

He Humbled Himself

In terms of human accomplishments, this man's resume is hard to beat. He was an army general in two international wars where he lost more individual battles than he won. He has a bridge named after him which you have to pay to go across and a towering monument named after him which you can visit for free. He has a state named after him. He founded his country's navy. His birthday is a national holiday. He was the first to sign his nation's Constitution. His country's capital city is named after him and his face is on the American 1 dollar bill.

Of course you have figured it out by now that this man is George Washington. Washington was a man's man. He was fearless and brave, yet he was graceful and charitable. He knew farming, business, and the ways of war. He believed in the principles of this great republic even if he was not one to write volumes on its freedom principles.

Without a doubt, his most significant contribution to this world, was him voluntarily giving up the executive power to the United States of America. He did not just believe in the ideas of this country but he lived those ideas out in a course altering way. "We the people in order to form a more perfect Union and secure the blessings of liberty and posterity." Those were not words to recite, but an idea worth following. This one move changed the course of our nation and the world. George Washington is the first major military leader in the history of the world to win a major war and then voluntarily step aside instead of seizing control and consolidating power.

It was a move of such unfathomable humility that the man who was defeated by Washington's army, King George III, was stunned. The king asked his American painter, Benjamin West, what Washington would do after winning independence. West replied, "They say he will return to his farm."

"If he does that," the incredulous monarch said, "he will be the greatest man in the world."

King George's words are certainly in the ballpark of being true. But there was another person who made an even more notable and significant act of humility. The Godson, Jesus Christ, humbled himself and came in the form of man to earth. This is a move that no one can ignore. "The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding" Martin Luther

It is a move we should all carefully consider. Today we will spend some time doing just that and we will still fall far short of the depth and meaning of God coming to earth in the form of man. We will look at this under the headings of Jesus is God, God came to us, He lived like us.

Jesus is God

V6 – Jesus is in the form of God. The way this is written in the Greek is very rich and it gives great insight for us. Some translations use "being in the form of God." The two Greek words here for 'being' and "form" are huparchein and morphe. Huparchein is used to describe a man at his very essence, the substance of which cannot be changed under any circumstances. Morphe describes the true and full underlying form of someone. What Paul is saying here is that God has a certain authentic form and Jesus Christ exists in that same exact form.

John describes Jesus this way at the start of his gospel, before the name Jesus was assigned to him, he was known as The Word. He was from the beginning. He was always with God and he was God Himself.

The Word, Jesus, made all things, there was nothing that was made that did not have Jesus involvement. In him is the essence of life which serves as the source for all humans to exist.

Do not be confused my friends, as Mark reminded us last week, Jesus did not begin in the womb of Mary or the trough at an inn in Bethlehem. As God, he has always existed. He didn't have a start and will not have an end. He created the stars in the universe and established the boundaries of the ocean waters crashing into shore. He stretched the neck of the giraffe, arranged the beautiful colors on butterfly wings, and designed the various flower petals with their sweet fragrances. He the designer of the human eye. The magnificence of it; receiving light signals and converting it to electrical signals that the brain then converts to images. And it is by the continual attention of Jesus that all these things are sustained, day by day.

Further, Jesus as God continually receives worship from created heavenly creatures. As Jonathan McClure reminded us about 2 months ago, The Cherubim creatures surrounding his throne cannot look at him or stand near him because of his holiness. Their wings must cover their eyes and feet because of his majesty. The train of Jesus, signifying his great renown, fills up the entire temple so that there is no room for anything else to stand if they could stand. And there are others around the throne who constantly call back to each other without ever taking a break saying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty. Who was and who is and who is to come. Christ also receives constant worship from other created beings who bow before him continually saying, "worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power."

When the few biblical authors were allowed to catch a glimpse of the greatness of his Power and Reign, they all immediately acknowledged the short comings of their own words to be able to describe this reality to us. Understand clearly, Jesus is God. He always has been and always will be, His essence cannot be diminished. And yet....

Jesus Came to Us

Being perfect in every way and being ascribed relentless worship, Christ did not count that as a treasure to be clung too. (v6). He didn't say "I'll be good right here, like this for the rest of time." He wanted to be with us and in order for that to happen, he had to come to us.

Even before Christ's arrival, God made occasional appearances. God has already demonstrated that being with us was important to Him. He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, he speaks to Moses in the burning bush, He appeared to Abraham at the tree of Mamre, and we see him leading the Israelites in a pillar of clouds and fire. *playing with action figures story*. The part that is hard to comprehend is that the one who moves the chess pieces around has become the central chess piece.

With the arrival of Christ as man, Paul describes it as he emptied himself or greatly lowered his reputation to come to us. (v7). This term empty is the Greek word kenosis. There are volumes of books from a variety of angles written on what exactly this "emptying" means. Here is what I believe to be the best understanding. It does not mean that he emptied himself from his godly attributes, such as being all knowing, all powerful, present everywhere. He did not become less God in any way by coming here as a man. You could say that he limited his divine qualities somehow while here on earth so that the limitations of his human nature could rise, but he did not give them up. Instead of subtracting deity from his essence he added humanity to his nature. Somehow in the incarnation, God who is unchanging becomes flesh and dwells among us.

He came in the form or essence of a servant and the likeness of a human. Christ came to us as a human servant. Christ is human because he was born naturally from a woman. He is fully God because his conception came from the Holy Spirit and not a human father. The virgin conception and birth was the way for God to clearly unite humanity and deity in one person. If he had showed up as a human adult, it would have been difficult to believe that he was fully human. We could say this is instead some divine being merely temporarily taking the likeness of a human. The humanity of such a demonstration may feel artificial. If he had two human parents, then we would have had a hard time believing that he was fully God. He would have been just like every other person born.

Further, Jesus coming in the way he did, also allows for him to be fully human without inheriting sin. He did not descend from Adam in the exact same way that all other humans have since God is his Father. Yes Christ was born under the law meaning he was susceptible to following the same commandments as you and me. But the sinful nature of fallen humanity was not residing in him at his birth. So his learned obedience was Jesus continually making decisions that pleased His Father.

It really is amazing and the greatest mystery in human history how God became man. That's why John says it like this in his letter. "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life". But Christ did not only come to us, he lived like us!

He Lived Like Us

It wasn't just in human form that he came to us, but also in experience. He came as a servant. Not as some lofty elite that lived according to different rules than you and me. Instead, he came to serve and not be served. The One who angels bow to, the noblest lay their crown jewels before and constantly ascribe the highest form of praise came here to wash the nasty bare feet of the man who would betray him to authorities who would then murder him.

The contrast of Christ's majesty in heaven with his humble arrival to earth could not be more distinct. (v8) He humbled himself through obedient learning. He was born in meager surroundings to very little fanfare. He was sent to a common, even poor family as an infant. And as an infant, he had to grow and develop as normal humans do. He learned to eat, crawl, and walk. He developed other behaviors as he aged such as reading, writing, work that makes you sweat, just like you and I do. He even learned the trade of his father.

He experienced the emotions of life, genuine joys and immense sadness. He got tired and hungry like we do. Christ was tempted with the same enticements that regularly trip you and me up, yet he overcame them and never gave in to them. Christ's learned obedience qualified him to be our representative substitute in his sacrificial death. He lived life in perfect relationship to the Father, how God intended us to live with him, before the fall.

But his lived out obedience to the point of death was publicly acted out in the most despised way possible; a condemned criminal on a cursed cross. (vs 8) God doesn't stand distant and detached from evil. Christ absorbed the shame, hate, and rebellion by suffering through real shed blood on our behalf. Christ really was acquainted with our grief and really was a man full of sorrow, emotions you and I experience as well. He was swallowed up by sin and death on the cross that day, but that wasn't the end. For it was by enduring the greatest evil, unjustly, that he conquered evil completely for our good.

The incarnation shows us that God is not ashamed of lowliness because he came near to all of the lowliness. He loves the lost, the neglected, the outcast, the weak and the broken because it became personal with him. Christ assumed those identities for us. God became lowly and made something splendid with it. If you find yourself in that lowly spot now then I am here to announce that God has been there too. Never lower than hanging on the cross. He took that lowliness and made it into a marvelous salvation for whosoever believes. He is meeting you in your lowliness and ready to make something marvelous in your life too.

Christ, the true form of God, humbled himself to come down from heaven to us in the form of man to live like us so that we may live with Him.

Immanuel, God with us, may it forever be dazzling in our sight!