

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Sunday, December 23, 2007

Philippians 2:5-11 “From Heaven’s Glory to Earth’s Shame”

Intro. Have you ever been involved in a conflict within a family, a church, or within a work environment? I believe we all have. There can even be conflicts at Christmas. If you have children, watch what happens on Christmas morning. When you visit family, you may have conflict before you leave, or after you get there. During times of conflict, tempers can flair, and we can get stressed out. People can get hurt. Conflict can get so bad that marriages and families break up, churches split, and nations go to war.

Evidently there was a bit of a breach in the fellowship there in Philippi. So in vv.1-4 of this chapter Paul exhorts the Philippians to maintain peace and harmony in the fellowship of God’s people. In the first part of v.3 Paul warns that pride and self-centeredness leads to conflict. We are raising a generation of people who are very self-centered, and we will reap the consequences of increased conflict. However, Paul goes on to say that humility and being thoughtful of others promotes peace and harmony. So the apostle commands the Philippians to practice these virtues. Then, he does what any good preacher or teacher should do: he gives a good illustration to drive home his point. Sometimes spiritual truth can better be presented by an illustration rather than by a detailed explanation. Well, there is no greater example of humility and thoughtfulness than our Lord Jesus Christ. No one has ever humbled Himself from so high a position, to so low a position as Jesus.

This morning we are going to take a close look at our Lord’s great example of humility and thoughtfulness. As we follow the Lord’s humble descent to be our Savior, we will apply these truths to our lives. The kind of humble mindedness and thoughtfulness described in this text should characterize the Christian.

So let’s look at the wonderful example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may we follow His example. Notice first of all that we should follow:

I. JESUS ATTITUDE TOWARD HIGH POSITION

I hope you realize that your attitude and state of mind will make a big difference in how you live. Notice v.5, “Let this¹ mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Because of the attitude and mindset of Jesus, He was willing to do something that may seem almost incomprehensible. Paul’s purpose beginning in v.6 is to help us understand how great was the descent that Jesus accepted when He became a man. If *He* was willing to humble Himself so greatly, then we should be willing to humble ourselves.

Now to fully appreciate the great descent of Jesus, Paul begins by describing the high position from which He started. Paul describes the relationship between Jesus and God the Father in this way in v.6:

A. He Is Equal with God – He specifically says that in the last of v.6. However, notice what he says in the first part of v.6, that He was the very “form of God.” Here it does not refer to

¹ The position of the pronoun “this” is emphatic and shows that the exhortation reaches back to vv. 2-4.

physical shape because we know that the Bible says that God is Spirit (John 4:24). “Form” is from *morphe*, which refers to the inner, essential, and abiding nature of a person or thing. It means the very essence of a person or thing. Also, the word “God” is without the definite article in the Greek text, and therefore refers to the divine essence. This inner nature normally manifests itself appropriately in outward appearance. What Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration was an outward expression of the essence of Deity. So the word implies partaking of the very essence of God. Jesus Christ in His very nature is God. Thus, He possesses the essential attributes and glory of Deity. The apostle John said in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then he said in v.14, “...and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Both John and Paul affirmed that Jesus is God. He did not begin His life in Bethlehem. Jesus Himself said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

You say, “Why is that so important?” That is important because that means that when you believe in Jesus Christ, everything God is, is available to you. For example, He is all-powerful. He who rebuked demons and conquered death itself can take care of any enemy you may face. He is all-knowing. No problem is too difficult for Him to solve. Jesus Christ can meet the needs of your life, whatever they may be.

I hope you can grasp and appreciate the position Jesus had before He came into this world. He was and is the Son of God, fully equal with God. He was surrounded, served, and adored by angels in heaven.

Yet in spite of His glorious position, notice His attitude as described in the last of v.6:

B. He Did Not Insist on Holding On to the Honor and Position of Deity – Before Jesus would have left heaven and become a man, He first had to have had the right attitude. And that is expressed in the last of v.6. Paul said that Jesus “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” “Robbery” is really not a good translation. To hold on to the privileges and prerogatives of deity would not have been robbery. His attitude was that the special position and privileges of equality with God was not something to be grasped, like a treasure to be clutched and retained at all cost. He was willing to let go of the very thing Satan desired when he fell from heaven.

I suppose all of our children and youth are looking forward to Christmas. Suppose you receive a gift that you have really wanted, and your brother or sister gets a different gift. But they want the gift that you received! Suppose they come over and try to take it from you. I would imagine that most of you will hold on to your treasured gift very tightly. You will probably not say, “Here, you can have my gift.”

Yet Jesus had a different attitude. Though all of us would prize such an exalted position in heaven, Jesus was willing to let go of His position and praise. He did not cease to be God, but He was willing to give up His exalted position in heaven.

Are you like Jesus? Once you attain position, power, or praise, do you hold on to it at all cost? Do you insist that people serve you, and call you by some exalted title? Or are you willing to give up position, power, or fame for the sake of others?

We are in a special season of praying for our missionaries, and giving to support them. Some of these missionaries in particular are truly like Jesus. They have been willing to leave the privileges and wealth of America, and go work among poor, lost souls, living in obscurity and difficult conditions. Some are not treated like royalty, but are despised and persecuted. Is there one here today who is inspired by the example of Jesus, and will surrender to God’s call to become a missionary?

Now what would cause Jesus to give up His exalted position in heaven? The only answer must be that His love compelled Him to leave it all as He thought of the needs of others. Jesus did not think of Himself. His attitude was unselfish concern for others. And so that leads to my next main point. We should follow:

II. JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHERS

He saw mankind in our need of forgiveness, for we were poor, wretched sinners, condemned to a devil's hell. He knew that the only way we could be saved was for Him to leave heaven, and come to earth. To rescue men and to lift them to the place from which He had come seemed to Him to be worth the temporary surrender of that glory and majesty. This reminds one of 2 Cor. 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Jesus perfectly fulfilled v.4, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Though Paul does not specifically mention the love of Jesus here, He certainly describes the love of Jesus in action.

So what did He have to do to save us? What Paul describes here is a great descent for Jesus. Consider with me the downward steps of humility He took. First of all:

A. He Emptied Himself – In v.7 Paul said that Christ "made Himself of no reputation...." Those words (*eauton ekenwsen*) literally mean, "Himself He emptied," or even "He voided Himself." If you write a \$100 check, and then write VOID on it, you have just emptied it of any value. The question is: of what did Christ Jesus empty Himself? Surely not of His existence "in the form of God." This does not mean that Jesus ceased to be God when He became a man; He did not empty Himself of Deity. In Col. 2:9 Paul said that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He was 100% God when He was a baby reclining helplessly on the bosom of Mary. During His ministry He demonstrated the attributes of deity many times. So what then, does it mean? Based on the Greek grammar,² the clause, "He emptied himself" derives its meaning not only from the words which immediately precede it, but also from those that follow. He emptied Himself of the honor and privileges of Deity when He became a man and took the form of a servant, and the other things Paul described in vv.7-8. So what was involved in this emptying of Christ? Let's follow it in chronological order.

In v.7 Paul says that Christ came "in the likeness of men." Here the word translated "likeness" is different from the word translated "form" in v.6. It is *schema*, which refers more to outward form, rather than inner essence. We get our word "schematic" from this Greek word. Looking at it from earth's viewpoint, men say, "Jesus was born." Looking at it from heaven, angels say, "He emptied Himself." The very act of leaving heaven and taking on humanity emptied Himself of the privileges and praises of deity. Of course, the fact that Jesus came in the "likeness of men" does not indicate that He did not have true humanity. He had a real, physical human body, and He was so like us that no one for the first 30 years suspected that He was anything but human. Like everyone else He had come into the world through the process of childbirth. What a humble, difficult way to enter this world! Like everyone else he experienced the process of growing up (Luke 1:80). He learned a trade like others (Mark 6:3). He experienced hunger, thirst, weariness

² The word "taking" is an aorist participle. A rule of Greek grammar says that the action of an aorist participle precedes the action of the leading verb. The leading verb here is "emptied." That means that the act of taking preceded the act of emptying.

and sleepiness (Matt. 4:2; John 4:6, 7; Mark 4:38). He knew sorrow. He wept at the tomb of His friend (John 11:35). His way of dress, customs and manners resembled those of his contemporaries. He knew what it was to be tempted. He didn't have a halo around His head as we see in so many paintings of Him. Judas had to kiss Him the night He was betrayed so that the arresting officers would know which man they were to capture. And yes, He tasted what it is like to suffer and die. I've seen many people experience suffering unto death. Jesus truly came in the likeness of men. So to fully experience our humanity, He never exercised His prerogatives and powers as God for His own benefit. It was always for the benefit of others. As man He became thirsty, but as God He walked on water to save His disciples. He would not turn stones into bread to satisfy His own hunger, but as God He later fed the 5,000.

What this means to us is the assurance that Jesus understands. I don't know what you are going through today. You come into this building and you are dressed up so nice and you are so sweet and you've got a smile on your face. But you may be smiling to cover the tears that are just beneath the surface of your life. You have hurts? Well I want you to know that Jesus had hurts. You have sorrows? Well Jesus was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Jesus understands what you are going through. You can go to Him and find One who sympathizes with your human condition.

However, the use of the term "likeness" is an acknowledgment that He was not *merely* human. There was likeness, similarity, but not absolute, unqualified identity. His humanity was not plagued with the weaknesses of a sin nature.

Now it would have been a great descent from heaven's throne just to come and live as a human. But that was not the extent of His descent. Notice what else Paul says about Jesus in v.8. He not only emptied Himself of the privileges of deity, but:

B. He Also Humbled Himself – He could have entered this world through the home of a rich king. Instead, His life was characterized by lowliness and humility. Think with me how Jesus humbled Himself. So poor was He that He was constantly borrowing things. They borrowed a place for his birth, and what a lowly place it was! A feeding trough was His first bed. He borrowed a house to sleep in, a boat to preach from, an animal to ride on, a room in which to institute the Lord's Supper, and finally a tomb to be buried in. He was willing to grow to manhood in an obscure, despised village like Nazareth. He was willing to be a common, working man. The Creator of all things worked as a carpenter, making furniture, ox yokes, and other wooden objects. He, the Object of most solemn adoration, voluntarily descended to the realm where He was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). There was hardly a man alive in the day of Christ that was more despised and ridiculed than He.

Paul mentions in our text two specific ways that Jesus humbled Himself. In v.7 Paul says:

1. He took "the form of a bondservant." As you read the four Gospels you see that it is Jesus who serves others, and not so much others serving Jesus. He served others as a carpenter. I can imagine that if someone needed something repaired, Jesus was right there to help. Throughout His ministry He served others. He said in Mt. 20:28, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." He even washed the feet of the disciples as a slave would (John 13).

Not only was Christ willing to become a servant, but:

2. He Even Accepted the Shame of a Cross – Paul says in v.8 that Christ "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." What do you think about when you think about a cross? Do you think about a beautiful cross like we have behind me, above the

baptistry? Though the cross is precious to us, it was abhorrent to people in the first century. It was a means of execution reserved for slaves and foreigners. That's because it was such a painful death. When they nailed His hands and feet, and when He hung on the cross, pain with shoes of fire ran up and down the nervous system of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in this context, Paul mainly had in mind that it was a shameful death. To be nailed to a cross was the utter act of humiliation and shame. People were crucified along busy roads so the victims and the charge against them would be seen by many. As they walked by they made fun of Him and they wagged their heads at Him and spit upon Him. This was the greatest act of humility for Jesus. Imagine the Creator allowing His creatures to mock Him!

What would cause Jesus to endure such pain and shame? The answer is love. First, He did it because He loved His Father. Love and obedience go hand in hand. His obedience knew no bounds. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." Jesus carried out the Father's will for the salvation of the world. The Lord Jesus was born to die. He came to this earth to die. He didn't have to die, but He "became obedient unto death" and gave Himself up willingly. Furthermore, Jesus accepted the pain and shame of the cross because He loves us. He knew that the only way He could save us from our sins was by dying for us. He knew that He was dying on that cross for your sins and for my sins.

Our sins created a big debt in our account toward God, a big minus. But since Christ lived a sinless life, His death on the cross created a big plus to our account. Our debt has been paid, praise the Lord. We can be forgiven! Oh, what humility! Oh, what a sacrifice! Oh, what love!

The underlying thought of vv.5-8 is this: Surely, if Christ Jesus humbled Himself so very deeply, then you and I should be willing to humble ourselves. After Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in the upper room, He told His disciples, "If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). That is Paul's point in this whole Scripture passage. We ought to be willing to serve the needs of one another, no matter how lowly the job may be.

Are you like Jesus? Are you willing to humble yourself for the sake of others? Instead of waiting to be served, are you willing to serve others? Will you serve in the nursery? Will you serve on our Building and Grounds Committee? Will you serve on the Social Committee, and help clean dishes? Will you visit the lonely? Or do you consider yourself too good, too important to take on humble duties to serve others? What about at work? Do you refuse to take on a menial job, even when necessity dictates the need?

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help them. Asked why by the rider, he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." With that George Washington got back on horse and rode off. [Illus.#C-1652].

III. JESUS' REWARD FOR SUCH AN ATTITUDE

Because Jesus was willing to sacrifice His position and glory in heaven, and because He was willing to humble Himself and make so many sacrifices on earth, God rewarded Him greatly. He was highly exalted. In v.9 Paul says, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him..." Paul coins an emphatic word (*huperupsoo*) which doubly expresses elevation, literally, He was hyper-

exalted, or super-exalted. His exaltation is a historical fact, taking place when He ascended into heaven in the Shechinah glory cloud of God, and exalted to the right hand of God. He did not exalt Himself; God the Father exalted Him.

In addition to that profound statement, Paul explains some specific ways Jesus was exalted:

A. He Was Given the Highest Name – Paul says in v.9 that God has “given Him the name which is above every name...” In biblical usage the name is intimately associated with the person who bears it. It expresses the person’s character, reputation, dignity, work. Hence, often the name keeps pace with the person. Abram becomes Abraham. Jacob changes to Israel. Simon is called Peter, who indeed became a rock for the Church. Men gave Jesus names of ridicule and slander, but the Father gave Him a glorious name! The name “Jesus” means, “The Lord saves.” Matt. 1:21 says, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for He shall save his people from their sins” (KJV). Paul rarely uses the name “Jesus” alone in reference to His Lord. But here he isolates that great name. Actually, it was a common name among Jews at the time of Jesus. But now that Jesus has fulfilled the true meaning of that name, and hundreds of millions call Him Savior. That name is honored by millions who render to it trust, obedience, and loyalty. It’s growing power, and the warmth of personal love which it evokes, through many centuries and in far away lands, is a unique thing in the world’s history.

So the next time you are tempted to take the name of Jesus in vain, think of vv.9-10! God intends to exalt that name that people use as a curse word and drag in the mud!

B. To Him Every Knee Shall Bow – Paul says in v.10, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.” He sets that name forth as the ground and object of worship. By virtue of the power and majesty of Jesus Christ and the recognition of Him as Lord every knee will bend and every tongue will proclaim Him Lord. Here he quotes from Isaiah 45:23. Bowing the knee can refer to prayer, but here it probably refers to worship and an acknowledgement of His Lordship. In Paul’s day most nations had kings, and it was common to bow to them to signify respect, and a pledge of obedience.

And notice that He will be universally honored. “Of those in heaven” refers to the angels and the heavenly saints of God. “Of those on earth” refers to humans who will be alive on earth when Jesus comes again. The day is going to come when every dictator and every godless ruler on this earth is going to be shouting, “Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord.” “Of those under the earth” points to the concept of Hades. It includes all the damned in hell, both human beings and the fallen angels, who will be forced to bow to Jesus, whom they rejected from ruling over them. All who have died shall rise some day, and bow at the name of Jesus.

C. He Is and Will Be Acknowledged as Lord – Paul says in v.11, “and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”³ Angels and redeemed human beings will do this joyfully; the damned will do it remorsefully, but not penitently (Rev. 6:12-17). But so great will be His glory that all will feel impelled to render homage to him. It is not enough to recognize Jesus as a man. He is the Christ. He is Lord! Jesus said before His ascension, “All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). God has made him

³ When the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified also. Though Jesus was thinking of you and me when He went to the cross, He was also thinking of His heavenly Father. He knew that by being obedient unto death, He would bring great glory to God, and that is His highest reward.

both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36). Rev. 19:16 says of Jesus, that He is KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

Do you remember the old commercial on television about the mechanic with the oil filter? He would say, “Pay me now or pay me later.” Even so, bow to Jesus now, confess Him as Lord now, or you will bow to Him and confess Him as Lord later. Now you can confess Jesus as Lord unto salvation, but if you wait too long, you will confess Jesus as Lord unwillingly unto damnation.

Have you come to the place in your life where you have confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you bowed the knee to Him? Are you living in obedience to Him? Don’t wait until it is too late to confess Jesus as Lord. Do it now and be saved. I think Christmas is a great time to give your heart to Jesus. Rom. 10:9 says “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” But just *saying* that Jesus is Lord will not save you. You must *know* Him as Savior, and then you can truly call Him Lord. And can you say He is your Lord, if you do not obey Him?

Since it is the purpose of God the Father to exalt Jesus Christ, I believe that is the will of God for every one of us. We are to exalt Jesus Christ, wherever we are and in whatever we do.

Conclusion: So let us set our minds on Christ and follow His example. By humbling ourselves and serving others, we will be on the road that leads to the true glory by which God Himself is glorified. There is a principle in scripture that is invariable. When you humble yourself you will be exalted. In fact, twice Jesus Himself said, “He who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11; 18:14). The apostle Peter wrote, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will lift you up in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6). Joseph suffered and served for 13 years; but then God exalted him and made him the second ruler of Egypt. David humbly served Saul, and waited for God to exalt him as King. From what happened to Jesus we see that God will reward those who humbly serve others, and put others first. Be inspired by the example of Jesus, and by the potential for great reward if you humble yourself, and put other first by serving to meet their needs.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 14 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 7/17/05); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, Philippians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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