christmas. He later reports to his wife that they spent over \$6000 last year.

I've never spent \$6,000 on Christmas, as my children can confirm. However, I do spend money for Christmas. Gifts, decorations, wrapping, food, travel. Christmas can be an expensive holiday, for sure. It's probably a good idea to **count the cost of Christmas!**

Even more important is to count the cost of the birth of Christ. Let's do that this morning by **Counting Christmas**. Not talking about **doctor bills**, for Mary had no doctor at her side. No cost for a **hospital bed, epidural or Lamaze coaching class**. Not even talking about the cost to Mary and Joseph. I'm talking about the cost to Jesus. What did the incarnation cost Him?

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul offers insight that will help us understand what it costs Jesus to become one of us. We often focus on the suffering that Jesus experienced on the cross . . . and rightfully so. But the price He paid for our opportunity to be saved began long before He was nailed to a cross outside the city of Jerusalem. It began when he entered humanity through His birth to the young virgin, Mary.

Christmas surely is about shepherds and a star, wise men and gifts, good news and goodies, angels and lights . . . but it's also about an incredible sacrifice made by the Son of God. **It was costly for Him to join our ranks!**

Read Philippians 3:5-8

We like to hear about the *rags-to-riches* stories. Stories of individuals who started at the bottom, with nothing, and ended at the top, with everything. That is the American dream. **This text** reveals a **riches-to-rags** story.

As followers of Jesus we learn that it is not about getting, but about giving. I see in this text no less than five things which Jesus **voluntarily gave up** in order to bring us the greatest Christmas gift, the gift of salvation. But first, we must first consider His starting point. Two phrases offer important insight.

Existed in the form of God ***Equality with God***

Both phrase make it clear that Jesus was fully God.

Form - Has nothing to do with size or shape of God. God is a Spirit being. The outward expression of the inward nature. The essential attributes of God were found in Jesus. In the incarnation, Jesus became the visible expression of God. He is God in human flesh. But even before that, He has always been God. The NIV rightly translates this word as ***nature of God***. For that is the meaning.

This is affirmed in John 17:5 when Jesus prayed, *Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.* Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is *the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature.*

Not assistant to God, junior partner, VP of Heaven. Equal in every way. He was present & involved at creation and has ruled and reigned from eternity past. He had everything! There was nothing beyond His reach. There was nothing that could be added that would increase His fortune, his pleasure or his worth.

Remember that Paul's point is that we are to be like Christ. He is our example. Notice what a great example He is. So, what did He do in joining our ranks?

1. He Relaxed His Grip (6)

Grasped - To clutch, hold on to. To use for one's exclusive benefit. Paul is writing not of the deity of Jesus, but of the privileges of deity.

For all eternity He enjoyed the **adoration of the universe**. Everywhere He heard praises and worship of angels. Enjoyed all rights and advantages of being God. But He willingly **relaxed His grip** on those things. They were rightfully His to be enjoyed, but He was willing to let them go.

How unlike most of us. We insist on our rights and privileges. We clutch possessions, power, positions. His first demotion was a willingness to let go of the privileges that came with His exalted position.

He looked at all that He enjoyed simply because He was God, and said, ***I can let that go of those things.***

2. **He Died to Self (7)** *Emptied Himself.* (powerful statement)
One speaks of his willingness. An attitude. A mindset.
Two was carrying out number one. An Action.

This is one side of the incarnation. Giving up something in order to gain something else. We'll see that something else in the next point.

Whatever would interfere with His ability to become fully human, was laid aside. Here are some examples:

- 1) **Glory.** While walking this earth His glory was hidden. To others, he looked just like a common man. All voluntary. None stripped away from Him.
- 2) **Independent authority.** The NT repeated presents Him as yielding to His Father. He was willing to be submissive to the Father.
- 3) **Wealth.** In his earthly life He experienced poverty and homelessness.
- 4) **Unbroken Fellowship with His Father.** He needed to stop and pray. On the cross there was a time when the Father turned away from the Son. There is a mystery here that we may never fully understand.

Once again, remember that Paul's point is that we are to be like Jesus! We, too, must be willing to relax our grip on the privileges that we have. We need to die to self. Jesus made it clear when He began to call followers. ***Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.***

3. **He Became a Man (7-8)** 3 phrases.
Taking the form of a bond-servant
Being made in the likeness of man
Being found in appearance as a man

He did not cease to be God. He was always deity. But He added something to his deity–humanity! This is the other side of the incarnation. One side involved giving up the advantages of being God. The other side involved taking on humanity with all its weakness, pain and limitations.

For the first time, He felt **the binding confines of flesh, now is wrapped in skin. Has to use doors, eat, sleep, ride animals.** He could stub his toe, get a splinter and have insomnia. The omnipotent one has made himself breakable. He, who had been only spirit, has now become pierceable.

He who is larger than the universe has weight and height which can be measured. The one who upholds the universe will now receive his nourishment from his young mother. What a violent and profane thing this must have been for the Son of God. Creator taking the form of the creature. Like us in every way, except sin.

Imagine humiliation - *OK mom, I'll do what you ask. Hey boy, get out of the way. Who do you think you are? Something special? Well you're not. Move it buddy. Stay in your place.*

Illustrate - man becoming ant. Not close. One creature taking form of lower creature. This is creator becoming creature. In that form he was bond-servant. Serving obstinate, arrogant, people who could care less about the sacrifice He was making.

He Relaxed His Grip	Determined to think of others over self.
He Died to Self	He gave up privileges in order to help others.
He Became a Man	He entered into the experience of others.

4. **He Yielded to Death (8)**

One who breathed life into all that has life, and sustains life, now willingly laid down His life. It was incredible that He experienced birth and life as a human, but the thought that he would also yield to death must have been **scandalous to the angels** observing this plan unfold. I can imagine some thinking *that's far enough! No more!* But there was.

Stands toe to toe with death's champion and lays down his weapons. High noon at OK corral and the good guy lays down gun. You win. Shoot me.

This was one of the key stumbling blocks for the religious leaders of His day. Not only could they not imagine the promised Messiah being a common man, there was no way they could get their head around the fact that He would actually die a human death. It was unthinkable to them!

They did not think they were in need of that kind of sacrifice. They had convinced themselves that they were good enough to measure up and

make it to heaven. They needed to substitute sacrifice! Their pride made it impossible for them to grasp that they were unable to save themselves.

5. **He Submitted to the Cross (8)**

Even death on the cross.

How would he die? Would he lay down and die peacefully? No, it would be cross. Designed not just to kill, but to torture. Make victim experience all sensations of dying in prolonged way. Humiliation as the victim was stripped of his clothing and exposed to the elements and to those watching. Mercy of insects, scorners, etc. Spit, jeer.

He would experience the **height of humiliation**, as He voluntarily subjected himself to a pagan ruler whom He put into place and to the religious leaders who had made it their life's goal to get Him killed.

As you reflect on the gifts given and received this Christmas, never forget the greatest gift ever given came with a high price.

But it was worth it to Him. Because He loves people. We are willing to spend freely and sacrificially for those whom we love. His gift enables people to find joy and fulfillment in life and to receive eternal life. But He doesn't force the gift on anyone. He gently offers it. Will you receive it? Bought and paid for. You can have it.

When all the ornaments packed in boxes, decorations hidden away. Wrapping paper cleaned up, and life returns to normal schedule. When the newness of the toys and gadgets has worn off, the greatest gift of all will still be offered.

He looked like anything but a king. Normal infant boy held close to his mother. As Mary recovered from the pains of childbirth, she looked into the eyes of one who had begun a most amazing journey.

Majesty in the midst of mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure. Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager in the presence of a carpenter. She touches his face not knowing all that He has already been through and all that He has yet to endure. She was gazing at a gift that came at the greatest price to the giver and the greatest benefit to those who receive it.

LORD'S SUPPER