

The Trials of the Incarnation

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the joy that was set before the Son of God in the trials of his incarnation
2. aim – to cause us to rejoice that the trials of the Son of God mean joy for us in our salvation
3. passage – Hebrews 12:1-3

b. outline

1. The Covenant of the Incarnation
2. The Trials of the Incarnation
3. The Joy of the Incarnation

c. opening

1. the **choice** of sermon topic on this pre-Christmas Sunday – a choice between:
 - a. a sermon continuing the important subject of **James 1:2** – that we are to “count it all joy” when we meet the various trials of life – to recognize the *long-term value* in them (which **v. 3** explains), or
 - b. a sermon that concentrates our attention on the birth of Jesus – the appearance of the Son of God in flesh, the Incarnation and all of its ramifications for us today
2. the **compromise** of a sermon that combines both subjects
 - a. based on a “broader” understanding of **Hebrews 12:1-3** (**read**)
 - b. **reality**: the Son of God endured not just the shame of the cross, but *the full gamut of “hostility” that came in the whole of his Incarnation* – **IOW**: the Son of God endured many sufferings *in his Incarnation*, and the *joy* that was set before him was the long-term value of all of them combined
 - c. **thesis: the Son of God covenanted with his Father, in eternity past, to experience all that was necessary in relationship to humanity in order to secure the redemption of a people – his joy (the long-term value of those experiences) was the promise by the Father that his obedience would secure both the redemption of that people and his own eternal glory**

I. The Covenant of the Incarnation

Content

a. the Trinitarian nature of the covenant

1. first, let’s be clear that we understand the Incarnation to be a *Trinitarian event* ...
2. Jesus often spoke about God in his public ministry in *Trinitarian terms* (**e.g. John 14:26**)
“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”
 - a. that God (Yahweh) is a singular being, with a singular nature, essence, decree, and purpose
 - b. and, that God (Yahweh) has eternally existed as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal Persons
 - c. with each Person possessing the fullness of the Godhead, yet unique, particularly in role
3. **the incarnation is a Trinitarian event because it is an act of a Trinitarian God**

b. the eternal nature of the covenant

1. it is the Second Person of the Trinity (the Son) who, in the Godhead, acts *in relationship to* human beings – a covenant relationship between himself and the First Person to be “involved” in every way with the creature who is the *target* of that covenantal purpose (**i.e.** redemption)
 - a. **IOW**: (in reformed theology) the Father and the Son (in cooperation with the Spirit) agreed together *in eternity past* to create a world, form a creature in the image of God, and then rescue some of those creatures from their own rebellion, all to the eternal glory of the Godhead
 - b. the Son would *form, interact, and incarnate himself to experience their sufferings*
2. **the incarnation is an eternal event purposed by God between himself and his primary creature, specifically, an interaction between the Second Person of the Godhead and man**

c. the temporal nature of the covenant

1. **IMO**: it is *the Son* who **formed** the first man (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (**Genesis 2:7**)
 - a. **i.e.** the One who formed the first man after the image he had in his own eternal mind about what *he himself* would eventually “look like” in his incarnation (**as the second Adam**)
2. **IMO**: it is *the Son* who **interacted** with humanity down through time (**e.g. Genesis 16, 18, 26, 32**)
 - a. **i.e.** the various *theophanies* – appearances of “*the angel of the Lord*” in human form to deliver divine promises *that are consistent with the message of the Christ* (**as Christophanies**)

3. **thus:** it is *the Son* who **incarnates** himself with a human nature (**John 1:1,14**)
 - a. **i.e.** the perfect “combination” of the *formation* of man with his *interaction* with man = the Son of God takes a human nature upon himself (like he formed in Adam) in order to *perfectly interact* with man (to experience “almost” all of the human condition *as a human being*)
 - b. **clarification:** the Son does not “lay aside” his power and glory (contra *Fullness of Grace*) – he “takes” a full human nature which “veils” his divine glory (**i.e.** “Veiling from us his ...”)
 - c. **clarification:** the Son “keeps” this human nature *for all eternity* – the covenant with his Father is such that he is glorified *as the God-man forever*, and the eternal advocate of his own people
4. **the incarnation is an eternal event whereby the Son of God takes upon himself a complete human nature so that he can experience all of the human condition, the “trials of human life”**

II. The Trials of the Incarnation

Content

a. the trials of the incarnation

1. the trial of **humiliation** = having to span the “gap” between God and man
 - a. **note:** our inability to grasp the “immensity” of God makes it difficult for us to see this “gap”
 1. **e.g.** our inability to grasp the immensity of our own planet
 - a. a 6’ tall man can only see about 2.9 miles out into the Gulf, yet the distance to the Yucatan Peninsula due S is about 500 miles (**i.e.** only about .6% of the distance)
 - b. at 36,000 feet, one can see about 200 miles to the horizon; about 63,000 mi² is visible out of the window (**i.e.** only about .1% of the entire surface of the Pacific at 63,800,000 mi²)
 - c. yet, this is only one small blue dot orbiting a medium size star in the outer bands of a small galaxy floating amongst 100-200 billion other galaxies visible to us
 - d. **yet, God holds the entirety of this universe in the palm of his hand**
 2. the “gap” between us and the immensity of God is so great *we can’t even begin to imagine it*
 - b. the Son of God had to cross that “gap” (of *nature*, not distance; **see Phil. 2:5-7**) – **i.e.** he had to experience the state of “veiling” his immensity in a finite, limited, human nature

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

 1. **he put his eternally glorious nature as the infinite Son of God into a child in the womb of a virgin in order to experience what it means to be human**
2. the trial of **need** = having to rely upon others and learn from others in his human nature
 - a. **note:** our inability to grasp the concept of a being that is utterly *self-existent* and *self-sufficient*
 1. the nature of the Son whereby, in his divine state, *requires nothing outside of himself*
 - b. **note:** our inability to grasp the **hypostatic union** – how one person could have two distinct natures, one divine, one human, and how the divine nature in Jesus could “experience” the needs, limitations, and sufferings of the human nature *without overpowering it or rendering it unnecessary*
 1. **i.e.** the same *mystery* of a being with one nature existing in three distinct Persons
 2. **e.g.** the human nature of Jesus (in the child) was completely helpless, as all babies are – he needed to be nursed, comforted, clothed and warmed, protected, transported, and taught
 - a. our own 4-month-old grandson, **Micah**, is just now learning that there is a world *outside of himself*, and is (only now) beginning to interact with objects and persons
 - b. the human nature of Jesus (like all other human beings) needed to grow up, to learn language and complex concepts, to become self-sufficient as an adult (**see Luke 2:52**)

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”
 - c. **note:** a *later* discussion in **James**: the common upbringing of both men under Joseph
 - c. the Son of God had to experience *need* – **i.e.** he had to live in the state of needing things outside of himself, *particularly other human beings*, in order to survive
 1. **he put his eternally glorious nature as the self-sufficient Son of God into a being of need in order to experience what it means to be human**
3. the trial of **anonymity** = having to live veiled in flesh and be unrecognized by his own creation
 - a. **note:** probably a *far greater* form of “suffering” than either of the two trials above – his divine nature “veiled” from the world such that “few” other humans would truly recognize him
 1. **e.g.** his family didn’t recognize him, his disciples were often confused about him, the religious leadership didn’t see him as the fulfillment of their own Scriptures, and most of the world rejects him as anything more than a crucified carpenter
 2. even though his divine nature was apparent: the transfiguration, his miracles (**i.e.** calming a storm, walking on water), his power over life and death (**e.g.** Lazarus), his wisdom

- b. the Son of God had to experience *anonymity* – **i.e.** he had to live an obscure human existence in a backwater area of the world, unrecognized by most, in order to experience the reality of the typical human being *who is born, lives a brief life, inevitably dies, and is ultimately forgotten*
 - 1. **he put his eternally glorious nature as the immeasurably beautiful Son of God into a being that was utterly humdrum in order to experience what it means to be human**
- 4. the trial of **rejection** = having to be rejected by his own, even to the point of execution
 - a. **note:** the entire *reason* for his incarnation – to be rejected by the very creatures that he himself had formed from the dust of the ground and to whom he had given his own image (**John 1:9-11**)
“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own [people] did not receive him.”
 - 1. as noted last week: the cross = the single greatest act of evil in the history of the world – the murder of the only truly innocent person that has ever lived
 - 2. the cross = the culmination of the Curse (**i.e.** the rejection by God of man)
 - b. the Son of God had to experience *rejection* – **i.e.** he had to suffer the rejection of the world, but also **the rejection of his own Father** as he bore the wrath of those for whom he came to die
 - 1. **he put his eternally glorious nature as the obedient Son of God into a cursed being and then suffered the rejection of everyone, even to the point of his death**

III. The Joy of the Incarnation

Content

a. the joy of the incarnation (Hebrews 12:2)

- 1. the joy of **accomplishment** = the completion of the covenant and its attendant rewards
 - a. **note:** this is *not just* the joy of having accomplished *redemption*, but the joy of having accomplished *all of what the Father, Son, and Spirit covenanted together to accomplish*
 - b. the Son of God counted all of these trials (and many more!) as joy because he knew that (in the end) the combination of them *all* would result in the fullest glory of God
 - c. or, the entry of the Son of God into the world, his incarnation into a baby lying in a manger, would allow him to experience the sufferings of humanity, and this was the *joy* that was “*set before him*” – the long-term value of the incarnation was the total glorification of himself for all eternity
- 2. **thus, those who know him by faith “look to him” as the ultimate example of one who saw the long-term value of suffering, and wait patiently through it for the Son of God to accomplish (eventually) its purpose in glorifying them**