

Money and Power

by Oscar Muriu

Oscar Muriu's sermon challenges the church to adopt a humble, servant-hearted approach to missions, following the example of Jesus' incarnation.

Duration: 30:22

Scripture: Matthew 8:20, Matthew 10:9, Luke 22:25, John 1:14, Philippians 2:5-11

Topics: "Incarnational Ministry", "Humility In Service"

Description

This sermon challenges the conventional views of how Jesus should have come to save humanity, emphasizing the importance of humility, powerlessness, poverty, and embracing brokenness in missions. It highlights the radical nature of Jesus' incarnation and calls for a new generation to follow His example by living among the poor and marginalized, serving with humility and sacrificial love.

Transcript

Well good evening Urbana. If I were God, I would not have sent Jesus as a baby. If I were God, I would have been in a hurry to save humanity.

I would have sent Jesus as a great sage, old, weathered, and wise. Coming from a distant land and in three years I would have saved humanity. I would have had Jesus preaching from the age of 15 years, dazzling his elders, drawing large crowds in their thousands, and I would have saved humanity in 15 years, half the time that it took God.

The way God did it was too slow, too low-tech, and too wasteful of time. Having Jesus born as an infant, three years as a baby, ten years as a child, seven years as a teenager, while the world waited to be saved is a sign of lack of visual clarity. Having Jesus live ten years as a mature young adult, your age, in his 20s, and yet saying nothing about his mission was a sign of poor product placement.

And sending him to earth penniless, born in some poor peasant family, born into obscurity, when God owns their cattle on a thousand hills, when we know that the answer to reaching the world is more money and more power, is a sign that God doesn't understand marketing and branding. I would have sent the Messiah as a king, rich and powerful. I would have announced his arrival by splashing it on the billboards.

At his entry, CNN would have recorded it live. It would have been digitally synchronized by satellite around the whole world. I would have reached the world at once.

And if CNN were not available, then I would have played some fantastical kaleidoscope of colors in the clouds. Something that would have made the whole world stop and look up into the sky. You remember how in the film Independence Day by Will Smith, when the alien ships are coming into the Earth's atmosphere over Washington, and New York, and Los Angeles, and Tokyo, and Russia, the clouds display these magnificent colors that make the whole world look up in awe.

That would have been my entry. So stunned with the world of being, that salvation would have come in a mere few weeks, and I may not even have needed a cross. But I am NOT God.

You see, God's way was quiet, and subtle, and subversive. And therefore God, God's way won and changed humanity. God's way was the way of incarnation.

We need to examine and question the way we are doing missions today, and the way we've done it over the last hundred years. Our desire for instant results, our belief that we would never admit that more money and power are the real answer to today's need. If only we had more money, and more technology, and more power, we will get the job done.

And it is exactly at this point that we go wrong in our attempt to win and change the world. You see, so often we're in too much of a hurry, and we believe that more handouts, and building world-class institutions, creating wealth, is the answer to missions. And so we jet into the hard places of this world, especially among the poor and the powerless.

We get into our air-conditioned limousines and our short-term mission buses. We drive into the inner-city communities, into the slums and the favelas of the world, while the poor stand by the roadside and they wave us by. We get out.

We address them. We paint a clinic or two. We take a few pictures.

We make a few promises about building them schools, and about sending them scholarships. And then we get back into our limos, and we go off to debrief in some safari. Mission accomplished.

Quick. Clinical. Easy.

But nothing changes through these helicopter missions. Being what Jesus called in Luke chapter 22 and verse 25, the benefactors of the world who lord it over the poor just doesn't work. And Jesus said, you are not like this.

You are to be servants. And so God did not send Jesus as a king or as a benefactor. He did not use CNN or Independence Day.

He chose a different way, a slow, gracious, but dangerous, difficult way. He incarnated into our reality, and he dwelled among us. And when he had touched humanity for eternity, he turned to his disciples and he said, as the father sent me, so send I you.

On the first evening of a banner, our Bible expositor Ramaz Atallah said, the incarnation is our model for ministry. How is this so? And how does it model for us today? In the book of Philippians chapter two, Paul gives us the answer when he says, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out

of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves.

Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. And then he begins that great hymn, that is Philippians chapter two and verse five. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he made himself nothing.

Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. And therefore God has exalted him to the highest place and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess in heaven and on earth and under the earth that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father. You see God incarnated into our neighborhood and lived among us.

Now when we talk about the incarnation, we often think of a geographical relocation from one address to another, from one physical location to another. But let me suggest to you, indeed in my understanding, the incarnation has four different aspects to it. Four doors that Jesus walks through as he moves from heaven to earth.

And the first of those doors was walking through the door that moves you from pride to humility. The incarnation of our attitude right there in heaven, long before he comes to earth, something significant, something more fundamental than geographical relocation takes place. Paul points to it in verse 5, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who humbled himself, who became a servant, obedient, even unto death.

You see before geographical location, we must go through an attitudinal incarnation. Before you go, consider others better than yourselves. Before you go, do not consider equality, even with those you go to, a right and something to be grasped.

Before you go, make yourself nothing. Leave your pat answers, your degrees, your learnings, your connections to greatness, leave them behind and take on the attitude of a humble servant. This came true for me when as a young Christian I was involved in a ministry that would reach out to people in the slums of Kibera in Nairobi and we would go into the slums and set up a speaker and a small band would begin to play on their guitars and to sing out loud so that a crowd could gather around us.

And when a good-sized crowd of a hundred or two hundred people had gathered around, we would then begin to mingle with the people and greet them and get to know them. And then somebody would preach the good news of Jesus Christ and we would begin to talk to those who stood around us, inviting them to make a commitment to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. And this one time I found myself standing next to a young lady, an attractive lady, and I turned to her and I said, did you understand what they said? And she said, yes.

Would you like to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? And she began to cry and she said, I would want to, I would love to, but I cannot. And somewhat puzzled, I said to her, why not? God will receive anyone who reaches out to him. And she told me he wouldn't receive me, for I am a prostitute.

And with my quick answers I said, oh that's not a problem with God, he will receive you, he receives everyone. And she said, I cannot receive Christ as my Savior, because if I do, then I need to give up my

profession. I cannot continue to be a prostitute.

And so I wondered and asked, what, what does that mean? And she told me, I have a two-year-old daughter, I have no trade, I have been unable to get a job, and the only thing I have is my body to sell. If I do not sell my body, my daughter will starve and die. And so she walked away with tears in her eyes.

And I had no answer for her. All my bad answers were not enough. And I stopped seeing her with the labels that I had categorized her in.

She was no longer a prostitute, she was no longer a sinner, she was no longer a loose moral person, sexually promiscuous. I saw her as a mother, gripped by the bondage to poverty, trying to provide food for her daughter, for her child. And she stopped being a ministry and became a dear, loved child of God, created in the image of God that Christ had died for.

You see, the first incarnation is the incarnation of our attitude. Otherwise, we stand the danger of going into the difficult places of the world with a know-it-all attitude, analyzing people's problems, unable to respect their challenges, unable to relate to their poverty and lostness. Our good intentions are not enough unless they are accompanied with humility.

And humility means listening to the story of the poor and the needy. Humility means learning their names. Humility means serving them and washing their smelly feet.

Humility means eating their food without bringing out our little antiseptic creams. Humility means listening to their wisdom and listening to their local knowledge. And finally, humility means keeping our mouths shut long enough that the poor can speak.

This is the first incarnation, moving from pride to humility. But the second door of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ was the incarnation from power to powerlessness. Verse 6 of Philippians chapter 2, being in very nature God, Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he made himself nothing.

Jesus did not come as a powerful king, not because God couldn't have made him be born in Herald's kingdom or in Herald's palace as Herald's son, but because the gospel does not depend on human power or our access to such power. Indeed, I would suggest that the more we depend on human power to drive our kingdom mission, the less effective our mission becomes. That's the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God.

The very thing we think will enhance the cause of the gospel becomes the very thing that harms the mission of the kingdom. Strategic planning and marketing and branding and negotiating access to the powers that be, connectedness to the presidents and to the opinion shapers all seem wise and necessary, but they all go counter-cultural to the kingdom. As Patrick Fong said yesterday, we should live to be forgotten and if God should choose to raise us up, so be it, but never because we sought or positioned ourselves for it.

Jesus came not as a king, but as a servant. His incarnation was a movement away from the center of power to the periphery of powerlessness. So powerless was he that he entered our world from the weakest, most vulnerable door into human society as an infant, totally dependent on human beings to care for him.

Children and especially infants are the most vulnerable of human society, particularly in situations of poverty, of war, or of famine. And it was this door that Jesus chose to enter our race. And to make it worse, he was born into a family without honor.

His mother was known to have been pregnant before marriage. And so in John chapter 8 and verse 41, the Pharisees say to Jesus, we are not illegitimate children, as though they questioned his birth. And to make it worse, he was born of a peasant family, so poor that when they present him to the temple, they could not offer the necessary sacrifice of a lamb.

They had to bring two doves, which was the offering of a poor man. And to make it worse, he was born into a refugee family, a foreigner, unwanted, undocumented, having to flee from the injustice of the powerful, completely defenseless. He entered human society at the very bottom.

His incarnation was an incarnation from the seat of power in heaven to the periphery of powerlessness as a refugee infant. When we incarnate into our mission fields, the mission fields of the world, we go with our trappings, our degrees, our access to power, our money, our iPods, our cell phones. This is not incarnation.

We are immensely powerful because of these things. And the people we go to know this, and therefore they cannot disagree with us. They cannot correct us.

They cannot advise us, for they fear that if they do, they will lose our benevolence, for we are a powerful people. But Jesus came as a child. He disinvested himself of all power before he entered our space.

He left behind the limousines, and the jets, and the power suits, and the gold-coated watches, and the smartphones with their CIT ringtones. And he was born into a manger, and not as the king of the Jews in Herald's Palace. This is the second nature of the incarnation.

The third is that Jesus incarnated from privilege into poverty. In heaven, he was God himself. In heaven, he sat on a throne.

In heaven, angels waited upon him. And when he finally went back to heaven in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 9, we read that he is honored and worshipped, but not when he was on earth. In Matthew chapter 26 and verse 15, at his arrest, we read that one of the disciples cut off the high priest's ear.

And Jesus turned to this disciple, and he told him, do you think I cannot call on my father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels. He had access to protection and to power, but he set them aside. You see, Jesus chose voluntary poverty for the sake of mission.

He gave up all privilege and became poor for our sake. In Matthew chapter 8 and verse 20, he says, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. Isn't he the same Lord who could have commanded the stones to turn into gold? When he went into the villages and the towns, at the entrance of the gate of the town, he could have commanded all the stones to turn into gold and distributed them to the poor.

But he never did, because this was not his way. He had moved from the place of privilege to the place of poverty. And when he sent out his disciples in Mark, Matthew chapter 10 and verse 9, he said to them, do not take any gold or silver or copper in your belts.

Take no bag for the journey, no extra tunic or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his keep. My goodness, what then do we do with our wealth? He looked at the rich young ruler and he told him, go sell your riches and give them to the poor. He doesn't say go with your riches to your mission field.

He says, go sell your riches and give it away and then come and follow me. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus seems to be saying to us that we are to go to the neighborhoods that he sends us to and be dependent on the people we go to. Many of our present models of missions try and ensure that we are not dependent, that we have everything that we need, that we never need to look to the local communities to care for us.

But how beautiful was Nicole's testimony of our ministry in China yesterday, that it is a physical disability and her dependence on the Chinese people that has become the very strength of our ministry. The fourth door that Jesus walks to is from the harmony and the unity of heaven to the brokenness and the dysfunction of the earth. This is the final movement of the incarnation, the geographical relocation.

He left heaven and came to earth and in so doing, he left the culture of order to come into a broken and chaotic world. He left the familiar and he came to be a stranger. 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. But God chose to have him born in a dysfunctional culture, to have him learn the ways of dysfunctional peoples in a dysfunctional world, to grow up as one who belonged before he could seek to reform. He became one among us.

He learned our language, he learned our ways, he understood our pain. That's what 30 years was about, learning culture, learning to listen, learning to speak in this new place. We are often in such a hurry, but God is not.

If we were God, Jesus would have been an amazing child. At the age of three, he would have been healing and teaching and debating with the Sanhedrin. At the age of 10 years, by his teen years, we would have made him a phenomenal evangelist.

Unlike God, whose timetable dictated that for 30 years he would remain silent and live among the people he had been sent to. Our hurry hurts the poor. We immediately hit the ground and begin speaking, organizing people, telling them what to do, analyzing their problem, writing books.

We don't know how to listen and how to be quiet. We have an agenda. We have our measuring matrices.

We're short on time. We need to bring back a report of success and results. We sacrifice relationships for the task and we run, run, run.

For Jesus' incarnation meant that he dwelt among the peoples, a broken people. He ate their food, he visited their homes, so that he integrated into their communities. And for 30 years, he didn't stand out in any way.

They never thought of him as different. He belonged. He was one of them.

And so after living with them 30 years, it took but a mere three years for him to say, it is finished. I have completed the work you gave me to do. And so in conclusion, my dear brothers and sisters, four doors to real and radical incarnation, moving from pride to humility, moving from power to powerlessness, moving

from privilege to poverty, and moving from harmony to brokenness.

This then was how Jesus incarnated into our world. And this is what then becomes a model for missions for us today. And Abana, I want to challenge you to be the generation that rises up to do missions radically, like Jesus did.

Already there are those breakaway movements, as we see in Shane, and in the likes of Scott Besenecker, and organizations like Servant to Asia's Urban Poor, new movements that are seeking to move into the slums and the favelas and the broken places of this world, and to live alongside the poor. I read Scott's book, *The New Phrase*, and his more recent book, *How to Inherit the Earth*. It's available in the bookstore, and they blew me away.

They are called to radical mission. God is doing a new work, and he's already stirring the waters, and a new generation of missionaries is arising. The question today is, will you be that radical missionary? Our generation, my generation, sought to be faithful in the best way we knew how.

That was much, there was much that we did that was wrong. But God saw it fit to use us anyway. You could spend your time critiquing my generation that has gone before you.

But God calls you to extend grace to us, and be courageous in your own generation. Lead us, and show us how it should be done. And so my call, and my challenge to you today is, take the beloved Church of Christ.

We cannot abandon the church, for you said, even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. God has not given up on the church. Take the beloved Church of Christ to the next level.

The baton is being passed into your hands. Within 10 and 15 years, you will be the leaders of the Christian movement. You will be the mission pastors.

You will be the pastors of our churches. You will be the missionaries on the field. You will be the board members of the mission organizations.

Take us to the next level. We need a new movement, a movement of young men and women who will choose voluntary poverty to serve the destitute poor. A movement of young men and women who will give up privilege and power.

A movement of young men and women who will serve for a lifetime, or maybe 10 years in the slums and the favelas of this world. Young men and women who are radical in their engagement. Will God find in your generation, these young men and women, or must he wait for the generation that comes after you? For some of you here, that's what God is calling you to.

Radical incarnation into the broken and poor places of this world. Because it is only in this way that we will ever change the world from the inside out. God bless you.

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