

Introduction

I'd like you to consider a question tonight. What is the grand sacrifice? I mean by that, the one in history that exceeded all the others in the price it paid. Most of us would answer it was Jesus dying on the cross for everyone's sins. I'd never demean the terrible price Jesus paid in doing that. But in my view, there was another sacrifice that was as grand as His death and Isaiah 7:14 reveals what it was, **"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a Son, and she will call His name Immanuel."** The birth of Jesus was as grand a sacrifice as His death was. Let's quickly examine Isaiah 7:14 and we'll grasp why.

Jesus Becomes a Child

We begin with the name ascribed to Jesus. It's **"Immanuel,"** a Hebrew word that means literally **"God is with us."** Protestant reformer John Calvin maintained that the name Immanuel **"cannot be applied to anyone who is not God"** and he was right. God is one being with three persons and the name Immanuel being applied to Jesus makes it clear. He's one of the three, God the Son.

That necessarily means He possesses all of the divine attributes. To illustrate, one of those is that He's all-powerful. He can do anything that's logically possible. He can, for instance, stop the earth from rotating on its axis and then start it up again, which He did in Joshua 10:12-14. But He isn't just all-powerful. He's all all-knowing, all-wise, everywhere present, and more. Because He's God, He possesses all the capabilities that God possesses. He is utterly competent.

Now look at the words **"child"** and **"son."** They reveal that Jesus became a human being. We call that the incarnation, the coming of Jesus in the flesh. He became like us in the essential aspects of our humanity.

First, He became like us physiologically. Consider two facts. One is that our kidneys filter 10,000 gallons of blood every year. The other is

that we shed 9 pounds of dead skin cells every year. That's true of our body and it was true of Jesus' body as well. His kidneys filtered 10,000 gallons of blood and He shed 9 pounds of dead skin cells, every year. His body, in its organic and nature and function, was like ours.

Second, He became like us psychologically. We have thinking, feeling, and willing dimensions and so did He. We have fond childhood memories, for instance, and so did He. We believe something about taxes and so did He. We have our favorite food and so did He. We get a kick out of small children and so did He. We choose to marry or not to marry and so did He. We think, feel, and will and so did He.

So that's what the words "**Immanuel**," "**child**," and "**son**," together, teach us. Jesus is God. And Jesus became a human being.

The Grand Sacrifice

You realize of course what that implies. God became a human being. Let those words sink in because they're the real meaning of Christmas. God became a human being. That doesn't mean that He was then not God or less than God because He wasn't. A.W. Tozer explained it well, "**In His incarnation the Son veiled His deity, but He did not void it.**" That's exactly right. Jesus veiled His deity but didn't void it.

Veiling it, nevertheless, was a dramatic thing. I said that He is all-powerful. In contrast, think of Him during the first hours after His birth. The same One who could stop the earth from rotating on its axis and start it up again could then not even feed Himself. The same One who could do anything that's logically possible could then do almost nothing.

That demonstrates what the incarnation of Jesus was. It was the grand sacrifice. As I've already pointed out, it was as sacrificial as His death was. C.S. Lewis said it this way: "**If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or crab.**"

Well, let's get the hang of it by thinking about just that, becoming slugs. So, it takes you and me 15 minutes to walk a mile. If we were slugs though, with a top speed of 150 feet per hour, it would take us

over 35 hours. Or you and I have a million gigabytes of memory capacity. If we were slugs though, we'd have none. Our descent in becoming slugs, as you can see, would be vast. But that's nothing compared to the descent of Jesus in becoming a human being. His descent was so vast in fact that it was as sacrificial as His death was. The price He paid was just as great.

Follow Jesus' Example

But so what? What does the grand sacrifice mean to us? It's many things, one of which Paul reveals in Philippians 2:5-7: **"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, emptied Himself, being made in the likeness of men."**

Let me make an observation. You and I, in our natural state, are wrapped up in ourselves. Our thoughts, feelings, choices, actions, and habits are directed primarily to the good of us. Listen to this little ditty from the *Gospel Herald Magazine*: **"Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use 'I' as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen eagerly to what people say about you. Be suspicious. Expect to be appreciated. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors. Never forget a service you rendered. This is an infallible recipe for misery."** That's what it means to be wrapped up in ourselves and the author of that is right. It's a recipe for misery. The soap opera lives of almost everyone around us prove it so.

In contrast to that, the grand sacrifice calls us to get over ourselves. We should apply the descent of God to us. As Paul exhorted us, we should emulate Jesus – follow His example. He lowered Himself and so should we. We should direct our thoughts, feelings, actions, choices, and habits primarily to the good of God and others not us. We

should put God and others above us, not below us.

We do that in a specific way. We apprentice ourselves to Jesus. We firmly make the decision to be with Him in order to become like Him and to do all that He says. We then do our best to carry out that decision.

Conclusion

Something powerful happens when we do. We enter into a transforming relationship with Him. Listen to the words of C.S. Lewis in that regard: **“The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to ‘inject’ His kind of life and thought into you.”** He was right. When we apprentice ourselves to Jesus, He slowly but surely turns us into human versions of Himself. He shapes and moulds us so that we eventually become persons who are like Him – ones who habitually sacrifice or descend. At that point, we are living breathing testimonies of the true meaning of Christmas, which is this. The birth of Jesus was the grand sacrifice.