

Humble Splendor

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[0 : 00] As we consider this morning the humble splendor of how Jesus was born.! It's interesting to me that the nativity, this humble scene of Jesus in a manger surrounded by his family and shepherds and animals has really become a quaint and cherished image for us during the Christmas season.

But at the time of his birth, the idea of having a baby in the place where the animals were kept was no more glamorous than it was today.

And I'm sure his parents also felt it about as desirable as you would. You show up at the hospital, sorry we're out of beds, but we do have an animal trough available for this birth.

It represents, in very stark terms, the humblest of beginnings. And right away, the way in which Jesus comes tells us something that's really too marvelous for the minds of humans to comprehend.

It tells us that though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully man. That means he was born.

[1 : 28] Just like everybody in this room, he was born. And just like all of us, he was vulnerable. It was an event without worldly splendor to it.

And there's many things that could be said because of this. Jesus being born in humility certainly teaches us that God is not bound by our limitations.

He doesn't need the strong or the powerful or the rich or the wise things of this world. He can use anyone and anything.

And he frequently does. Choose the weak and the foolish things of this world to show his glory. Jesus being born in humility also tells us something about his disposition towards us, towards his creation.

And by extension of that, what he expects our disposition to be if we're a follower of him. Jesus starts low in a manger.

[2 : 43] And he stays low his whole life in a way that makes even his closest friends kind of uncomfortable. As when he stoops to wash their feet.

He doesn't hesitate to move towards those who are poor or the outcast. He never stops because of the constant refrain of, What will people think if they see you hanging out with that person?

Jesus' humility and love calls him forward. Jesus being born in humility tells us that he knows what both humility and humiliation feel like.

Throughout the pages of the Gospels, you see that Jesus knows what it's like to work a non-glamorous job in obscurity for most of his life.

Jesus knows what it's like to be judged based not on who he is, but based on where he came from and who his family is.

[3 : 52] Jesus knows what it's like to be doubted by those who are closest to you. Jesus knows what it's like to have a close friend let you down in a really critical moment.

Jesus knows what it's like to pour into somebody and trust them only to have them stab you in the back.

And in a way most of us will never know, hopefully, Jesus knows what it's like to be ridiculed and mocked and spit on and thought of as nothing and punished unfairly.

The Bible wants to be clear that Jesus never views your hardships or temptations in this life as some otherworldly thing that he can't relate to.

Something that he could never be acquainted with. The Bible is really clear. He knows what that's all about. In the book of Hebrews chapter 4 it tells us, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet was without sin.

[5 : 18] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

And of all the things that Jesus' humble birth teaches us, I really think that the thing that is most prescient for us today, the thing that is most urgent for us to take in about this humble birth, is exactly this last point that we see in these verses from Hebrews.

Jesus' humble birth is an invitation to draw near. After the breaking of the world in the book of Genesis, one of the unyielding truths you see all throughout the Old Testament about God is that you cannot approach him.

To see him in his full glory, his unmatched magnificence is more than a mortal can bear. And so he clouds himself.

He obscures the fullness of who he is. Because we simply can't take it. And even in the life of this nation that he creates, when they build a temple, and God resides again with his people, it's a place where God can be with his people, but even then, there's this giant curtain.

[6 : 49] You can't get to him. To enter into that place with even a hint of unholiness means certain death.

And not because God is petty or vengeful, but because there's simply no way for the unclean and the profane to approach the sacred.

And it's something you see all through the pages. Until we get to this place where God enters back into history, and as he does it, he does something that's, again, almost incomprehensible.

When God shows up as a human, he comes in the most approachable way you can imagine, as a baby. I mean, when you take a minute to ponder a mystery like that, of how you literally couldn't come near God without death, and then he's a baby, you begin to understand why New Testament authors say lofty things like this, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom of the knowledge of God. It is not a plan we would conceive. But taking in that humble birth is so crucial because it means whatever image you have in your head about Jesus, whatever maybe makes you hesitate moving towards him, because of the glory and the magnificence of him being God, the humble birth invites you close.

[8 : 35] It's a humility that stills all our fears, and it silences all our objections. Look, Elliot, I'm not really sure I'm the one that's the candidate that he wants to draw near.

Truth be told, if he's got a mission, I'm really not that skilled or important or extraordinary. I'm pretty much just a normal person. But in Scripture, it tells us, For consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, and not many of you were powerful, and not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in this world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in this world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in this world, and even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Maybe you want to come to Jesus, but you feel just the weight of the struggles of this world. Elliot, I feel so overwhelmed just in day-to-day life.

[9 : 56] I feel like I can't live up to the weight of just what my daily life requires, and now the thought of adding some religious standard, or standing in the presence of Jesus, so that all the places I know I'm already messed up can be mercilessly nitpicked every day.

On top of all I already bear, I just don't think I can do it. But Jesus, speaking about himself, says, a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

That means Jesus wants you to know he will never be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Throughout the Gospels, you see the offer he makes is, come to me who are weary and burdened, and you will find rest.

You will find a light yoke, not more weight that you couldn't bear. Maybe your honest cry is, listen, the truth is, I don't have my act together.

I am so, so bad. I am not a good person. Like, if you knew what I was bringing in here, you'd probably be ashamed of it.

[11 : 22] Jesus is not going to want to draw near to someone who's where I'm at in life. But this is exactly the picture that the Bible gives us.

In more than one place, we see a scene like this one in Matthew 9, where it says, And Jesus reclined at the table, and behold, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with him.

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, Jesus said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. In every objection we have, our weakness, our instability, our personal sin, they are rendered mute before the humble splendor of our Savior in a manger.

And in point of fact, the one thing we are cautioned about in Scripture that can keep us away from him is the very opposite of humility itself.

[12:47] Pride. Pride that refuses to admit that we need anyone to save us. I don't need anyone or anything.

I got this. Pride that refuses to see that anything but our own plan for our lives is the best thing that could ever conceive that maybe what we think is best might not actually be best.

Pride that refuses to call anyone or anything but our own heart Lord. But even over the proud, his great heart longs for restoration.

James 4, it tells us this. What causes quarrels and causes fights among you? Elliot, why does everything always fall to rancor?

Why does every church I'm a part of, why does every society I'm a part of, why does it seem like every family, we can't not be at each other's throats? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

[14:00] You desire and you do not have, so you murder. You covet and you can't obtain, so you fight and you quarrel. You do not have because you don't ask.

And when you ask, you don't receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your own passions. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world will make himself an enemy of God because do you suppose the Scripture says to no purpose, he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

[15:09] Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom because if you humble yourselves before the Lord, he will exalt you.

Jesus doesn't enter history with fireworks, with an overwhelming display of his glory and his power because his goal isn't just to put you on your face in fear or awe.

It isn't just to prove that he is God. He has no need or no insecurity to prove himself to anyone. He comes as a baby to invite you near.

So whatever objection you have can be cast aside to restore what is lost.

Could today be that day you come home? You're never too far. The baby grew up, but Jesus never changed.

[16:18] And he still welcomes you today. So the band's going to come back to the stage. It's a time of response and if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, the message that this birth calls to you is if you want something more than this world has given you, if you want to know were you really made and made for a purpose, if you know you want and you need forgiveness for what you've done in your life, Jesus, the humble savior, invites you home.

The Bible is telling you in stark terms that insisting on being the God of your own life is going to bring you to ruin. But it doesn't have to be that way.

And if I could just say, you know, Jesus being your Lord, you know, those words like Lord and Master and Servant, they carry a lot of baggage for us today.

I just want you to understand the picture that God is offering of Jesus as Lord is not a picture of groveling submission. If you have just recognizing that I'm a worm and I can't lift my eyes, the Bible says the kind of Lord Jesus is is the one that comes to set captives free.

To set you free from sin, the places in your own life you know you can't fix. To set you free from Satan, the powers of this world that you can't conquer.

[18:03] Set you free from death itself, this destiny that you're heading towards. to remind you what real life was supposed to feel like.

Jesus came to be Lord. The reason he wants that place is because you were created in the image of God.

And you were meant to shine like children of the creator would. It's the only way home. If you are a follower of Jesus, our Savior came in humility, which means we go in humility.

We go to those that others have forgotten. We go and we refuse to hate those that we feel may deserve it.

and we go not in strength but in weakness. We launch out into the hostility of the world with the same thing that Jesus had.

[19 : 18] The foolish message of the good news of a Savior and a rock solid trust that my Father is with me and I don't have to be afraid.

The God who held Jesus will hold you too. So you can ask in confidence this question. Jesus, what do you want me to do today?

What is your calling for me? What does humble splendor require of my life? I'd invite you to take a minute and ask him that and not be afraid of the answer.

And when you've done that, when you've taken a moment you were invited as a follower of Jesus to the communion table where we remember how he went again humbly.

He put himself in the hands of sinful people that we could be made whole again. And you can take those elements back to your seat and take them whenever you're ready.

[20 : 34] And remember that it's another sign he's approachable. You are part of his family, his very body and blood given for you.

father, we give you these moments I pray that you will help us to see you as approachable.

I pray that whatever thing in our heart and minds, whatever thing in this room that would attempt to prevent us from knowing that Jesus wants us near would now depart.

glory. I pray that whatever thing makes someone feel ashamed or unable to come or worried or fearful, you will now by your Holy Spirit remove that and help them to see Jesus as their loving Savior.

Whatever needs be, Holy Spirit, we invite you to do your will. in Jesus' name. Amen.