

Christ's Condescension

Part 2

Philippians 2:5-11

Christians are never more like Christ than when we sacrifice what is truly ours in the service of others.

LTS: John 17:1-19

This morning we once again turn in our Bibles to Philippians chapter two. We are intentionally moving more slowly and deliberately through this passage because we don't want to miss any of the glory and wonder of this revelation of Jesus Christ.

We said last week that this text can be neatly broken down into two parts; namely.

I. The Humiliation of Christ (6-8)

II. The Exaltation of Christ (9-11).

This is the second week in a two-week study of the condescension and humiliation of Christ. Next week it is my hope to come back to this text once again to meditate on the exaltation of Christ. Whether we will do that in one message or two remains to be seen.

For our purposes this morning, however, we will focus once again on the Humiliation of Christ. To do that I want to offer a five-point outline upon which to hang our thoughts. And I want you to view them as descending steps in the humiliation of Christ.

- I. God Eternal
- II. Emptied by Adding
- III. Descended to Serving
- IV. Humbled through Dying
- V. Disgraced by Shaming

Some of this will be review from last week, and that is by design. But let's begin, as always, by standing together and reading this great "Hymn of Christ."

Read Phil. 2:5-11

In the larger picture what I want you to see this morning is Paul's description of Christ's systematic descent from divine royalty on the sovereign throne of heaven to the lowest possible status a human being could ever experience in this world.

To begin with, then, the first thing Paul tells us in that Jesus Christ is...

I. God Eternal

1. Verse 6 declares that he was "in the form of God." We learned last week that the phrase "in the form of God" doesn't mean that he merely appeared to be God, but that to the extent that he could be seen or perceived in heaven before his incarnation, it was ONLY in the form of God.

2. Before the coming into our world; before the Word became flesh, he always existed as eternal God. Jesus Himself affirms this when arguing with the Pharisees by saying, "Before Abraham was, I Am."

- We see this also in the O.T. book of Exodus where Moses encounters God before a burning bush that is not consumed. Moses was actually speaking to the Pre-incarnate Christ.
- We see it again in Isa. 6 where the prophet steps into the temple and finds himself face-to-face with the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. John tells us in chapter 12 of his Gospel that the One Isaiah stood before that day was actually Jesus.

3. You see, in the beginning, the Second Person of the Trinity, to the extent that he could be seen or perceived was seen and perceived only as God. He existed "in the form of God."

4. But then, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son... That is, God the Father sent the Son into the world to redeem a people from their sin forever. This required NO small sacrifice on the part of Jesus. First he is presented as God eternal. Now we behold him...

II. Emptied by Adding:

1. In the next important phrase Jesus begins his descent. Paul writes (6-7) that He "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

2. In these verses we are presented with the greatest mystery in the Bible, that eternal God could become man; that he could be conceived of the H.S. in the womb of a teenage girl and born into the world just as every human baby is born into the world.

3. Paul describes this as Jesus “emptying himself.” And as we said last week, the great debate on this passage throughout the ages is, “What does it mean that eternal God “emptied himself.” We are tempted to ask the question, “What did He empty himself of? And as soon as we answer that question we begin crossing the line into heresy. We get into real trouble when we think that somehow Jesus jettisoned some of the divine attributes in the process of becoming a man. But this cannot be.

A. If God were to cut off from himself ANY of his eternal perfections He would cease to be God. But God cannot cease to be God. Rather, as Roger Ellsworth explains, “He laid aside the glories and riches of heaven and added our humanity to his deity so he was at one and the same time fully God and fully man.”¹

B. It’s easy to get confused here because the word “emptied” strikes us as meaning that He emptied himself in the sense of losing something of himself. But that is not what the text says. It says, “he emptied himself by taking.”

C. Paul is teaching us something about Jesus by the use of a strange kind of math that supposes a subtraction by addition. What is being subtracted? Clearly not anything essential to His deity. As God, he never ceased to be omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. Rather, it was the obvious, visible, or perceivable glory and majesty that distinguished him as a member of the Trinity before being born into the world.

D. In that sense, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to cling to, defend, or demand. Rather, he willingly chose to veil his glory in human flesh to such an extent that anyone who looked at Him would perceive him only as a man.

E. Sometimes theologians summarize it all by saying: “Remaining what He was, He became what He was not.” In other words, while Jesus continued “remaining” what he was (fully divine) he also became what he had previously not been (fully human).²

4. This seems like a good place to remind ourselves of Paul’s purpose for revealing these things about Jesus. He is talking about the unfathomable condescension of Christ to inspire us to relate to one another with similar humility.

¹ Ellsworth, R. (2004). [*Opening up Philipians*](#) (p. 37). Leominster: Day One Publications.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000), 562

- A. In verse 3-5 Paul commands,
Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...
- B. So, in our relationships with one another God calls us NOT to humble ourselves in the same WAY as Christ, but with the same MIND as Christ. That is, we must stop thinking first about our own rights, our own dignity, our own interests, and make the concerns, needs, and interests of others more important than our own.
- C. This is how Christians proclaim the excellencies of Christ. This is how we show the world what Christ and his gospel are like. This is how the church makes the gospel visible.
- D. Paul is revealing the condescension of Christ in order to motivate humility in us. And we exercise humility when we rank ourselves under others in order to serve and build them up.
5. This is why Paul is walking us through the descending steps of the condescension of Christ. Jesus is God Eternal, who Emptied by Adding, and then

III. Descended to Serving:

1. He who eternally existed in the form of God (7) took to himself “the form of a servant.” This statement further qualifies what it meant for him to become a man. It would certainly have been possible for Jesus to come into the world as a human king. He could have at least been born in Jerusalem to the wife of the high priest in the shadow of the Temple. But he wasn’t.
2. Rather, He was born to a homeless, Jewish peasant girl in a place where the only suitable sleeping accommodations for the infant was a cattle trough – a manger. His life was characterized NOT by leading and ruling, but by helping and serving.
 - No doubt he helped his father in his humble carpenter shop.
 - As a young man he lived in obedience to his parents.
 - When he began his ministry he served food to the hungry, and wine at the wedding.
 - He healed the sick, the blind, the demon-possessed.
 - He took time to bless and associate with children

- He counseled the outcasts and touched the unclean.
- He wept with those who grieved.
- Though the whole world approached him only to take, and take, and take, he willingly served, and served, and served.
- He who for all eternity sat (as it were) upon the glorious throne of heaven, with flaming seraphim at his beck and call; who was known as the Captain of an army of angels, was now seen by men as a man NOT unlike every other man.
- He never became the governor of Jerusalem.
- He never led a band of soldiers.
- He never wrote a book.
- He wasn't even made the leader of a synagogue.
- And do you remember what he said to His disciples when they asked for the highest places of honor in his kingdom? He said, (Mark 10:42-45)

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (cf. Dan. 7:13-14)

3. To say that he descended from the glories of heaven to become a man is to say that he, for all intents and purposes, laid aside his crown, turned off his visible glory and awesome majesty, and slipped on the apron of a humble, human servant.

4. Perhaps the most explicit illustration of this is found in John 13:1-5 (Read).

A. The washing of feet before a banquet was a duty entrusted to the lowest of slaves. To be a servant who waits on tables and serve the food is one thing. But to hold the status of a nameless foot-washer was quite another. And to this position of ignominy, Jesus willingly stepped for the benefit of others.

B. We already know that Paul said, “Have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. But listen to how Jesus says it.

(Read Jn. 13:12-17)

5. What have we seen so far? Eternal God, Emptied by Adding, Descended to serving, and fourth,

IV. Humbled Through Dying

1. Back to Philippians 2 again, we read (8) “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.”

2. It is stunning to think that the creator of all that exists, the very source of life by which all living things live, could actually die. We should not be able to read these words without a sense of awe and wonder stealing over our hearts.³ To be God means NOT only to have eternal life but to BE eternal life; that is, life that can never die. And yet, the very Son of God experienced what the other Person’s of the Trinity never did or ever will experience. He died.

3. Once again Ellsworth writes, It would have been an act of stupendous humility if the Lord Jesus had done nothing more than take to himself our humanity. But he did much, much more. In that humanity, he died.

4. John 1:4 says, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Jesus is the giver of life. He proved that again and again by raising people from the dead. How could he do that? Answer: Jesus is life.

5. And yet, in order to accomplish the Father’s will, to rescue a multitude of sinners so vast they cannot be numbered, the one who is the very source and sustainer of life in this world, willingly gave himself over to death on their behalf.

A. Hebrews 2:14 “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

B. 1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh.”

6. Talk about condescension! Eternal Deity, Emptied by Adding, Descended to serving, was Humbled by Dying. But the death He died was no ordinary death. By this particular kind of death he was

V. Disgraced by Shaming:

³ Ellsworth, R. (2004). *Opening up Philippians* (p. 37). Leominster: Day One Publications.

1. Paul could have finished his admonition toward humility by declaring that Jesus “became obedient unto death.” That alone would have been shocking; that the prince of life humbled Himself for our sakes by experiencing death? That’s shocking! But at least we might assume that his death had occurred by natural causes. He could have died in bed surrounded by all His friend and the people He had brought into reconciliation with God. But NO. Paul wants us to understand that Jesus’ Condescension plunged Him even to the depths of ultimate humiliation.

2. So Paul says (8), “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

3. The sentence of crucifixion inflicted upon a condemned man offered not only the most intense pain imaginable, but also the most intense shame possible. Long before the arrival of Jesus on the stage of history, Crucifixion was already considered the most horrible means of death.

- A. The one being crucified was stripped naked of all his clothes before the gathered onlookers and mockers. He was laid down upon the implement of torture where His arms and legs were stretched along the cross-beams, and at the center of the open palms (or writes) the point of a huge iron nail was placed, which by the blow of a mallet, was driven home into the wood.
- B. Then, through either foot separately, or possibly through both together, as they were placed one over the other, another huge nail tore its way through the quivering flesh. To prevent the hands and feet from being torn away by the weight of the body, which could rest upon nothing but its four great wounds, there was, at about the center of the cross, a wooden projection strong enough to support a human body, which soon became a weight of agony.
- C. Then the “accursed tree” with its living human burden, was slowly heaved up and the end fixed firmly in a hole in the ground.
- D. Crucifixion was usually done in a very public place.⁴ In the case of Jesus it was on a hill called “the place of the skull” (Matt. 27:33). The primary charge against the accused was usually written on a tablet (titulus) which preceded him on the road to crucifixion and finally fixed upon the cross for all to see.
- E. The feet of the condemned were but a little raised above the earth. Because of this the victim was in full reach of every hand or stick

⁴ Ibid.

that might choose to strike. A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and and shame that death can possibly inflict upon a man.

4. A key term in Paul's words is "obedient." Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

5. This is important because Jesus death was not the natural consequence for life he lived. Rather, it was an act of obedience to the Father who had sent him into the world to make atonement for sinners.

6. The point is that the humility which Jesus exercised was not the kind of humility we might see as an endearing personality trait. Rather, it was grounded in a determined resolve to be obedient to God regardless of what it might cost him personally.

7. That puts the call to humility in a whole new light, doesn't it? Paul is talking about more than merely being civil, courteous, and kind to others. He is calling us to sacrifice what we believe is rightfully ours for the sake of others – even people who we are convinced don't deserve it.

A. Husbands should be reminded that they are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

B. Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, just as the Lord submitted to His Father in all things.

C. We should give of our money NOT only to the Lord, but to the poor.

D. We should give of our time to anyone who has need, and teach our children to do the same.

E. We should stop thinking of ourselves as "somebodies" who are worthy of respect and begin thinking of our selves as nobodies who should feel at home performing the most menial labor for others in the body of Christ.

F. This is what Jesus did. He was a "somebody" who made himself a nobody so that he could make other people sombodies in God's wight.

Here's how Paul said it,

2 Corinthians 8:9

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

8. And if you are here this morning and don't have a resonal, vital relationship with Jesus Christ, I want to exhort you to consider how far Jesus descended to save you from yourself and the penalty of your sin. You see, the only reason Jesus died was so that you may be saved. Never in your life have you experienced this kind of love.

Never in your life WILL you EVER experience this kind of love BUT through Jesus Christ.

9. Stop waiting! Cry out to him today and say, O God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I know I don't deserve your forgiveness. I know I have earned your condemnation. But if this book is true, then you sent Jesus to pay my penalty on that cross. O Lord, I believe it! So take me. Change me. Forgive me and use me however you will. I surrender. I repent. You are Lord. Save me now.

- A. God eternal
- B. Emptied by Adding
- C. Descended to serving
- D. Humbled by dying
- E. Disgraced by shaming

8. This is the condescending humility of Jesus Christ. And Paul is saying, "Have this attitude (mind) in yourselves..."