

SERIES: The Good News as Reported by Matthew
SERMON: **Jesus Exalted! The Hope of Christmas**
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:15-21
SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
DATE: December 23, 2007

The Real Santa Claus defended the deity of Christ

When I found out Christina was going to sing “O Holy Night” I was excited because the song communicates very well what I would like to say this morning. So I contacted her right away wanting to know if she would be including verse 2, as it is my favorite part of the song and rarely sung. Because of time she was unable to include it so would you please allow me to read a couple lines from the second verse to complete the song and to help summarize my sermon: **“Fall on your knees! The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger; in all our trials born to be our friend. Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!** Does the Christmas season cause you to fall on your knees and behold your King? Where is your focus this Christmas?

In America there seem to be many symbols, or icons that represent Christmas and impact our focus. And like it or not our attention is drawn towards images. But in my mind the two images that compete most with our focus are these:

The image of the nativity scene expresses the humility of God coming as a baby, to be our Savior. This image should call *us* to humbly fall on our knees to receive and *exalt* him as Lord in our lives because without him we will remain in our sin.

The image of Santa Claus on the other hand represents a child’s desire to get presents. Now the desire to give presents is one thing, but the desire to consume and get everything we want is not Christmas; it’s American.

So why has Santa Claus become the icon that represents materialism in our self-focused society? I’m not able to answer that question this morning, but the more I learn about Santa Claus the more confused I am.

As you probably know the name Santa Claus is simply another name for St. Nicholas¹ and there are many legends that surround St. Nicholas, but the one that interests me most and is the furthest removed from our modern day impressions of Santa Claus, is the story of St. Nicholas’ involvement at the Council of Nicea.

This Council was summoned by the Emperor, Constantine, in response to a serious dispute in the church that was known as the Arian Controversy. The Arian Controversy derived its name from Arius, a Bishop from Alexandria. Arius *and* St. Nicholas were among 318 church leaders present at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

The controversy was essentially this: Arius believed that Jesus was created by God the Father and therefore not equal to the Father or to be *exalted* as the Father was. Arius’

heresy was met with passionate opposition by many of the early church fathers, including St. Nicholas.

The rest of the story goes something like this: As St. Nicholas sat and listened to the heresy coming out of Arius' mouth he was moved with passionate conviction and in a moment of weakness rose from his seat, approached Arius and punched him in the face in front of the whole council!

Wow, wouldn't you agree that this is a very different picture of St. Nicolas than the fat man in the red suit?

Tradition does tell us that St. Nicholas was a humble man who had a heart for the poor and needy, but he also had a passion for Jesus Christ and wanted the Church to have a proper focus on Jesus.

Arius' beliefs were ultimately rejected by the Council and as a result the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ was preserved.

Why do I tell this story? Well for one Christmas is in two days, but more importantly as we celebrate Christmas *we* need to have a proper focus on Christ! The Arian heresy had a wrong focus on Jesus by reducing him to a baby in a manger and not acknowledging him as God with us. We too can get so wrapped up in our selfish desires around Christmas, lose focus and reduce Jesus to a baby in a manger forgetting that he was God, in the flesh, come to save us.

Our text this morning reminds us that God the Father had a high view of Jesus for he says in **verse 18**,

“Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.”

We too must have a high view of Jesus. If Jesus is not God we will fail to fall on our knees and we will instead fall on our face, eternally. For as Wayne Grudem says, **“If Jesus is not fully God, we have no salvation and ultimately no Christianity.”**²

According to Grudem, believing in the full deity of Christ is critical for 2 reasons:

1. **“Only someone who is infinite God could bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him**
2. **Salvation is from the Lord, and the whole message of Scripture is designed to show that no human being, no creature, could ever save man – only God himself could...”**³

Let us join St. Nicholas in passionately opposing any view of Jesus that strips him of his deity and instead proclaim victorious hope to a broken world that comes only from the Son of God!

Please turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 12, verses 15-21**. I will not be preaching from a traditional Christmas passage today. I will instead stay with the series in Matthew. I think you'll see how the true message of Christmas is at the heart of this passage. I'll be reading from the English Standard Version.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all. And ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

*"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
My beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not quarrel or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory;
and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*

The world is bruised and broken. (15)

The backdrop for this text goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, in Genesis Chapter 3. Creation is bruised and broken and has been ever since sin entered the world through Adam and Eve! People were bruised and broken during Jesus' day and they are bruised and broken today! Christmas may make this more evident than any other time of the year. While many say "'tis the season to be jolly" in reality it is often times the season to mourn.

Last Tuesday Wichita reported at least 6 suicides in one day. Last Friday marked the second anniversary of Rebecca Lear's death, the 18 year old daughter of Don and Susan Lear, who was killed in a car accident on her way home from college. Two weeks ago today 4 were shot and killed in Colorado coming out of *church*. My heart hurts for the families of the victims who will be without their loved ones this Christmas. And many of *you* will also spend Christmas without a loved one for the first time this year.

Maybe your dread of Christmas has to do with the fact that you *will* see family members this year that bring back memories of abuse from your childhood that you are trying to forget. I know that there are many here who are experiencing health challenges that cause you pain, or you are anxious and concerned about someone close to you who is sick or dying.

Our world is the same bruised and broken world that Jesus came to save 2000 years ago.

In our nature we desire to be healed and restored of this brokenness. And so when Jesus walked the earth is it any surprise that the sick and downcast flocked to him? For the all-powerful *Creator* came into his fallen *creation* to re-create life in us, the way it was supposed to be. He was born so that we could be re-born.⁴

Wouldn't you have run to him to be healed and restored? Wouldn't you have *rejoiced* when he healed others? Or would you have? There were many who didn't run to him and there were many who were not impressed with what he was doing in the lives of the sick and hurting. Our text tells us the Pharisees wanted to kill him.

So why do some respond to Jesus in humility while others want Jesus out of their lives completely? What is required to receive Jesus, the King of Christmas? I want to suggest that...

Jesus must be *exalted* as the victorious King in your life. You must *humbly* receive the free-gift of grace and salvation that only comes through *Jesus*, God's humble servant.

The world's brokenness has at its root pride. (15-17)

Pride desires complete control and is self-focused

The Pharisees were not willing to do this. They wanted him dead, not exalted. The text says in **verses 15-17**,

“Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there and many followed him and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:”

What was Jesus aware of? He was aware of the fact that the Pharisees wanted to kill him. If you've been following Mike's sermons over the last few weeks you know that Jesus was in the business of healing people and as a result many were coming to him to be made well and were *then* following him.

The Pharisees were threatened by this. They had a reputation to uphold and Jesus' fame was taking away from theirs. *They* were the guys people looked up to and it was *their* interpretation of the Law that was considered the final authority. So when Jesus comes on the scene attracting the crowds with his healing and his teaching, the Pharisees want him out of the picture.

Now they disguised their pride, and their hate for Jesus, in their love for the Law, but their hatred towards Jesus was not so much because he was breaking the Law as it was because he was gaining too much attention, and threatening their position. Their main concern was that *their exaltation* was being eclipsed by *Jesus' exaltation*.

Pride ultimately leads to death

As you know, the Pharisees weren't the first ones who wanted to kill Jesus. Remember Herod attempted to kill Jesus 30 years earlier, on the first Christmas, when he had *all* the babies in Bethlehem killed. In Herod's pride he wanted to be *exalted and in complete control*; a Messiah was a threat to that ambition. Herod's pride was so great that it led to the slaughter of babies and the Pharisees' pride eventually led to the murder of Jesus.

We would generally place Herod and the Pharisees in a different category than we would ourselves, but are we really all that different? If *I'm* honest I have to confess that at times I want to be in complete control and get all of the attention.

We may not have commissioned the murder of babies and we did not personally nail Jesus to a cross, but we must confess that we are sinful to the core and at the root of our sin is pride and pride always seeks to glorify itself.

Humility leads to life

Are you more like the Pharisees who want complete control or are you like the weak and wounded, followers of Jesus who came to Him and were healed? Pride ultimately leads to death. Humility leads to life.

God desires for us to fix our eyes on Jesus not ourselves. Jesus was always taking the attention off of himself. He *was* doing amazing things: healing people, performing miracles, raising people from the dead. But he avoids the spotlight at every turn and slips into obscurity among the poor and diseased.

Jesus didn't need to be around important people to feel important. All Jesus needed was the affirmation of his Father, who says of him in **verses 18-19**,

Jesus came to save this broken world. (18-19)

“Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.” “He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.”

The Father chose Jesus as his instrument of salvation.

Verse 18 may be the most important verse in this whole passage. God is doing more here than giving affirmation to Jesus. This is an acknowledgement of Jesus' deity! Not only is Jesus a man with whom God is pleased, but he is the beloved Son of God, come by the will of the Father, to save the sinful human race by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is only able to save us because he is God and he alone is righteous and he alone is perfect and powerful.

The Father is completely pleased with Jesus.

When God says, “*with whom my soul is well pleased*” I’m reminded of the fact that Jesus is the *only one* in all of human history with whom God is completely pleased.

Jesus refuses to exalt himself

Only Jesus is perfect; no one besides him is worthy of exaltation. Not even the most religious. Human pride and self-righteousness are false exaltation. Jesus was perfect and powerful but *he* didn’t make a big deal about it. **Verse 19** tells us that he didn’t even raise his voice. Let us learn from him who is humble.

The Jews were not expecting a *humble* Messiah. They were expecting their Messiah to be a political revolutionary, but that wasn’t God’s plan. The revolution that Jesus wanted to instigate was a revolution of the heart. Those who start political or even religious revolutions are loud and they are self-absorbed, but Jesus was gentle and gave all credit to the Father. He used a low voice and he kept a low profile. His mission was not necessarily peace for Israel; his mission was peace for our souls.

This theme that we see throughout the Gospels, of Jesus quieting his fan club, is remarkable. He doesn’t want to stir up passion that leads to revolt; instead he wants hearts quieted. Our hearts have to be brought low in humility and we have to acknowledge our need for a Savior before we can receive grace. What a contrast to the pride of the Pharisees!

*In our brokenness...humble ourselves to have hope. (20-21)*⁵

We need to have a proper focus on Christ and to be humble, but what does humility really look like? Let’s turn now and look further at Jesus’ character, in **verses 20-21** to find out.

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

True humility is exemplified in Jesus’ incarnation.

As I’ve studied this passage and look at the contrast between the pride of the Pharisees and the need of the sick and wounded, I am persuaded that this verse implies something that is not explicit: **Christ will not completely break off or snuff out those of us who are bruised and broken and who desire to be restored by him. But brokenness and contrition are required before we can receive restoration and hope for eternal life.**

Without sorrow for our sins we will be unaware of our need for grace. The absence of humility means the presence of pride which seeks to exalt self over Christ.

I have had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time contemplating the Incarnation this year. I have, in my mind, a picture of the Nativity Scene that is so vivid and helpful to me, that I want to share it with you.

Imagine this: The *Word of God* is being born in a sheep pen. This is the same Word of God, who created the heavens and the earth. And at the same time as the events surrounding this birth are occurring, the Star of Bethlehem is rising high in the sky to mark the Savior's birth. And so the King of Creation, who "upholds the universe by the word of his power,"⁶ is actually *directing* the Star above him at the same time he is being born in a lowly manger. God in the highest came to the lowest.⁷

The floor was covered with manure, the air was filled with the stench of urine, it was cold, it was dark, and it was lonely. Why did the holy God of the Universe, *have* to be born in a sheep pen, cold and dirty? It seems so unsuitable...

But O how unsuitable *we* are for the holy God of the universe! And that is why he lowered himself all the way. Because *we* are cold and dirty, *we* are soiled with sin and a stench in the Father's nostrils; because *we* would be *eternally* lonely without him, he lowered himself.

So how low should we bow our hearts? It's really not an issue of us lowering ourselves because we're already as low as we can go, in our sin. We simply have to *acknowledge* how low we are and then look up to Him, who directs the stars, if we are ever to see how much we need Him, who was born in a barn.

Romano Guardini says it this way: "**Humility is no human quality. The attitude of the little man who bows to the greater is one not of humility, but of truth; genuinely humble is the greater man who bows before the lesser because in his eyes the little man has a mysterious dignity...Humility springs from the Creator and is directed towards the creature; tremendous mystery! The Incarnation is the fundamental humility on which all human humility rests.**"⁸

If we are to be like Jesus we have to be humble, as he was humble. In *His* humility, he was broken. We become humbly broken when we understand *why* Jesus was broken. **Isaiah 53:5** says it best: "*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*"

Brokenness that is humble exalts Christ and brings us hope.

So it is our sin that causes our hearts to be broken, but is all brokenness a result of our personal sin? Are there other circumstances in life that cause us to be brought low that are not our fault? I believe that sin is the ultimate cause of all brokenness; however, not all experiences that break us are directly related to a specific sin that *we* have committed.

For example, I am among the many people in this world, who are fatherless. This has, for my whole life, proven to be wounding. This is not a result of sin in my life, but is an example of the brokenness that is in our world because of sin. I was graciously blessed to have a mother who raised me and my brother well, who loved us and worked hard to provide for our physical and emotional needs and she did a great job. But there have still been times, in my life, when I have resented my fatherlessness and been mad at God.

But I have now come to a point in my life where I embrace this brokenness as a blessing. God has allowed me to be brought low emotionally and to experience feelings of insecurity because I never knew a father. And it was through this wound that I became aware of my need for a Savior, and a heavenly Father; so I praise God and can say confidently to you, with the prophet **Hosea**,

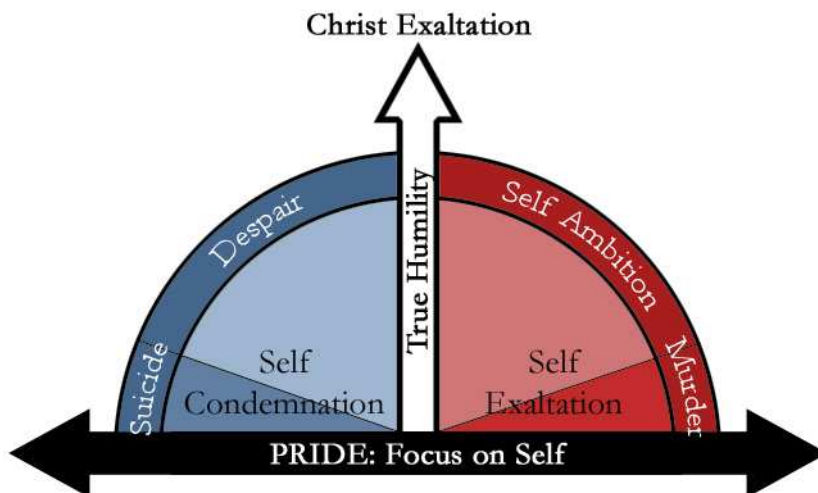
“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.”⁹

I understand that I have no inheritance in this life, no credentials, nothing that makes me a “somebody”. Whenever I am arrogant and critical of others I have to remember that all I will ever be is because of God’s grace and all I have in life both now and evermore is Jesus. I am to be *satisfied* with nothing but mercy. And this is true of the thorns God gives each of us. For **2 Corinthians 12:9** says,

“my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Brokenness that is self-focused leads to despair and self-condemnation.

This being said, I must also say that we *can* be brought *too* low by our brokenness. Some bow their hearts so low that they enter into despair. *Dwelling* on the brokenness of life leads to despair and self-condemnation. And when self-condemnation is full-grown it can lead to suicide, in just the same way that self-exaltation can lead to murder.



So whichever side of pride we lean towards, the focus is the same – we are focused on ourselves. Self-Ambition *exalts* self and will end in destruction. Despair *condemns* self and will end in hopelessness. The only solution is to humbly focus on the *exalted* Christ!

Conclusion

Bow your hearts low, but keep your head up. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. He is the way by which we enter into relationship with the Father; and it is only by *following* his way, that we are to live now, in this life, “*until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope!*” His way was to focus first on the Father and then on others. Are you focused on Jesus first? If you are then the next step will come easy; focus on others.

Will you serve others first or yourself? Will you bless the broken or will you be consumed by your own problems? Will you bear with others who are broken but are in denial because of pride? Pray that they would see their need for Jesus who can save them. Will you lift up those who are broken to the point of despair and pray that *they* would focus on Jesus and receive the hope their souls long for?

Jesus wants to be in relationship with us for eternity. The Christmas story is a love story. It's the story of the King of Creation *pursuing* his creation, as his bride. Friends, our story was coming to a sad ending, and then Jesus entered our world. For God is intimately involved in our story and has provided a way, through Jesus, for us to know him intimately. Will you receive his love? Will you pray that others will?

I want to share with you a fairytale, written by the Brothers Grimm, that I think illustrates what I'm trying to communicate. It goes like this...

***Thrushbeard*¹¹**

There once was a king who had the most beautiful daughter in all the land. But she was so proud that she thought no man good enough to be her husband.

One day the king held a great feast for all of her suitors. But she found something wrong with each of them and made fun of them all. They were either too fat or too short; too thin or too tall.

But she saved her worst taunts for a fine young king – superior to them all in rank. He had a chin that jutted out from his face. “Look at that chin” she said “its so big; it sticks out like a thrush's beak.” I think I shall call you Thrushbeard.” And from that day on the name stuck.

Her father was enraged by his daughter's behavior and he vowed that she should marry the next beggar who came to the castle gates.

A few days later a minstrel was found singing beneath the castle windows. He pleased the king so much that the king rewarded him by giving him his daughter's hand in marriage.

The princess was indignant and begged her father to change his mind, but the king called for the priest and they were wed.

The king then spoke: "It is not fitting for you to remain in my castle now that you are a beggar's wife. You must go now and lead a beggar's life.

As the minstrel led the princess away they came to a great forest. "Whose great forest is this?" asked the princess.

"It's Thrushbeard's great forest. You could have had it all."

"Alas," she sighed. "Poor wretch that I am. I should have married Thrushbeard!"

Next they came to a large meadow. "Whose large meadow is this?" asked the princess.

"It's Thrushbeard's large meadow. You could have had it all."

"Alas," she sighed. "Poor wretch that I am. I should have married Thrushbeard!"

Next they came to a splendid city. "Whose splendid city is this?" asked the princess.

"It's Thrushbeard's splendid city. You could have had it all."

"Alas," she sighed. "Poor wretch that I am. I should have married Thrushbeard!"

As evening fell they came to a tiny shack. "Whose miserable shack is this?" asked the princess.

"It's my miserable shack and here we shall live together."

"Where are the servants?" she asked

"Servants! There are no servants *you* must do all of the work. You can begin by making me some supper."

And so they lived until one day they ran out of food. Then the minstrel said, "we have run out of food. You must weave baskets, to make money, to buy food." But the princess' fingers were too tender for the work.

"I can see that you are not made for work. I made a bad bargain when I married you! Here, take these clay pots to the market to sell; maybe you will do better there."

She was reluctant and worried that her father's servants may see her in the market, but she had to swallow her pride or they would starve. At first everything went well for people like to buy things from beautiful women.

But one day a drunken soldier came galloping right through the princess' shop smashing her pots to smithereens. She burst into tears and ran home to her husband.

"You're not much good at anything it seems. But luckily I have found you a job at the castle working as a kitchenmaid.

And so the king's daughter became a kitchen maid and had to help with the most unpleasant chores, but she *was* allowed to take scraps of food home in her apron pockets.

One day there was a great ball at the castle, for the young king. The princess snuck upstairs and watched from a distance.

It was such a magnificent ball that her heart grieved for her present misfortunes and she cursed her foolish pride that had brought her to such misery.

Then out of nowhere King Thrushbeard himself advanced to take her hand for a dance. She drew back in shame and struggled to free herself.

But as she struggled her apron strings broke and her scraps of food spilled on the floor. The guests all made fun of her and laughed.

The princess blushed for shame and wished she would die. She ran for the door and darted down the stairs, but Thrushbeard ran after her and brought her back to the castle.

"Do not be dismayed" he said to her tenderly. **For it was for love of you that I disguised myself as the minstrel. I pretended to be the drunken soldier and broke your pots. But I did this only to break your stubborn pride. Now the past is over and today we can celebrate our wedding!"**

And so they were wed, and it was a joyous day. I only wish that you and I had been there too.

Conclusion (continued)

Jesus says in the chapter just before this one in **Matthew 11:28-30**,

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Let us learn from Jesus who is gentle and lowly in heart. The King humbled himself and was broken for your sin. He was lowered because he wants to lift your burden. If we are to be like him, we too have to understand our brokenness and be as beggars before him,

desiring grace. **Remember that Thrusbeard didn't just humble himself to break the princess, but he humbled himself so that he could have relationship with the princess.** The knowledge of our brokenness is not intended to drive us to despair but to draw us into a relationship with Jesus where we will finally receive rest for our souls. If God has broken you, go to him, receive his grace; he promises you rest.

Do not be like the Pharisees who were focused on exalting themselves and do not be like those who wallow in self-pity and lose hope.

Instead fix your eyes on Jesus and in humility exalt him as the King. When the chapter closes on the story of your life it doesn't have to be a sad ending, it can be a beautiful love story of you being restored to your King. Fall on your knees, before him lowly bend. He is exalted! This is the *hope* of Christmas!

¹ Comes from the Dutch [Sinterklaas](#)^[3], which in turn is a contracted form of *Sint Nicolaas* (Saint Nicholas).

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 553

³ *ibid*

⁴ These thoughts are inspired by Athanasius' book [On the Incarnation](#)

⁵ A lot of my thinking in this section is influenced by John Piper:

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/14/434/The_Spirit_Is_upon_Him_Gentle_for_Now/, and the Puritan pastor Richard Sibbes' book [The Bruised Reed](#)

⁶ Hebrews 1:3

⁷ Athanasius, [On the Incarnation](#), pp. 45-46

⁸ Guardini, Romano, [The Lord](#), pp. 423-424. Cf. Philippians 2:5-10

⁹ Hosea 6:1

¹⁰ This diagram was inspired by the Slippery Slope diagram in Ken Sande's [The Peacemaker](#). It was created by Julie Egy

¹¹ Adapted from "King Thrusbeard, A story by the Brothers Grimm with pictures by Felix Hoffmann." Pictures taken from the same.