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Sermon Notes

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Christ Descended from Heaven to Raise Us Up to Heaven

John 6:35-51

This summer, I had the great privilege to visit for the second time one of the most beautiful cities in the world, Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. In the Old Town near Prague Castle stands an imposing bronze statue of a warrior on a horse. It is Wenceslas, whom the Bohemians view as their "patron saint," and who is well-known as the subject of John Mason Neale's Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas." Many American Christians know the song and hear it sung every Christmas, but few know the story of this man of God.

Wenceslas was born around 907 in the castle of Stochov near Prague. At some point in history the castle was destroyed. However, there remains an oak tree in that place which was supposedly planted by his godly grandmother Ludmila when Wenceslas was born. Legend has it that his nannies watered the tree with his bath water, which supposedly made the tree strong and ready for long life. The church Wenceslas attended also exists today.

At first Wenceslas was raised by Ludmila, who was committed to the Christian faith. Then, when he was about 13 years old, his father died, and Wenceslas succeeded him as duke. Because he was too young to rule, his mother, Drahomira, became regent. Drahomira was opposed to Christianity and used her new power to persecute followers of Christ. She refused to let her son, Wenceslas, see grandmother Ludmila because she was afraid they would scheme to overthrow her. Not long after Ratislav's death, Ludmila was murdered at Tetin Castle -- strangled, it is said, at Drahomira's command.

But the loss of his grandmother did not stop Wenceslas from seizing power. At the age of 18 he overthrew his mother's regency, just as she had feared, and began to rule for himself. Wenceslas was a stern but just monarch, and he stopped the persecution of priests and tamed the rebellious nobility. He was best known for his kindness to the poor, as depicted in later verses of the carol. He was especially charitable to children, helping young orphans and slaves.

Many of the Bohemian nobles resented Wenceslas's attempts to spread Christianity, and were displeased when he swore allegiance to the king of Germany, Henry I. The duke's most deadly enemy proved to be his own brother, Boleslav, who joined the nobles who were plotting his brother's assassination. He invited Wenceslas to a religious festival and then attacked him on his way to mass. As the two were struggling, Boleslav's supporters jumped in and murdered Wenceslas.

"Good King" Wenceslas died on September 20, 929. He was in his early twenties and had ruled Bohemia for just five years. Today he is remembered as the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

The words to the carol "Good King Wenceslas" were written by John Mason Neale and first published in 1853.

The HYMN:

In the hymn, Good King Wenceslaus is standing in his comfortably heated castle, looking down on the snow-covered ground below. It is nighttime and bitterly cold, but the moon is shining brightly and Wenceslaus can see plainly a poor man braving the frigid temperatures to collect firewood for his family.

Moved with compassion by this pathetic sight and the suffering plight of this poor man, Wenceslaus calls one of his servants to stand near him. The two of them stand and watch the poor man scrounging around for firewood, and Wenceslaus asks the servant, "Do you know who that man is, and where he lives?" "Yes, sire," the servant answers. "He lives almost four miles away, at the base of that mountain near St. Agnes's fountain."

Then King Wenceslaus sprang decisively into action. "Bring me meat and wine, and also plenty of firewood from my personal store. This very night, you and I are going to watch this poor man and his family feast on what we bring him."

So the godly Wenceslaus and his servant went out into the bitter cold, made far worse by a howling wind. They were both heavily laden with food, wine, and firewood, and after a while the servant began to complain about the difficulties of their toilsome journey. "Sire," the servant said, "clouds are hiding the moon, and it's getting harder and harder to see. And the wind is really kicking up now... I don't know if I've got enough strength to make it to that poor man's hut!"

Wenceslaus answered his servant, “Walk behind me in the footsteps I make in the snow. Walk in my footsteps with good courage, and know that I also am bearing this terrible weather. If you do that, it won’t be so hard for you.”

So the servant followed in his master’s footsteps, the tracks he made in the snow. In some mysterious way, the servant actually could feel warmth coming from the footsteps themselves. They made it to the poverty-stricken man’s hut and surprised him with lavish blessings he never expected. Imagine the surprise when the poor man heard a knock on the door during that windy, cold night. Imagine the shock as he opened the door and saw his King and a servant standing there with red cheeks and arms laden with food, wine, and firewood! “Do you mind if we join you?” the King might have asked! And imagine the rich feast and warmth of the fire that poor family experienced, eating with their gracious King that night!

There is no historical record of this event, but it is consistent with the character of Wenceslas. It is also a beautiful picture of the humility of Christ, who “though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that we, through His poverty might become rich.” As Wenceslas looked out on the snowy field from his comfortable castle perch, so Christ looked out on a sinful world from His heavenly throne. As Wenceslas ventured forth into darkness and cold to minister to the needs of the peasant, so Christ took on a human body to save us from sin. However, the sufferings of Wenceslas and those of Christ cannot be compared. Neither can the blessings of those who received Wenceslas’s benevolence be compared with those who received Christ’s gifts.

This morning, we are going to ponder Christ’s descent from his heavenly castle to a cold and rebellious earth to feed a spiritually starving people, sinners freezing in the cold of being ALIENS and STRANGERS from God’s warm and loving kingdom.

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

THIS is the real Christmas present... the gift at the center of it all; the infinitely rich giving to the truly poor

Focus text: John 6...

John 6:33 the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:41 "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

John 6:50-51 here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

This is the central mystery and miracle and wonder of Christmas

That Jesus, the babe in the manger, is actually God in the flesh, who willingly CAME DOWN from heaven to save us and feed us and raise us up from the dead and take us up to heaven

This morning, I want us to feast on the bread of heaven, Jesus Christ, by faith in the word of God

Context of John 6

- 1) Jesus fed the five thousand...they tried to make him king by force by he hid from them
- 2) Jesus sent his apostles across the Sea of Galilee in a boat
- 3) Jesus went up a mountain to pray and be alone with his Father
- 4) During the night, Jesus walked on the water in the view of his disciples
- 5) They were terrified, but Jesus assured them it was He... they then took him into the boat; immediately, the boat was at the other side
- 6) The crowd had travelled by boat to Capernaum and they were shocked to see Jesus there, since he had not gotten into the boat with his disciples
- 7) The crowd asked him when he had gotten there...

Jesus answered in this way:

John 6:26-27 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Their minds were on earthly things... earthly food, earthly drink, earthly comforts, an earthly kingdom

Jesus wanted to lift their eyes to heavenly things...

So he used a powerful metaphor for his mission to the world: he called himself the BREAD OF LIFE that came down from heaven to give eternal life to the world

I. Where Jesus' Mission Began

A. Seven Times Asserted

Seven times in this chapter, it is asserted that Jesus CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN...

John 6:33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

John 6:41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

John 6:42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

John 6:50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

John 6:58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

B. Jesus Entered the World Willingly

1. No other human being in history is able to say they entered the world for a set purpose
2. We were conceived and knit together in our mothers' wombs
3. We have no existence before that moment

4. But Jesus existed from eternity past

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

5. He was on a glorious throne in heaven, with a hundred million angels worshipping him

Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

6. He made a conscious choice to leave that glory and comfort, and enter a world that would hate him

7. He willingly CHOSE to enter the world

John 18:37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

C. Jesus Entered the World Obediently

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:57 the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father

D. Jesus was Sent on MISSION by the Heavenly Father

II. How Jesus Came Down from Heaven

A. Not So Plainly Asserted Here... but Hinted At

John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

B. More Plainly Told Earlier in John's Gospel

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

C. The History Given More Plainly in Luke

The angel Gabriel said to Mary:

Luke 1:31-35 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 2:1-7 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:8-14 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

D. That Is How Jesus Became Human... That's How His Mission Began

III. Why Jesus Came Down from Heaven

A. To Give Life to the World

John 6:33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

B. To Bring Fullness and Satisfaction

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

C. To Raise Up the Elect on the Final Day

John 6:38-40 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

D. To Feed His People So They Will Not Die

John 6:47-50 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

E. To Give His Flesh for the Life of the World

John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

This is the mission Jesus came down from heaven to do! Lavish generosity to the sinners of the world

He came to feed us forever... not with merely physical bread that will spoil, and that will not satisfy. But he came to give us a full, rich, satisfying life ETERNALLY... he came to defeat death by giving his flesh on the cross for the life of the world

He came to raise us his chosen people from the grave after death... to raise them up on that final day

F. No Christmas Gift Can Possibly Compare!!

1. Christmas in America is a time of overwhelming material gifts... of "food that spoils"
2. It is so easy for us to get caught up in the materialism, and think that our lives really do consist in the abundance of our possessions
3. Jesus calls us here to something infinitely higher and more satisfying:

John 6:27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

According to research: only 1 in 20 Christmas toys has a lifespan longer than a year

Some gifts last longer... like Christmas FRUITCAKE which can last decades!!
(Just kidding)

But all the stuff under the tree is “food that spoils”

Jesus yearns to give us something eternally satisfying... HIMSELF!

IV. The Divisive Effect of Jesus’ Mission

A. How is this Gift Received? By FAITH

***John 6:28-29 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"
29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."***

It is by SIMPLE FAITH IN CHRIST that we receive the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life!

Many people try to pay for their sins by their good works

Perhaps at Christmas time, they put some coins in the Salvation Army pots at the supermarket; or they may write a more substantial check for a charity of their choosing; some volunteer at the Rescue Shelter or do some other form of charity...

Unfortunately some people believe that by this kind of ministry to the poor they are paying for their sins.

But the people here asked plainly, “What good work must we do to please God?” Jesus answered plainly, “BELIEVE IN THE ONE HE SENT!” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...

He says this many times in this passage:

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

So... to “come to Christ” means you’ll never go hungry, and to “believe in Christ” means you’ll never be thirsty. To come to Christ = to believe in Him...

It's to come to him as a sinner and FEED on him, on his work on the cross, where he gave his flesh for the life of the world. To believe that God raised him from the dead on the third day. This is a SPIRITUAL FEAST of truth, of joy, of the forgiveness of sins, and of life everlasting!

B. BUT No One Can Receive It Without God's Work in their Hearts

1. There is a great deal of DIVISION in this passage
2. Many people resisted Jesus' teachings:

John 6:36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

John 6:41-43 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" ⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered.

C. The Division Intensifies More and More... Obvious by the End of the Chapter

John 6:51-55 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵² ¶ Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

John 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

John 6:66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

D. The Absolute Sovereignty of God Asserted

1. It is a moral and spiritual impossibility for anyone to come to Jesus unless the Father draws him

John 6:43-44 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

2. If the Father draws a person, it is a moral and spiritual impossibility not to come to Christ

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

3. If a person comes to Christ, it is a moral and spiritual impossibility for Jesus to LOSE that person

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

4. Simple faith in Christ results in eternal life:

John 6:40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

This is the Christmas message!

This is Christ's mission!!

E. Who Can Receive This Difficult Teaching?

John 6:60-65 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

John 6:66-70 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?"

God's sovereign work on the human heart is ESSENTIAL to salvation... this is what Christ came to do, the salvation gift he came to give

Only if God is working in your heart will you come to Christ and feast on him. If God is not drawing you, you cannot come. Then you will get swept away working for FOOD THAT SPOILS!!

V. The Call of Jesus' Mission: Believe and Live!

- A. This is the Central Message of this Chapter... and the Whole Gospel of John

John 20:30-31 *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

B. This is the Central Call of Christmas Itself

1. Will you labor for the food that spoils... or will you come to Christ and believe in him for the forgiveness of your sins??

C. Applications for Christians

1. Feast on this living bread... Christ... by faith
2. Guard your hearts from laboring for bread that spoils
 - a. Commit yourself to a simpler celebration of Christmas... perhaps a little late now, but maybe you can find ways to downsize the materialism of Christmas
 - b. Spend more time focusing on spiritual truths, realities that come from the word of God
 - c. Meditate on the powerful assertions of this chapter
 - d. Embrace the absolute sovereignty of God over salvation... that it is impossible for any person to feast on Christ unless God draws him; and that if God draws him, he will most certainly come; and if that person comes to Christ, Christ will most certainly receive him; and if Christ receives him, he will most certainly RAISE THAT PERSON UP on the last day!
3. Delight in Christ... feast on the truth that He loves you, and is your Savior, and has cleansed you from all sins, and has offered himself for your life
4. Delight in the your glorious future in heaven!

D. Understand Christ's Mission is WORLDWIDE

1. Christ came to give his flesh for the LIFE OF THE WORLD
2. Faith comes by hearing

Romans 10:13-15 *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ ¶ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they*

are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

3. Lottie Moon Christmas offering... IMB... key time in the history of SBC missions... will we be generous??