

Christ-Centered Humility

By Don Green

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The GraceLife Pulpit
28001 Harrison Parkway
Valencia, CA 91355-4190

Website: www.thegracelifepulpit.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gracelifepulpit

Of course, we just celebrated Christmas and before we leave Christmas and the Incarnation in the rearview mirror and accelerate into the new year, I wanted to go back to the theme of the Incarnation this morning just for one final time and then in the weeks to come here in Grace Life, I intend to return to my study and exposition of 1 John. Look, we could never talk about the Incarnation of Christ enough and so I don't feel constrained by the fact that December 25 was a few days ago to constrain not to speak about the Incarnation today again as we've talked about it in the past. That time when God became a man, when Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, and the richness of that is just inexhaustible and incomprehensible and so expansive that you could never exhaust all that Scripture says or all that it means for our lives, and I want to draw a particular thing out today for you.

Of course, we know the historical facts of Jesus' birth, found primarily in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, those same passages explaining the reason that Christ was born. The angel told Joseph, "You shall call his name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins," Matthew 1:21. In Luke 2:11 it says, "today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." I don't know about you, but I never get tired of hearing about that or thinking about that. That's not a Christmas limited theme. Jesus Christ came to save sinners from the wrath of God and if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been rescued from the wrath of God because Christ offered his life as a substitutionary sacrifice on the cross to bear the penalty that your sin and mine deserved against sin, and now his death and resurrection rescues sinners who believe in him because he accepted God's punishment for sin on their behalf when he died on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He bore our sins in His body on the cross."

If you're a Christian today, you start the year with sins forgiven, with righteousness imputed to your account with the glory of a fully reconciled relationship to the living God, a true and righteous and living possession in your life. That's marvelous. How could we get tired of talking about that? I don't think that we really do but today at the start of this new year, if you have never turned from sin and received Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, I invite you to do so today. What a great start to the new year that would be for you. But for the rest of us, for those of us that know Christ, I want to take this final look at the Incarnation before we move on into other things, before we leave Christmas too far in the rearview mirror, because this is so fundamental it will influence the way

that you approach the new year. The way the Bible talks about the Incarnation of Christ and its implications for the life of believers frames the entire way that you approach life. The more and more that I read and study Scripture, the more I am just impressed upon how the fundamental principles that shape our character are things that we can never discuss enough and the Bible talks about the Incarnation of Christ, the life of Christ, in such a way in interaction with the life of believers that it is never discussed as an abstract historical fact that's just out there and something that we contemplate as something entirely outside of ourselves and with no implications for our lives. The Bible repeatedly points to the life of Christ as a living model that we are to bring home to our own life and implement and appropriate and then live out. That's what it means to be Christ-like in our character, is that we understand and recognize the way that Christ lived and that it would become part of the way that we live, and that we would aspire after that to mimic and to imitate him.

So for example in John 13:12-15 after Jesus washed the disciples' feet, the Bible says, "when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.'" The point being that the humble service that Christ rendered to the disciples would be a model for which all disciples would follow in their attitude toward serving one another.

In John 15:20, for example, further on, Jesus said, "A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." Persecution in the human life of Christ becomes a matter of something that we can expect to emulate and to follow in his steps in our own lives here on earth.

Humble service in persecution, in the institution of marriage, for example. I'm just giving you examples to make the point that the earthly life of Christ is repeatedly set forth as a model for us in Scripture. Ephesians 5, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." He says as Paul is addressing husbands in this letter, he says, " You love your wives and draw as your pattern, as your example for how you are to love your wife," and he says, "love your wife and as you do that, look to the life of Christ, look at the way he sacrificed for the church and appropriate that example and live it out in your marriage, in the context of your marriage."

In 1 Peter 1, Peter writes, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like," again drawing that analogy, "the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" The whole concept of holiness is built on the character of God as lived out in the life of Christ.

Peter goes on and gives us an example and points to the example of Christ in refusing to be one who retaliates against wrongs that are done against us. 1 Peter 2:21, "For you have

been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

So in matters of humble service to one another, in responding to persecution, in the institution of marriage, in personal holiness, in a spirit that refuses to retaliate when wrong is done to us, over and over again we see the life of Christ held up as a model for us to follow. Now, it's not that we follow that model in order to gain salvation. That's not the point. You cannot emulate Christ so perfectly that you could obtain and earn salvation on your own. That's not what we're talking about at all. What we are talking about is that someone who has committed their life to Christ, whom God has regenerated and given new life, that new life is to be exercised in emulating the example of Christ on this earth until we get to glory. We trust Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we realize that we cannot save ourselves, and when he saves us and when we commit our life to him as our Lord and as our Savior, we have committed ourselves to emulating the example of Christ to the best of our ability in this life. The way Christ lived has immense implications for the way that you are to live. That's my simple but important point.

Now, what we're going to look at today is a passage that takes that and applies that same principle to us in a different realm in the whole mindset of living the Christian life. That's what we're doing here and so I invite you to turn to our text for today which is Philippians 2 after all of that introduction. In some ways it seems like you wouldn't even have to make the point that Christ is the example for Christians to follow in their lives but over and over again we see that emphasis in Scripture so I wanted to emphasize it here. This is a great great passage that our own pastor preached on just a couple of weeks ago. It's a little interesting for me to preach on it in his wake but that's what I'm going to do. Philippians 2, beginning in verse 5, and we'll set it in its broader context in just a moment. Notice again in verse 5 how the example of Christ is set forth as the example for believers to follow. Verse 5,

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What we have in this passage, whereas in the other passages that I quoted maybe there is a bit of an external dimension to the example that we are called to follow in expecting persecution and rendering service to others and all of this, what this passage is doing is framing for you the fundamental rails upon which the train of your mind should run, the

fundamental way that you should think about yourself in relationship to God and others. This is absolutely fundamental what Paul is laying forth here.

What he's doing here, what he is saying is that – this is just in summary form and then we'll unpack it in the rest of our time together – that when Jesus Christ came to earth in order to procure the salvation of everyone who would ever believe in him, he manifested a supreme example of humility. This was absolutely a step of great humility for Christ to step down into earth and humility is that spiritual virtue in which you lower your estimation of yourself for the sake of obedience to God in service to men. Pride cannot live under the shadow of the cross, as Charles Spurgeon once said. To become a Christian is to humble yourself before God, before Christ and also not just in that initial moment of trust in Christ for salvation, but as an entire life pattern, an entire lifestyle by which you are to live out daily life. This is immensely practical and immensely important. The Apostle Paul in this passage in Philippians takes the willingness of Christ to step down out of the glories of heaven down to earth in order to be the sacrifice for sin; he takes that voluntary humiliation of Christ and holds it forth as the example by which you are to frame your entire attitude toward life. That's what's going on in this passage.

What does humility look like? Well, we look to Christ and find the supreme example of humility. If you have ever driven past the 170 and you see on the left side Polytechnic High Schools, they have all of these different human examples of different virtues: Mother Teresa for compassion, and other guys for leadership and all of that, and they have one person for each virtue. Every time I drive past that, I think that's such a waste of time. In Christ we have the perfect representative of every perfect virtue of all of humanity. I don't need a human example, a flawed human example to show me what compassion looks like. Christ is the example of leadership and compassion and all of that. Today what we're seeing is that Christ is the supreme example of humility as well in profound ways.

Now to this passage, we're going to look at three lessons from the Incarnation of Christ so that you might develop that same humble mindset that would further your Christian growth and your usefulness in the service of God. This is designed to change the way that you think and the way that you think about yourself, when that is changed, it will change your life as well. There is no question about that.

Well, we have to look at this passage in context, in its context to see exactly what Paul is getting at here. Paul is using this passage as an illustration for what he wants from the Philippian church. Now, when he wrote to the church at Philippi, he was writing to a church that had long supported his ministry and that he had a warm relationship with. Philippians is often called the epistle of joy because the theme of joy and his affirmation and his personal warmth toward his readers just bleeds through every chapter on the page. So the Philippian church had supported Paul's ministry. They were personally concerned for him and he writes a very warm letter to them that is filled with joy and gratitude. But at the same time, at the same time, Paul writes to them and exhorts them to greater Christ-likeness in their personal lives and in the fellowship, and apparently there was some internal division in the church that Paul needed to correct.

Now, first of all, look at Philippians 1:27. After Paul has reported on his personal circumstances and his personal aspirations to live is Christ and to die is gain, he turns and he pivots in chapter 1, verse 27, and starts to address his readers with this overarching statement about what he wants from them and what he is calling them to as he writes. This overarching statement, look at verse 27, he says, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." The overarching statement that he is making is, "I want you to live a life that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. I want you to live a life that is worthy of the great exalted Son of God who humbled himself to come to earth to sacrifice himself for your sins, and now having been dead and buried and resurrected, has ascended on high and is one day coming back, and who will one day so work by the power of his hand to conform and transform the body of your humble state into conformity with the body of his glory," verse 21. "In light of all of these lofty truths, I want your life to be worthy of that. I want you to aspire and to live a life that is worthy of the nobility of the great Christian Gospel." That's what he's writing and exhorting them to and that, beloved, is the purpose of this time together today, is to call you through the Scriptures to that same lofty aspiration that fundamentally says, "No matter what has been in my past, I will live henceforth a life starting today that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Because I see the value of Christ and I love him for saving me from my sin and I love the future hope that belongs to me, between this point and reaching glory, my life will be worthy of the Gospel of Christ." That's the point.

How could you have any other approach to life if you are a Christian? I mean, think about it. Are you going to consciously accept mediocrity? Are you going to consciously say, "I'm indifferent to whether my life is worthy of Christ or not"? That doesn't make any sense at all. That's a blasphemous travesty against the Gospel of Christ to have any other aspiration. You must live a life that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ and conduct yourself accordingly. You must. That is our privilege and responsibility as believers in Christ, is to live a life that is worthy of him.

Now, Paul as he wrote, he started with that general statement, "Conduct yourselves in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ." That's the general overarching statement. In the rest of the letter, he picks out a particular issue, a particular problem in the Philippian church, and applies it and zeros in and says, "This is one particular area where you need to do better." And what he zeros in on and what he uses the example of the humility of Christ to illustrate what needs to change, is that apparently there was some internal division in the church that Paul wanted to correct. There were spats and disputes that were going on. While generally this church loved and supported him, there were still fleshly divisions that were involved that he wanted to correct and so he calls them and he takes this example of Christ and applies it, but first I want you to see where we get that from.

Look, first of all, at chapter 2, verse 14, where having called them to one mind and one spirit, he comes back and he addresses it in a more negative way. He says, "Do all things

without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." Well, he wouldn't tell them not to grumble and complain if they weren't grumbling and complaining. So the grumbling and complaining that was under the surface of their love for Paul and their love for Christ, was one area in particular that they needed to live a life that was more worthy of the Gospel of Christ than they had beforehand.

In chapter 4, verse 2, he calls out two women by name and says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel." These ladies had some kind of dispute that was spreading and creating division and poisoning the atmosphere of the church and their grumbling and disputing with one another was spilling over and was undermining the testimony of the church. The church was not living as worthily of the Gospel of Christ as they could have because of this internal division and these disputes that were going on. So as Paul recognized the situation, he writes this letter to them and resolving those divisions and making them go away was one of the main goals of his letter as he wrote.

Now, transition here. We're going to bridge into the text that we're going to look at now, having set that overall context. Overall, live a life that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Specific application, do all things without grumbling or disputing. Now, what Paul says and the way that he goes and applies this to bring about change to them, he says that the cure for that grumbling, disputing, dissenting spirit among you is for you to develop greater humility in your individual lives.

Look at what he says in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4, which is the run-up to that great passage that I read earlier. In light of the disputes, understand these four verses, read these in light of what Paul had said about the problem of grumbling and disputing in the church. Now chapter 2, verse 1. He's lovingly pleading with these people, winning them over, wooing them, as it were, to hear what he has to say and to implement it in their lives. He says, chapter 2, verse 1, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." He's lovingly pleading with them to come together and be unified once more.

Verse 3, he says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind," there is that word "humility," "with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." And here's the genius of his argument as he appeals to these believers, and if you think about this just as a general matter of dispute resolution, if both sides to a dispute would humble themselves to this instruction and drop their pride and selfishness, no matter what the dispute is there is not going to be much left to fight over. If you're willing to sacrifice your rights, to lay yourself down, and the other person is willing to lay himself down, there is not going to be much left to fight over, and the

fight and disputes that we go through, you can look at it from that perspective and you see pride and selfishness in the midst of all of it. So if somehow we could deal a death blow to the dominant motivation of pride and selfishness in those times, then greater unity and harmony in the body is what's going to be the result. There is not going to be much left to fight over.

Now, with all of that background, watch what he does here. As great as this passage in Philippians 2 is, Philippians 2:5-11, he is using the earthly Incarnation of Christ as an illustration of this pastoral point that he is making. He is using a theological illustration for the pastoral exhortation that he is making to the congregation there and I love this and this is so instructive as a parent, in leadership and all of that, because Paul doesn't simply say, "Stop fighting." He doesn't simply say, "Look, you're fighting, I've been hearing about this and I just want you to cut it out. Now let's talk about something else." That negative exhortation is not enough to truly help and to bring change. It's not just that you cast aside the bad things that you're doing or the selfish motivations that are provoking the dispute, you need to cast those aside, yes, but Paul gives them a positive illustration of what will bring lasting change. It's the genius of the apostolic method. He doesn't simply say, "Stop fighting. I'm tired of hearing of these disputes." What he does is he calls their attention to Christ. Instead of them looking at each other and being at loggerheads, fighting each other on a horizontal basis, he says, "Stop for just a minute. Hold it. Let's both look up. Let's all look up to Christ." And Christ becomes the unifying force, Christ becomes the unifying example by which from this point of separation as we draw closer to Christ, there is going to be greater unity that comes as a result. It's brilliant. It's absolutely brilliant because underlying this theme is that if individual believers are thinking rightly about Christ and implementing that right thinking in their own lives, that right-thinking will overflow into their personal relationships as well.

Look at Philippians 2:5 now with all of that in mind. He says, "Having just said do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves," he says, "I want you to be humble of mind as you interact with one another." Verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Have this attitude. He's calling them to this attitude of humility and then he gives them an illustration that will carry power in their hearts to promote change. There is no power in the simple negative exhortation to stop doing something. There is no power to change in that but if you bring the earthly life of Christ to bear, if you bring the mind of Christ to bear on a situation, bring it to bear on a struggling believer, that is where the power of persuasion in the heart of a man resides in order to bring about true change. He says, "Have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus." In other words, what he's saying is, "What I'm calling you to, I want you to see that Jesus Christ himself, your Lord, your Savior, your Master, your King, he himself had this very attitude that I'm now calling you to adopt. And if Christ can be this way, if this can be the mind of Christ, then surely it can be your mind as well. Surely it must be your mind as well. If Christ is like this, as a believer this is what you must be like too." It's compelling. It's utterly compelling.

So these three principles that I want to bring out from this passage showing forth the mind of Christ on the one hand while simultaneously recognizing that Paul is holding this

up to be our mind as well, point 1: have an attitude of service. Have an attitude of service. Look at Philippians 2:6. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who," now he's going to describe, he's going to expound on the person of Christ here with that relative pronoun, "Have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus, who," now I'm going to open the doors to Christ for you," Paul says, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." He emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.

Now, in verse 6 here, he says he existed in the form of God. That word "form" is a word that indicates the essential nature of something. He's saying that Jesus Christ had the essential nature of God himself; the full essence of God, fully equal with God the Father, and he had that essence before he was even born in Bethlehem. He eternally existed as God. And from that position of full possession of deity in the glories of heaven in intimate face-to-face communion with God the Father, enjoying the glory of heaven and the unbroken worship of angels, it was from that exalted position that Christ stepped down to earth. It was from that exalted position that he entered into the world. Understand that with the full prerogatives and power and position of deity, Christ stepped into the world in a humble manger, born as a babe to a virgin in some forgotten village in Galilee. Before he was born in Bethlehem, he was in heaven with all the rights and prerogatives of deity at his disposal and what Paul is doing here as he unfolds this, he is giving us profound insight into the pre-Incarnate mind of Christ. This is unbelievably holy ground that we are walking on. This is an unthinkably great, noble and majestic realm of thought that we're entering into because Paul is telling us what the attitude of Christ was before he came to earth.

And what was that attitude, Paul? Well, let's state it in the form of a question. There is Christ in the full glory of heaven, by royal prerogative it belonged to him, by royal prerogative, by eternal nature, that heaven is his domain, it belongs to him, why not just stay there? It's a whole lot better in the throne room of heaven than it is on the dusty roads of Galilee. Why? Why would you leave that when you are God? Well, Paul sets it forth right here. Look at verse 6 again. He said, "although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard," he did not think, he did not consider, "equality with God a thing to be grasped."

What is he saying there? Let me state it in the form of a question. In that royal position of deity, the question is would he grasp that position, would he cling to that position, would he hold onto it and exploit that position to his advantage? Would he gather up all of those royal prerogatives and keep them all to himself while down below, as it were, sinful men were careening off into eternal destruction? Men who had rebelled against him, men who curse his name, men who break his law and violate it and flaunt it while they do so, would Christ stay in heaven and cling to all of the prerogatives of deity while men were dispersing themselves off into hell? From his position of unparalleled authority and unparalleled glory, would he keep it all to himself since no one could challenge him if he did? And the great Son of God said, "No. That's not how I'll approach my prerogatives of deity." He didn't use his deity to elevate himself and secure his own exalted position, as it

were, rather he did just the opposite. Jesus laid aside his privileges of deity, he stepped out of the glory of heaven in order to bless and serve sinful men in obedience to the will of his Father.

This is so magnificent. This is so noble and majestic. This is your Christ that we're talking about here. He was still fully God as he stepped down to earth because God can't stop being God, but he used his person and his privileges in order to bring salvation to sinners. Think on that for a while. Think on how many times you have been unwilling to set aside your privileges for the sake of someone else and realize that from a much greater position with a much greater exaltation, Christ said, "I'll set that aside and come to earth." He said in Matthew 20:28 that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." The Son of God took on the form of a servant and if you are a believer in Christ, you eternally benefit from that. And realize that if you are a believer in Christ, you would have none of the privileges of salvation if Christ had not been willing to humble himself to such a magnificent extent.

Now, I ask you in light of that, beloved, can you not find room in your heart to be a servant during your short time here on earth? Jesus used his position to serve and in our passage here in Philippians, Paul says that that example is your example for Christian growth. He's calling you to adopt that same approach to your privileges that you have in lesser measure, of course, than Christ but he says you take what Christ did and view everything in your life with that same perspective. Christ viewed all the prerogatives of deity as something to be disposed for the benefit of sinners in obedience to his Father's will. What Paul is saying is that in the midst of your earthly life, you develop that same spirit, you have that same humility of mind that verse 3, look at verse 3 with me. I do not want you to lose sight of the context here. Paul is setting forth Christ here and says, "You, believer in Christ, do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Look at Christ and then determine how you can serve.

What he's getting at is this: that in light of Christ's example, you should understand that God has given you various levels of blessing and privilege and authority for some of you as parents, as bosses, as leaders in churches, in whatever realm with material blessings, all of those rich things that you have at your disposal, God has given those things to you and placed you in a sphere of relationships so that you would use all of those privileges that you have received from him to the benefit of others and in service to him. That is why you have what you have. God has given it to you so that you could serve, just like Christ took what he had and served with it. This is powerful.

So we come to the question: who is it that you could serve with what you have? Who is it that you can serve with your spiritual giftedness and edify them in Christ, or lead someone to a saving knowledge of Christ, or alleviate suffering in someone's life that's in your sphere of relationships? That's the point. You have an attitude of service with everything that you have that mimics and is a faint reflection of the greater attitude of service that Christ himself adopted when he came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. The Incarnation of Christ and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross has immense,

enormous, far reaching, ethical implications for the way that you live as a believer in Christ. That's what you need to see out of this passage and I thank God that so many of you exhibit this in your life. I would be foolish not to acknowledge that in a room of such wonderful believers as what we have here. But for me and for you, we can all excel still more; to embrace this, to understand this and to let that wash over our minds and refresh us and say, "Yes, I want to renew my pursuit of that in my life." It's not complicated but it requires true humility to act upon it and say, "The privileges given to me are not for me to cling to, to grasp and hold onto. The privileges given to me are meant to be a service to others."

So the reality of the Incarnation of Christ establishes a fundamental mindset with which you approach all of life. As you act like Christ with what God has given to you, you will glorify the God of your salvation and be useful to men as well. So you have an attitude of service. Now, secondly and closely wrapped up with this, tied up with this, you could almost make it one point, maybe I should have. The second point: have an attitude of self-sacrifice. An attitude of self-sacrifice.

Look at verse 7 again. Paul says, "but Christ emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." He's setting up a strong contrast here. Jesus in verse 6 was continually existing in the form of God with the essential nature of God. Verse 7, "but," strong contrast, "but He emptied Himself," and then he immediately explains what he's talking about. What do you mean, "He emptied Himself"? Well, he immediately explains what he means by that in verse 7 as you continue on. This next clause is explaining what it means that Christ emptied himself. He "took the form," there is that word for essential nature again, "He took the form of a bond-servant, and was made in the likeness of men." When Christ came to earth, beloved, he took a great step down. He walked on earth in full humanity, as we studied about a year ago this time as we studied the humanity of Christ, experiencing all the physical dimensions of humanity in hunger and thirst and fatigue, human emotions. He walked on earth in full humanity like us in every way except for sin. The Creator of the universe taking on human flesh and walking in the midst of all of the reality of humanity and human limitations as a voluntary, a voluntary act of self-sacrifice. He obeyed his Father. He served ungrateful men. He received their blows and their spittle on his face. He received the crown of thorns. He took the nails in his hands, praying, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

God, God did that. That is the spiritual power in his example. He is God. God was a baby in Palestine. God spent most of his earthly life in obscurity. God voluntarily took a lower position than by nature he deserved. God sacrificed his position in heaven for a time so that he could sacrifice himself on the cross for you, beloved. And as Paul lays that out, he's saying that is the mindset for a Christian. That is the mindset that settles disputes. That is the mindset that you aspire after and live after day after day, hour after hour, minute by minute. When new challenges or opportunities come, say, "I'll sacrifice myself here just like my Savior did for me." You keep the mind of Christ, you keep the sacrifice of Christ and who he was and what he did at the forefront of your thinking day by day, moment by moment, and as you do that, it has a transforming effect on you. You as you

think about Christ and meditate on the mind of Christ, start to adopt that as your own if you are a humble believer.

And I would dare say that the reality of these truths that Paul lays out in Philippians would quickly drive away the pretenders, false professors of Christ who don't truly love him, because if you don't truly love Christ this is a repulsive example to the pride of man and the selfishness of man. But to the one who understands that he has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who realizes that his eternal security, his eternal salvation rests upon that willingness of Christ to voluntarily lay down his life for him, your heart if you are truly regenerate bends to this and says, "Yes, of course. I love Christ for being that way and I want to be like him." And it's a lovely and sweet and noble thing that you want to pursue no matter the cost. So sometimes you have a legitimate claim against someone and you let it go for the sake of peace. Sometimes you endure wrongs and you refuse to retaliate and strike back. You extend goodness and blessing to those who don't deserve it because you understand that that is what God did for you in Christ and you say, "How could I be any other way? If I receive these benefits from God, then surely I have to disperse them in my own opportunities."

Matthew 5:43, for example, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun," s-u-n, sun, "to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." It's not just that you love those that are good to you, you love and are good to those who are bad to you because that's what Christ was like.

Now look, I understand that some of you have been horribly wronged in your past by people who acted very wickedly toward you. Some of you are enduring the consequences of that severely even today. If that mark hits you, you can honestly say, "Yeah, I've been mistreated but do you know what I am going to do? Rather than being resentful, I'm going to look to Christ. This is my opportunity. The depths of this sorrow and discouragement and irritation, this is my opportunity to lift my eyes up more gloriously and profoundly to Christ in light of what Paul says here in Philippians 2, and do you know what? I'm not going to resent it anymore. I'm not going to retaliate or wish ill upon those who have done ill to me. No, it's going to be joy to me to follow the example of self-sacrifice that Christ himself did because do you know what? I wronged Christ and violated the law of God in ways that are far more wicked and sinful than anything that's ever been done to me and Christ sacrificed himself for me. That's going to change the whole way that I look at everything." That is the power of what Paul is saying here. Rather than resentment, you can find joy because it forces you to look more deeply at Christ and the glory of it is that God will bless you for it in ways that you can't conceive.

Final point, third point, final characteristic of Christ's humility for today. These all are woven together. The third point: have an attitude of submission. Have an attitude of submission. Look at verse 8, Christ "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Here it is that we see how far Christ would go in his humility. He put no limits on it. He had

stepped down from heaven to earth already, he had already left the glories of heaven and was walking on earth as a mere human, as it were, but the truth of the matter is that he would step down even further in his submission and in his humility, he ultimately would die in obedience to his Father. He went from heaven to earth, from earthly life to death, and that wasn't even the extent of it, it wasn't just death itself but it was death on a cross, that death by crucifixion that was the scourge of mankind in the first century, the death reserved for traitors to the Empire and common criminals, total humiliation as he hung naked on the cross. That is how far he went in his humility. He put no limits on it. And what you have to understand is that he did that on his own initiative. John 10:17-18, jot this verse down. John 10:17-18, he says, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative." Christ obeyed the Father to the point of death, death on the cross, and he did it on his own initiative.

What kind of man is this? What kind of mind is this that not only leaves glory for earth but obeys to the point of death? And not only death but death on a cross? Silence and worship in the presence of such a one is a most appropriate response, wouldn't you say, along with a willingness and a commitment to say, "If Christ would do that on behalf of sinners and he did that on behalf of me personally, he did this on behalf of me, then it's not too much for me to try to approximate that same attitude of self-sacrifice in my own life."

This is the mindset of true believers. This is your mindset in the face of suffering and temptation. It's not about you. Whatever has happened in your life, beloved, it's not about you. It's about you reflecting this mind of Christ, this attitude of Christ's humility, reflecting it in the midst of the circumstances that God has ordained for your life and to lay aside the bitterness and the anger and the jealousy, the resentment, and say, "Christ did so much more. I'm done with my sinful mindset and now I'm just going to embrace the joy of being in Christ and pursuing being like him and trusting God for the outcome of that."

Do you know the beauty of this? God is no man's debtor. Look at the reward that came to Christ for his obedience in verses 9 through 11. God blessed that obedience of Christ. "For this reason," verse 9, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." God exalted Christ after his humiliation and the Bible tells us that God will bless us also in the midst of our self humbling humility. 1 Peter 5:6-7 says, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Beloved, take care of first things first. Forget about your circumstances for the moment and say, "This mind of Christ is noble and worthy and that's what I want to be like and that's what I'm going to pursue. Now, how does this work out in my circumstances? Ah, okay." And as you do that, you can persevere in the midst of the adversity because God stores up eternal reward for those who love Christ and

follow him. You are people most richly blessed if you are here in Christ. Now go out and follow him.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, you are wonderful and magnificent and we honor you and we worship you, stunned as we consider the self-sacrifice that you made in obedience to the Father in which you did on our behalf for those of us that love you and know you. Eternity will not be long enough to say thank you. We love you and we pray that you would take these principles from your own life and work them out in our own thinking, our own self-assessment, and that it might overflow into every relationship that we have in the coming year. Give us grace to that end and expand our capacity and illuminate our understanding so that we would see you more clearly and have a deeper and greater appreciation for the glories of your own person in this coming year than we have ever had before. We love you and we honor you and we submit ourselves to you unconditionally for the glory of your name. Amen.

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