

12/05/2021 - "A Manger Throne"

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[0 : 00] We are going to be continuing in our sermon series called The Melody of the Gospel. And this is a special topical series that we're stepping away from our traditional expositional series in the Gospel of John.

And mind you, all of our preaching is typically expositional. And we are continuing in this Melody of the Gospel. And this is a series that specifically looks at songs that we sing.

And by looking at how the song is structured and formatted, looking upon God's Word and saying, is there truth to the things that we sing? And so that is the Melody of the Gospel.

And the song this week got to me thinking about, we have four kids. And we've gone through a lot of swings that are now banned from being sold anymore, that are no longer allowed to be sold for the safety of children.

We have all of these noise machines and tunes and the things that just go on at 1 o'clock in the morning and wake you up and you think your house is, it's like a movie from Poltergeist or a scene from Poltergeist.

[1 : 20] You're just freaked out, especially Furbies if you're a 90s child. You know, we're a teenager. Furbies, those things were possessed. But anyhow, we are very familiar with all of these toys.

And within all of these toys, usually the ones that sing, that have a melody, those have a song that's infamously known as Greensleeves.

That melody that goes, da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. If you want me to sing, you can give me a quarter, I'll keep going. But Greensleeves, it's a melody that is common, usually within these lullaby toys.

We've heard it on numerous devices. And undoubtedly, this melody transports us to the Christmas season, if you're anything like me.

That this old English folk song, as you can imagine them singing in the bars, swinging their glasses back and forth, da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.

[2 : 28] It is now applied to numerous songs. Over 20 songs are applied to this Greensleeve bar tune.

And one of them being that, what child is this, that we often hear at Christmas time. So this, hearing that melody takes me to the Christmas season.

And originally given the title, A Manger Throne, William Cheddarton Dix penned this lyric to the song of a late 19th century, wonderful, unique perspective on the birth of Jesus Christ.

To encapsulate various elements and various themes of the gospel. And so, for that reason, I have titled this sermon, A Manger Throne.

And we're going to look upon this author's creative liberty that he took to capture our minds and hearts upon that manger scene.

[3 : 35] Upon the wonder of the incarnation of this baby. And we're going to be looking at a song that is structured with three stanzas.

And in particular, they are listed in an order that is important to analyze as we go through the topic today.

Because it comes from a perspective of a unique observer. However, if you could imagine, being outside of possibly the promise of God even back 2,000 years ago, and looking upon this manger scene where all this commotion is going on.

There's farm animals doing their farm animal stuff. Things are going in the front end. Things are coming out the back end. You're just like, what's going on? Why are there shepherds here?

Why are people bringing gold? Why are they bringing these expensive fragrances and these spices? What in the world is going on?

[4 : 42] And so, this song captures a unique perspective of that birth of Jesus Christ in three stanzas. And the first two stanzas are similar because they begin asking a question regarding the identity and the mission of Jesus.

This baby boy. This baby boy. And by the end of each of those stanzas, they end with a triumphant declaration of the baby's divine origin.

Divine nature. And then the third stanza stands out on its own. Because how the world ought to respond to him, the third stanza says by consecrating.

Bringing him gifts. Giving our lives to him. Following him. And so, I want to pray just momentarily here as we get into the message today.

And looking at that unique perspective of a baby boy born in a manger. Let's look at the theology of Christmas this morning. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful to be gathered.

[5 : 54] To sing songs that bring glory to you. To take the Lord's Supper. And just to be within the community of God. The family of God.

There's nothing like it. And so, Father, at this time, we pray that we turn our attention to the gospel as we see it through the scriptures. And Father, help us to humble our hearts this morning to not allow this season to pass us by with dryness.

We pray that you ignite in our hearts what everyone is singing about. What we preach about every Sunday.

Let us see the beauty of the very beginnings of the incarnation this morning. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen? Okay.

I need to open my eyes and make sure you guys are still with me. We are going to take this in three sections based on the three stanzas. I promise, little one, it will be okay.

[7 : 11] So, the first section is, what child is this? What child is this? Many of the gospel narratives, we're in the middle of a series in the gospel of John and other synoptics, Matthew, Mark, Luke, ask these similar questions of, who is Jesus?

This is the point of the gospel narratives to really broadcast who Jesus is. Why did Jesus come? And as we see in the gospel of John that the only adequate response of his identity and his mission is to respond in a certain manner of having faith in him.

And not only do we do the first two questions of this song dominate this song that's written by William Dix, but it's also the dominant theme throughout the entire Bible.

Who is Jesus and why is he here? We've seen many questions throughout the gospels, if you've been in the Bible reading plan as a church, that the Pharisees, the world, has asked Jesus face to face, who is he who forgives sins?

Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Who are you? Who are you, says many of the Pharisees? Are you the Christ?

[8 : 39] Are you the king of Israel? And looking back to the late 19th century, when this song was written, we can see that what sparked that creative element within William's mind is the same exact question that our world asks today.

Who is Jesus and why has he come? So from a confused observer standpoint, the song asks, what child is this?

Resting as a baby in Mary's lap. That angels greet him with songs. That shepherds guard him and watch over him in this vulnerable state.

Who is this vulnerable human life that is causing so much commotion? And the song answers, this is Christ the king.

Matthew and Luke emphasize in their opening genealogies of their gospel narratives, the long and often chaotic lineage that states and proves that this baby is no ordinary baby.

[9 : 56] This baby is the son of David. And if the son of David, according to scripture, he is the king of kings.

And so last year, we studied the mess, the tapestry of Christmas, that there were some messed up situations that happened throughout Jesus' lineage.

And this year, we're going to be continuing, starting here in Matthew. We see the gospel account continuing after the genealogy that proves that he is the son of David, the king of kings.

And Matthew 1, 18 through 25, states that this is no ordinary birth. If you have your Bible, turn with us to Matthew 1, 18, or it will be on the screen as well.

It reads, But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 40] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, just like we spoke on last week, meaning God with us.

And when Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to his son, and he called his name Jesus.

According to the Bible, as miraculous as it sounds, as strange as it can be, what child is this?

This is the son of God. Conceived through a miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin named Mary.

[12 : 49] What child is this? This is the redemption of our souls that has come to us in the flesh. The only true hope to all humanity.

What child is this, church? This is God clothed in humanity. Better for us to sing, what king is this? What king would ever leave his eternal, infinite throne of infinite existence and come under the limitations of that state?

Come under the limitations of time? Come under the limitations of space? Come under the limitations of humanity?

Church, this is a God who truly loves. John 3.16 makes it clear. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

[13 : 53] His motive and his mission, his driving force has been his love for humanity. And how quickly we can miss the wonder of Jesus' incarnation by replacing it with just this mental affirmation.

Yep, Jesus came and he died for me and I'm on with work this week, right? And we lose that sense of wonder. Of God eternally existing, coming and being bound to our limitations here in this earth. Let this never be detached from our hearts. Not this year, church. God came as a testimony of his promise to redeem his own people, known as the nation of Israel, but also to gather those outside of that promise.

Gentiles like you and me to open those gates for those who respond in faith. And while the first stanza really encapsulates the humanity of Christ and his kingship, the second stanza brings a chronological momentous wonder into the king's mission specifically.

And we see in the second section here that I have titled, Why Does He Come in Such Humility? Why does he come in such humility?

[15 : 20] The actual song says, Why lies he in such mean estate? Now, I get tongue-tied on that old English placement of words.

It just doesn't make sense. So I've reframed it to say, Why does he come in such humility? Because essentially, this rhetorical question found in the song is asking, Why does Christ, the king, as he's established, lie in such a humble setting?

We talked about the farm animal scene. We won't go back into that. But the mental imagery is right there. That he has come, Not in, you would think that if a king is coming, he comes with a throne. We need to cater to this king and everything. Why is he in this little wooden thing? Why is he not being cared for, guarded by actual guards?

Like authorities. But these shepherds with crooks. Why does he come in this way? Well, William Dix takes the emphasis in a different direction in this stanza, having already established the wonder of his identity in stanza one.

[16 : 35] Now he seems to focus upon the mighty mission of this resting, sleeping child upon Mary's lap. A mission in which William says, Christians fear for sinners here.

The silent word, the sleeping child, the silent word is pleading. And William actually uses language, terminology derived from the gospel of John that we've been in.

As we see in the gospel of John, John 1, 1 through 2, we see that should be up on the screen. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was beginning. He was in the beginning with God. And then verse 14 continues, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.

Glory as the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And as William puts it, this is the silent word.

[17 : 43] This is the word made flesh. He's the eternal one. The one who was face to face with God has now become face to face with us.

Isn't this a miracle? And why did he come? Did he come just to hang out with sinners, which is a popular one today? Be like Jesus. Don't judge anyone.

Just hang out with sinners. Do what Jesus did. Right? Did he come just to hang out with sinners? Did he come just so he can relate to us in our limitations, and then be able to be a relatable high priest, just as Hebrews says?

Why did he come? What was his mission? So from a confused vantage point of looking upon that manger scene, it says, what will become of this silent word?

Why does he come in this humble way? Well, he comes in this humble way because it's the only means of which that he would be rejected by humanity because the original verse of this song continues with the answer.

[18 : 58] Nails, spear, shall pierce him through. This is imagery from Isaiah 53, verse 5. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was a chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.

Why does he come in such humble a state? Why is he vulnerable? Because somebody, a worthy sacrifice, had to be pierced for our transgressions, had to be crushed for our iniquities.

And by this wound, we are healed, brought peace. Think about what's going on here in this manger scene.

In a wooden structure, Jesus was placed in his lowly human beginnings. And upon another wooden structure, Jesus would be placed for his sacrificial human endings.

[20 : 17] He would die the sacrifice that we deserved. And many of the popular songs today, if you hear it in Hobby Lobby, I guess they play instrumental music, or if you go throughout the shopping malls, you may hear this.

But many of the songs today, you won't hear, nails, spears, pierce him through. You won't hear that verse. I have no idea why. It's probably out there on the internet, but I guess if it's on the internet, it's true, right, church?

No. It's not just in case. I want to be careful. But could it be that the nails, the spears that pierce him through kind of interrupt the joyful season that we try to celebrate?

That nobody wants to talk about death. And in so doing, not wanting to talk about death, not wanting to acknowledge and remember the very mission, and sort of want to encapsulate the Christmas story to, oh, the cute little baby sleeping on Mary's lap and sentimentalizing this incarnation, forgetting the whole mission of why this baby came.

Church, may we never look upon baby Jesus in such wonder that we miss the very purpose of which he came. The balanced message of the gospel says, yes, Jesus came.

[21 : 45] He came in weakness, as weak as you and me, but he came by the means of which God intended to allow a sacrifice to be suitable, to be satisfactory in order to die the death that we deserve and atone for sin.

The weakness of Jesus Christ's humanity was the means in which God intended to reveal his power and authority over weakness. A proper understanding of God's sacrifice often, sacrifice upon the cross, beckons for a reverence approach, approach, approach to him.

That when you think about the cross, it's horrific. It's not something you want to gather around at a time of all this triumphant declaration of Jesus coming and being a baby.

It's not something you want to acknowledge, but we have to. We have to acknowledge that unless we find ourselves failing to grasp the severity of the cross.

And if we're minimizing and not grasping the severity of the cross, do we truly understand the severity of our own sin? Right?

[23 : 13] The humanity of Christ definitely makes God more relatable as Hebrews, as the author of Hebrews says. But he didn't come simply just to be your friend.

Yes, we are friends of God and that's within the Bible, but he came to break the curse of sin. This is not Jesus, your homeboy.

This is not an irreverent reference to just any person, a cute little baby in a manger. This is the king of kings to break the curse.

And he's your king. And our attention better be focused on our weakness. Right? As Romans 5, 6 says, for while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

And verse 8 says, but God shows his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Hello, redemption. Hello, justification.

[24 : 25] It's all found upon this baby in a manger, the mission of the gospel. Christ provided us two ways in which we can live. We can live for ourselves or we can live for God.

One depends upon oneself, one depends upon God. And as Christians, our lives must reflect sacrifice. And our approach can only be consecrating our lives to him just as the third stanza of the song speak of that consecration.

And we see the third section and the third question, how must we respond to him? With not only Christ's identity and mission defined within this song, we find that it calls us to enter into worship along with those that are present in the day of Jesus' incarnation, in his early stages of his incarnation.

What does the identity and mission of Christ demand of us? What does the mission and identity of Christ demand of us?

One word comes to mind and I've said it and I'll say it again. Consecration. This is a fancy term for being set apart. This is sanctification.

[25 : 50] This is consecrating our lives to Christ the King. And this is often a response that turns your world upside down because we know that the world apart from Christ is in rebellion of what Christ demands, what God intended.

Right? And the most valuable aspects of our lives ought to be surrendered to God alone. Whose worth, whose value, whose essence surpasses anything of value upon this earth.

Gold was brought to him. The precious metal, frankincense, often a fragrance offered by the high priest. Myrrh used as a spice to, one of the spices used to cover the body's stench at burial.

And the good news of Jesus Christ demands we approach him in complete surrender and worship. Anything that we find valuable in our lives does not even come close to the value that we find in Jesus Christ alone.

And from our hands we return to him the very things that he's given to us. You think you've earned something in this life? I hate to bum you out.

[27 : 16] It's a gift from God, everything in our lives. And from our lips we return the very same breath that he has given to us. We have been created by God and for God, for his purposes.

And in this final stanza, we enter into the imagery of Christ's lowly estate with our highest form that we are capable of doing in our weakness, our highest form of praise.

His lowly estate in our highest form of praise. Why? Even the gospel in its lowly, vulnerable, infantile beginnings is a broadcast of God's glory, love, and promise to humanity.

And the backdrop of the gospel is a story that realizes God's design has been distorted by sin. And that all of us were born into this distorted design.

And by birth, we are, unlike Jesus Christ, by our birth, we are tainted by sin. A story that there's nothing that we can do in our power to make our relationship, our broken relationship with God right again.

[28 : 37] It took a mediator. And the mission of the gospel is that God's desire is not that we should continue on the pathway to hell.

The world from birth is marching on their way. Right? But that we would see Jesus along the way of this life. And that we would see him and the sacrifice that he gave for us upon the cross to atone for that sin as our mediator.

And the promise of the gospel is that those who rest in Christ alone as the means, the only means of their salvation, through their faith in him, they will be completely saved.

Instantaneously, miraculously saved. Fully, completely. The criminal record that we have been imputed with, completely wiped clean.

And we are forgiven by God's grace. And this is the hope of the gospel. That those who trust in him will not die in their sins, but will be risen with Jesus to an inheritance waiting ahead.

[29 : 51] Merry Christmas. As we close, through the expositional preaching ministry of our church, we often are opposed by biblical authors a response that relates to the text.

And this response can often be simplified into three categories. A response of our heads, a response of our hands, or a response of our hearts.

To be a response of our heads, that's like a forensic response. This is to make a judgment and decide something, a response from our heads. This also is a response of our hands.

This is a rhetoric, a take action to do something with our hands response or our hearts. An epidemic, this is a delight in something.

This is something to marvel at with our hearts. And for those who are Christians, who are redeemed by God's grace, we undoubtedly respond in an epideptic way.

[31 : 08] That we delight in the truth and the hope that biblical theology was presented to you today evokes our praise of him.

However, does that delight, church, does that delight translate in our lives and how we are consecrated to the king of kings?

So I offer you today not simply to marvel at the mystery, the miraculous intervention of God upon this earth, but a plea to counter the worldly notion of living your life focused on what you get rather than what you give.

How does consecrating, as I plead to you this morning, look in your life. I mean, the world will look at any Christian life and I would hope that they would laugh at you.

If they're not laughing at you, you might be doing something wrong. If the world doesn't hate you and despise your way of living, of the lines and the boundaries that you draw, you might be doing it wrong.

[32 : 27] as foolish as the world may view your consecration, you can be encouraged. In your family, even mothers, I know a lot of mothers who are stay-at-home that have chosen to raise their kids.

The world says, how could you be so lazy for your husband to go out and work? And trust me, I hear it all.

it's like a response that gets that crooked head dog look. You're a stay-at-home mom? What do you do then? As if your value and your purpose as a mother are defined by the things that you get rather than how you serve.

God's design is counter-cultural. Or, even in our purity, for men and women to save intimate relationships for marriage, the world will scoff at you for that.

They will say that, oh, you're that old-time traditionalist. Why don't you get with the times? It's not that bad, right? It sounds like the serpent in the garden.

[33 : 37] Did God really say, right? It all has its roots. And we can go on and on and on of, where are you going to be on Sunday? We want to go out to our golfing match.

Well, I can't because I have church on Sunday. consecration, giving all of ourselves to Jesus Christ. This is what it could look like.

So I give you this legislative plea for you to do something, not just marvel. And for those who aren't Christians, you are definitely, without a doubt, on a legislative side of this response, a legislative end right now.

because the gospel, as it has been presented to you, is calling for action. It's calling you to do something. So will you surrender your life to the miraculous wonder of the gospel, regardless if it doesn't all make sense to you?

If this is the means of salvation, who are you to ever deny that? Who are you to ever question God's design?

[34 : 49] We submit to him just as a king. And spend your Christmas this year as part of the family of God. So if that's you today, today is a day of salvation.

I ask you to surrender yourself and your life, your questions, to the truth of the gospel. And through our faith, collective faith, as a family of God, we all can sing with a wondrous declaration, just as William Dick said, joy, joy, for Christ is born.

Joy, joy, for Christ is born. The babe, the son of Mary. Salvation has come, and it is here today. Let's pray.