

Series: *THE INCREDIBLE INVASION*—December 3, 2006

GOD'S AMAZING DESCENT

I. INTRO

- A. Recent history is filled with stories and movies about alien invasions and super-heroes. One of the most infamous happened on October 30, 1938, when Orson Wells did a live broadcast of a play, *The War of the Worlds*. He explained at the beginning that it was a drama—but a lot of people never heard that—and it sounded like a live newscast of an actual Martian invasion. As people listened to what appeared to be live reporting—some totally panicked. People packed the highways trying to escape, hid in basements—and even wrapped their heads in wet towels to survive the poisonous gas coming from the spaceship.

-These reports seem pretty ridiculous to us now. We're veterans of computer-generated special effects that are unbelievably realistic—from *Men In Black* spoofs to *Spiderman*, *Independence Day* and the latest incarnation of Superman.

-The story line is almost always some version of "What if really evil powers with superior technology came and took over the world?" or "What if there were people with superpowers dedicated to protecting us from evil!"

1. As new as all that seems, the history of humans is loaded with stories of the supernatural invading earth—both for evil and good purposes. Greek and Roman mythology is filled with stories of gods who mix it up with humans. Zeus, Hermes, Aphrodite—the list goes on and on. They are portrayed as half-gods and half-human; with supernatural powers from the gods—combined with all the worst in humans.
2. If you choose to, you can place what the Bible says in the same category as Greek mythology—a little more highly developed, but still *myths*. Some people do that. Or, *or...* you can see these narratives as a clear explanation of something that that has always been there, but so huge and mysterious we can't quite get our heads around it.

- B. The real Christmas story, as you know, has absolutely nothing to do with Santa and Christmas trees and candy canes and reindeer and elves and "naughty or nice" kids. That's become a fun part of our culture—but the story line of Christmas doesn't belong to us. It's one of the most profound, mind-boggling—yet beautiful stories anyone can imagine. But it goes way deeper than just a quaint story. It's a story of an invasion. Now, I know that word has bad connotations. We talk about an *invading* army, and *invasion* of privacy, and *invasion* of ants or cockroaches or disease. The point is that someone or something comes—and *we* didn't choose it.

1. The Christmas story is the story of a profound invasion of good. Subtle—known, yet secret; prophesied about over and over, yet somehow extremely hidden—missed, really, by the people who were watching most carefully.
2. Let me explain the invasion part a little better. Today after the service, I will go home to 43 Standish Crescent. I'll have to unlock the door, and the dog will bark—but it's not an invasion because Lori and I *own* the home.

-God isn't a foreigner. He's supernatural, but not an alien. Everything here belongs to Him, because He thought it all up and made it. And He's been here all along. But 2000 years ago, He decided to show up here in a unique, unexpected way that we still haven't been able to get our heads around. John, one of Jesus' closest followers and friends, said it like this:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him (John 1:1-3, 10 TNIV)

-When this verse talks about **the Word**, it's simply referring to Jesus as the expression of all that God had said about Himself. God...in flesh and blood. It was a **good** day—that day He—**the Word**--showed up. Angels sang and danced across the skies, and history forever changed. The decision you'll have to make in this series is, "Will I allow God to fully intersect my history and change **me!**" My prayer is that this Christmas will be a defining moment in your life.

II. WHILE WE WERE SLEEPING...

- A. Now, let me explain briefly why John chose this specific term—**the Word**, or **Logos**, to talk about Jesus. Jewish understood this reference to the **Word** They understood it as the Truth of who God was as described in the holy ancient writings or Scriptures passed down to them. God literally **spoke** everything into being. His Word had incredible power.

-But this word, **Logos**, also had powerful significance in Greek philosophy as the underlying principle and truth behind everything that existed. The author is saying, "Jesus of Nazareth is the personification of that **Truth**, that **Power**, the **Basis**, **Foundation** for all that exists. Specifically, God somehow became a man; a real flesh and blood human, who experienced pain, got hungry and thirsty, felt sexual desire, needed rest—in other words, **limitations**.

The limitations all humans have.-The Bible puts it like this. I'm reading from the translation, **The Message**:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish (John 1:14 Msg).

1. The struggle people had then—and still have—is, "Okay, if he's bled when he was cut, got tired and hungry, and had needs like anyone else, **how could He still be God? Wouldn't be a little more like, well, Superman? Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive...**
- a. If you were to go to the corner of Bloor and Yonge—and ask people, "So, who **was** Jesus...**really?**" you'd most likely get responses from people that

would most likely range from *The Da Vinci Code's* “a really good, powerful, influential man—but no more” “I have **no** idea!” I can guarantee you that **very** few would say, “God Himself showed up!” And some of you may find yourself in that category.

-In fact, depending on your exposure to Jesus, what He claimed, and what the Bible says—**you** may be struggling with some of these questions. And I just want to encourage you to hammer, dig at, and investigate this truth. Real truth, **true** truth is never changed by tough questions.

- b. Truth is, Jesus' own brother—who spent 30 years with him—struggled with his identity. And there's some clear evidence that even Mary, who had his identity revealed to her by the visit of an angel, and conceived as a virgin, did not really understand that she carried God in her womb!

-See, from what they understood of God, He was so massive, so holy, so incredibly powerful—that even to see his face would instantly kill a person. And yet they saw Jesus' face all the time. And Mary watched his face develop—just like other children's faces—from tiny, wrinkled and red—to growing whiskers and getting creases. How could God have a dirty face; have food running down his chin—enjoy a meal of leg of lamb?

- 2. So, with all this stuff—why do we now believe that God took on flesh, became human and **moved into the neighborhood?** Let me list just a few clues:

- a. First, that's really **Who** the prophecies said he would be. Listen to one from Isaiah:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6 NIV).

- b. Second, it's clear that Jesus claimed to be God.
*He said that he and the Father were one; he claimed the exclusive name God had revealed to Moses: **I AM**. He accepted worship—and people calling Him God; He claimed that He had pre-existed with the Father.
- c. Third, he did the kinds of things only God could do: healed and raised people from the dead; claimed he would judge the world; and forgave sins. This stuff was all exclusively God's domain—and He was, in fact, nailed to a cross for claiming to be God.
- d. Of course, the other thing about Jesus is that He fulfilled 48 specific prophecies that had been made about him hundreds of years before He even showed up—as well as His own prophecies that he would be crucified and rise from the dead. Which He did.
- e. I find it amazing that even though he only had a public ministry of 3 years, never traveled more than 100 miles from his home town—he forever split

history into to big chunks. His impact on this world has been absolutely profound.

3. In our Christmas record archives—which are substantial, we have this old song recorded by Mitch Miller and the Gang—and this obnoxious little girl soloist. It's called **Must Be Santa**. She sings, "Who's got a beard that's long and white... **Santa's** got a beard that's long and white; Who comes around on a special night? **Santa** comes around on a special night... **Must be Santa!** Of course, the song drills down through all these characteristics—boots and a suit of red, long cap on his head...big, red cherry nose...laughs this way, **Ho! Ho! Ho!** Must be Santa!

-My point—and there **is** a point—you walk down through all these characteristics: Hmmm! Who can perform miracles, raise the dead, receive worship, forgive sin, rise from the dead, and change history? Only God can. Hmmm! Must be God!

-Of course, the stinger in using this analogy is that people put Jesus in the same class as Santa Claus—a wonderful myth we tell children to make them feel warm and fuzzy. The difference, of course, is that Santa hasn't changed the world, and no one has ever died for their belief that Santa Clause exists

- B. Now, I've looked at the evidence, and though I sometimes have my questions, I am convinced way beyond any reasonable doubt that on what we now call Christmas night, 2000 years ago, the unbelievable...the incredible happened. God showed up. And He showed up in the same messy, painful way we all do. Mary was, based on the best estimates of experts--probably about 13 or 14 years old. She gave birth to Him one night in a cave used to shelter animals.

1. Honestly, I can barely grasp the truth of that. Especially when I think of the truth of who God is. The observable universe is 78 billion light years across and contains at least 100 billion galaxies. God not only fills it and exists way beyond it—He **made** it!

-And one day, somehow, He reduced Himself to a strand of DNA in a young woman's womb. Think about that real long, and you'll get a headache about the size of a quarter in the center of your forehead!

-Now, I could get into a **lot** of detail—about Someone who's eternal getting reduced to time; and someone who's all powerful having the flesh and blood muscles and brain of an ordinary human—and the angels watching all this in stunned amazement. But the real question—the biggest question is **Why? Why would He do this? Why this way? Why come here—to these people?**

- 2.. And that really is the big question—probably for a lot of people, isn't it? The God of the Universe showing up on this planet as a baby born in a backwoods town filled with bean-eaters in Palestine sounds like this fantastic, made-up story. Why? And the Bible has a very simple answer to that question. Love. A kind of love that is way bigger, way beyond our imaginations as well.

-See, there had been a previous invasion. An invasion of evil and wickedness—intent on corrupting, stealing and ruining all God loved, simply out of hatred for Him.

- a. And, truth is—every single person on this planet sees this and **knows** it. There’s not a single person I know who would think it’s okay that babies starve; that sexual predators lie in wait for children. That there are people on this planet who hate others enough they were willing to discard their own lives to do it. You name the problem—AIDS, Alzheimers, cancer, abject stupid poverty—alongside obnoxious consumerism and waste. It’s **evil**. And we know, in our hearts, there is something deeply wrong with our world. To be honest—with **us**.
 - b. Our immediate instinct is to distance ourselves from it. To say, “Wow—look at the other **awful** people in this world. I personally think it’s **terrible!** But it **wasn’t me!** It’s not my fault! **Ain’t no flies on me!**” When, of course, the **real** truth is, we’ve felt that evil in us, far more than we’d ever be able to publicly admit.
3. The bad news about the condition created in our world—and in us—by this evil is that it’s terminal. And that’s why God stepped in. We needed to be delivered from evil—the evil around us, and the evil in us. We needed someone to free us. He would have to bring His Kingdom to **this** world. Sin, evil and death needed to stop. It was unthinkable that anyone would carry the sin disease into the next life—into Heaven, and destroy life there. There were two choices; extinguish all life and start over, or deal with evil. And that’s why God the Son stepped out of Heaven and said, “I don’t want anyone to be lost. I’ll go.”
- The instinct to humble ourselves, to rescue, to lay everything on the line, to pay a price to save, isn’t totally foreign, is it? Many of you saw Mayor Don Cousens here last Sunday; I think of the anonymous donor who recently put herself at risk to donate one of her kidneys and save his life. I have a friend, David Goodman, who was murdered in front of his family in Jordan—simply because he wanted to take the Good News of Jesus to the people there.
- Any parents here who have ever gone through agony—humbled yourself to help one of your children? God just did this on a scale we can barely imagine—because His love is greater than we can possibly imagine it.
4. And that’s what Christmas is all about. It’s about love. It’s about making things right, seeking peace, finding forgiveness—and giving gifts out of love. It’s about humbling ourselves to serve those who need us most.

III. SO...WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

- A. The mystery that has totally stumped Jesus’ followers for years has been, “How did He do it? How did God become **fully** human and not compromise who He was as God?” To tell the truth, I don’t have a clue. That’s God’s business, not mine. But the Bible does tell **us** what **we** need to do in the light of it all. How many of you want to know what that is? You may not like the answer. Let me read it.

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage.

Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. (Phil. 2:1-9 Msg).

1. The question Jesus, by his invasion, by his coming, asks is, "What will you do with this kind of love? God saw our mess—God responded to our need, and now **we** have to respond—and we will be held accountable for that response. The Father gave His Son as a gift to us. The passage I've been reading from John 1 tells us how most responded when that happened:

He came into the very world he created, but the *world didn't recognize him*. He came to his own people, and *even they rejected him*. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:10-12 NLT).

2. Now, I want to be very careful here—but I need to talk about **truth**. A lot of other people have come claiming to offer a way to God, a way to the life we've always wanted, a way to eternal life. The result is a lot of religions—and **immense** confusion.

-None of these other ways talk about God humbling Himself and coming here to make a way. They all talk about what **we** need to do to either find our way to God, earn God's approval—or find inner peace, or live for a long time...etc., etc.

- a. The message of Jesus' coming is very, **very** different. It's God initiating a very messy **humiliating** process based on purer love than you can imagine. Him doing that would make **absolutely no sense** if everyone could invent and believe in their own way of reconciling with God.
- b. He came the world He created, and no one recognized Him. His own people rejected Him. But those who **did** receive Him, believe in His Name—that is, that He was God, Savior—who He **claimed** to be—found real **life** as a gift. And their broken relationship with God was restored. And **they too** became His children.

-The offer is still real. He offers life—and He offers it to you. And I'll tell you **specifically** what it is that you and I have to do to receive Him. Humble ourselves before Him. Friends, we have to admit that we may be able to do a lot of things—but we can't save our own souls and we can't give ourselves life and we can't wash the evil out of our souls.

And so I want to ask you this morning; He humbled himself more than you'll ever dream to offer make this offer of *life!* Will you humble yourself to receive it?

-See, it's really not that *complicated*. He offers you the gift; you say, "I desperately *need* and *want* the gift of life you died to give—and I will humble myself before you!" That could happen this instant. You're a prayer away from that. If you've never done that—you've got a decision to make. The ball is in your court.

- B. There's another extremely important piece to this that, unfortunately, a lot of Christ-followers get around to. This is the part of following Jesus that's messy. For some people, it's totally revolting. It's doing what we are specifically *told* to do in the light of Jesus' voluntary descent. It says,

Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself (Phil. 2:2-5 Msg).

- Let me break this down very simply. It's called *humbling* yourself. Jesus had another word: *denying yourself—and choosing to serve*.
 -And this is messy, difficult stuff. See, we *love* the word *up*. *Upscale, upgrade, upswing, upsize, upper* income, *upper* class. *Upwardly* mobile.
 I mean, we want—and are determined to *make*—our finances, our success, our popularity, our lifestyle to go up and to the right. But if Jesus' example is the right one—then there will be times when we will have to go down—just like He did. And I don't think this is talking about finances, necessarily—although it could. What this is really dealing with is our relationships with other people.
 -I want you to think about pride for a minute—which is behind most of the relational conflict and mess in our lives. Anyone here who really *likes* to hang around proud people—people with immense egos. People who are always right, look down their noses at others, have to get the last word, talk condescendingly to those they feel are inferior—and *refuse* to admit they're wrong? Anyone who says, "Wow! Now *these* are *my* kind of people!"

 -I don't know if you've ever notice in movies, but the tension is many times created by the pride and arrogance of a person—to the point where everyone in a theatre is saying, "If this movie's gonna have a good ending, this person has to go *down! Hard!*" One of my favorite Christmas movies is...*A Christmas Carol!* You know me too well. You get partway through this movie—with his bitterness, arrogance and cruelty—and you *want* him to be humbled. Why I love this movie is that he is humbled—he *is* changed—and I don't see that happen a lot. People *hate* pride. And you need to know—all through the Bible, it becomes clear that there's one Being in this universe that hates it more than us. And that's God. And He is *absolutely determined to humble the proud*.

- a. Notice what the Apostle Paul says about this process of humbling yourself:

Agree with each other.

To do that sometimes means that you and I have to swallow our pride, and not be real worried about who's right. Pride will ***always*** lead you into conflict; humility gets you out—and if you ***learn*** it--keeps you out.

- b. He says,
Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top.

Our world is like that, isn't it? Scrambling, clawing, digging--trying to get to the top of the heap. And in our culture, trying to get our **kids** to the top of the heap. How many of you think that if you can get your kids to the top of the heap—that will make them really happy and successful in life?

-We will kill ourselves—or others--trying to be first in line for jobs, promotions, perks. Oh, and first in ***traffic***—anyone ever try to do that besides me? We notice what others make, others do, what their kids do, where they are on the scale of ***UP***—compared to us. Why? Cause we ***love*** up. Up, up, up.

-And this attitude ***totally*** contradicts everything Jesus did and stood for. The whole New Testament--the story of Jesus, basically says, "I wouldn't worry one second about that stuff—cause the whole ***system*** is skewed—and it will skew your heart towards darkness!"

- c. Then these amazing words:

Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

-Think about how obsessed we are with our own advantage, our own bank accounts, our own schedules, our own stuff, our own lives. This says, "If you can bear to do it—just put yourself to the ***side*** of the picture—for just a little bit—and look at your world, look at the people in your world—without thinking about what they can do for you. Think instead of what you can do for them.

There'll be ***plenty*** of time for you—just open your heart, say, "God—help me to ***see this world—all these people around me—without putting myself in the center of the picture!***"

2. At the very top, Paul gives all these..."if you's;"

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care...then act like Jesus; humble yourself; love others like you love yourself. If Jesus is your goal, your leader, your friend, your mentor—then let this be your mindset.

- a. This passage doesn't tell us this, but I think one of the reasons why God asks us to humble ourselves is because God wants us to enjoy the kindness and goodwill and admiration humility brings. He wants us to be loved.
- Pride invokes dislike. If you get arrogant, think your opinion is more valid than anyone else, I can **guarantee** you that those who rub against your life are doing to think, "He needs to be taken down a few notches!" Is that true or not?
 - Pride is one of the most destructive forces in any relationship we have. It destroys marriages, friendships, parent/child relationships, employer-employee relationships. People too proud to admit they were wrong, too proud to get help with their marriage or their parenting or their finances or their addictions. It's so **stupid**—AND so rampant. I see it all the time, don't you? I wouldn't at **all** be surprised if everyone here has at least one relationships that's screwed up **mainly** by pride.
- b. As I mentioned, God is absolutely committed to taking down the proud. If you let pride into your heart, watch out—you've just painted a target on your life and said, "Go ahead, God. Bet even **You** won't do anything." When someone gets proud, God loves them **too much** not to humble them. Oh, He'll try other things first—but the Bible is clear: God **opposes** the proud; pride goes before a fall. And I could give you example after example.
- God took down Lucifer—threw him right out of Heaven and condemned him to hell.
 - Pharaoh got proud—and Pharaoh went down.
 - The king of Assyria mocked God—he got proud, and he went down.
 - A king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar got proud—and he went down. His moment of arrogance was followed by 7 years of insanity where he lived in the fields and ate grass like a cow, he wrote his own chapter in the Bible. Listen to how he closed it:

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride, he is able to humble (Dan.4:27 NIV).

3. See the deal is that God in his grace gives us time and space to humble our hearts, to realize who He is—and who we are. He gives us space to realize how limited we are—but that if we will lay aside our rights and our power and our status for higher causes—great things can happen.
- So...what if we don't? Well, then we miss the greatness we were destined for. I want you to notice what it says about Jesus as this passage—which was probably an early hymn of the church—closes. Because he was willing to descend to the very depths of humility...

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11 NIV).

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. I'm just going to be bold and ask this morning; if you were to follow Jesus' example, if you were to humble yourself--lay aside your rights and privileges and success. Lay aside the little bit of glory you've been able to attain—what would that look like?

How long has it been since you humbled yourself before a spouse, a child, a co-worker, a friend and admitted that you were wrong? How long has it been, really, since you've asked someone to forgive you? Is it because you're so good, you really don't need forgiveness—or is a point of arrogance in your heart—and you are begging God to humble you? And I need to beg you—don't tempt Him. My sense is that we have a choice—we humble ourselves voluntarily—or He humbles us.

-See, the deal is that if the Creator of all would—and did—humble Himself to love, serve and forgive us—how could we be so incredibly arrogant not to do the same? Why **not**?

- B. Sometimes we don't see it. I don't know about you, but I find that pride sneaks up on me. Sometimes pride gets into my need to be right. "No, no, no—you don't understand—see, I **know** this stuff!" It shows itself in relationships—you know, me dropping little sneaky hints about what I know, where I am. Anyone here tracking with me, or am I all alone? It shows itself in my home; when I have a heated discussion with one of my kids. -This morning, will you be honest about your pride? There's no other path to greatness. So, will I, will you--like Jesus, **voluntarily** lay aside my rights and privileges—and descend into the greatness God always planned for us? We celebrate Christmas—because the Creator of all things humbled himself and became a little baby.