

Christmas: Humility of a Redeeming King
Philippians 2:5-8

...but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Introduction: Pride is easy. Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in Genesis 3, pride has ruled in the hearts of every man, woman, and child. Pride considers self as the most important and significant value in life, and sees others as a means to that end. God is at best co-equal with us, but truly is or should be sub-servient to us, helping us achieve our greatest goals. If you want to see how pride manifests in the heart of mankind and still rises in your own, simply take your family to Disneyland or travel through busy airport terminals! Our family was at Disneyland this last week and I remembered how quickly my heart is exposed as my patience for others gets low (especially for the “worm” people), how I will fight for my own rights and spots and for those of my family, and how I’m willing to fight to move up in line to our own advantage, putting others at a disadvantage. Pride causes us to look at our own interests first, to fight for those we love, and to view all others through the lens of being a nuisance, irritation, or an enemy. In other words, it takes a large amount of humility to value those that are annoying or are our enemies.

This is why the gospel is so transformative. It not only calls us to turn from sin, but it changes our entire disposition toward others. **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves”** (Phil. 2:3). This is a foundation changer, a life altering call that moves us out of our natural disposition in our sin nature and transforms us into the likeness of our Savior. Not only this, but we can stop looking to our own interests but rather to the interests of others, hoping for their growth and good (Phil. 2:4). In this is a great source of **joy**, replacing the unquenchable search for meaning and happiness in self-fulfillment and discovering that service and sacrifice in light of Christ and the gospel is truly the foundation for **lasting joy and satisfaction**.

As we consider on again on this most celebrated events of Jesus’ incarnation at Christmas, we move from the **panorama** of redemption, where we saw Jesus’ coming was NOT a reaction or merely a point of historical time, but the culmination of prophecy and redemptive history! From the beginning of time, Jesus’ appearance into humanity WAS the goal and plan, in order to bring back a sinful people for God’s own possession. But moving from the high altitude of covenants, we now look at the ground level of the **eternal God of the universe coming into the world as a baby in a manger**, the King of the universe NOT entering in as a king or priest or soldier, but as a lowly servant, who possessed no majesty or beauty (Isa. 53:2). Not only will we see the greatness of our Savior and God, but we should walk away with a sobering command, to follow in His footsteps, since we are united with Him and have the same mind. The more we understand that life is not about us but about Christ, others, and the gospel, the more we will be pleasing to God and filled with the fullness of joy He promised (John 15:11). We can embrace our identity in Christ, willingly humbling ourselves to our Savior who died for us while we were **still sinners** (Rom. 5:8), not when we were cleaned up. He loved US while we were ungodly and dressed us in holiness and righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), so we are new creations. **So humility is NOT thinking less of ourselves, but rather thinking properly in light of Christ, but surely thinking of ourselves less!**

The Humble King Willingly Gave Up His Advantage

Philippians 2:6 – Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

What do we learn from Christ's incarnation at Christmas? In a few short sentences we discover revolutionary truths that are simple enough for us to understand yet will take us a lifetime to sink our teeth into and truly understand. In order to understand these verses, we must understand the unique words used in their context to grasp fully what Jesus did by leaving glory and entering into humanity as a baby in a manger. So let's take some phrases one at a time and then tie them back together:

"who, though He was in the form of God" - There are two words in this section that, when we understand how they work together, helps unlock the whole. The word "form" is the word "**morphe**", which refers to the *outward manifestation of an inner reality*. Here, it does not merely refer to the *external appearance* but pictures the pre-existent Christ as clothed in the garments of Divine majesty and splendor. **He was in the form of God, sharing His glory.** We see this in John 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:3, which says, *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and HE upholds the universe by the word of His power."* The whole thrust of the passage here is that Jesus was equal with God from the beginning, being One with the Father in eternal Sonship (John 5:17-18; 10:30, 28; 14:9: 17:1, 21-22; 20:28)

The other word to understand is in verse 8, where He was found in human **form**. This is an unfortunate translation, since they are different Greek words. The word is human appearance, or "**schema**". This is the outward form that changes from time to time, from circumstance to circumstance. **William Barclay** illustrated the interaction of the two words this way: the essential *morphe* of any human being is humanity and that never changes, but he *schema* is continually changing, from baby, to child, to boy, to youth, to middle age to old man. In each stage, the *morphe* never changes, but the outward schema changes all the time. Jesus was, is, and forever will be God, divine, pre-existent, and sinless.

"Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"

Here is where the explanation truly picks up steam. Though He was equal with God, existing in glorious splendor and majesty, lacking nothing, He made a voluntary, loving decision. The language means that He did not regard being equal with God as something to **use for His own advantage** and refused to use for His own glory that which He had from the beginning. **He did not cling to it.** He gave up power, privilege and possession, that were His rightfully. **WHY???** Because humility thinks of others and their interests, not our own. **Love lays down its life for others.** Leaders use privilege to help others and build them up, where lesser men use their privileges to promote self. Humility demands that we view ANY privilege, power, gift, ability, resource NOT as our own to hold onto, grasp, and cling to, but to leverage it for the sake of others. This is the epitome of love for others, which is the central reality of the gospel. Jesus loved freely, willingly, un-equally, as He left glory to save sinners who hated the light and loved their sin.

The Humble King Took On Life as a Servant

Philippians 2:7 - *...but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*

Because Jesus refused to cling to His favored position, He was willing to **empty Himself, laying down those rights.** Now, it must be made abundantly clear here that He did lay down His divinity or become less than God. His *morphe* did not change, but His schema did. **Mike Riccardi** wrote:

*"The text does not say that the Son emptied Himself **OF anything** ----whether essence, attributes, etc. It says He emptied HIMSELF. The Son HIMSELF is the direct object of emptying --- not the form of God, not*

equality with God. HIMSELF. Thus, "HE nullified Himself", or "made Himself of no reputation", or "made Himself nothing".

The emphasis is on the **condescension** or self-abasement of the Son, not the divestiture of anything about His divine existence. And the very next word tells us how He made Himself nothing: "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men." Christ nullified Himself by **taking on a human nature, not by reducing His divinity in any way.**"

But the reality is that the God who created, sustains, and holds the entire universe together put Himself under it, emptying Himself of a rightful position to become a servant. But what was it that Jesus did empty Himself of?

What Divine Rights Did Jesus Empty Himself?

- **Temporarily Divested Himself of Divine Glory (John 17:5)** – "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Jesus possessed glory with God the Father before the world existed. He gave that up to become a man, moving from the aroma of incense for worship for the spit of soldiers, from the worship from angels to the jeers of created man, from divine pleasure to human pain.
- **Laid aside the independent use of His Divine Attributes** - Jesus exercised the power on earth that only God possesses, from knowing what was in man (John 2:25), to healing disease and raising the dead. However, He did not exercise the full use of these attributes as a man, but only at the direction of the Father or Spirit. Jesus functioned like you and I do on this earth, so that in the midst of temptation He did exercise divine right but used the resources available to us (the guiding of the Holy Spirit and God's Word), so that He could truly be our High Priest (Heb. 4:15) who sympathizes with our weaknesses, having faced them as a man.
- **Independent Divine Authority** - In a mystery, Jesus gave up doing anything on His own (John 5:30), instead only doing the will and submitting to the Father (John 6:38), and even learning obedience as a man (Heb. 5:8)
- **External Riches** - The One who created and own everything became poor. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though **He was rich, yet for your sake became poor**, so that you by His poverty might **become rich.**" (2 Cor. 8:9) Again, He dwelt in glory with the Father but willingly gave up those riches for the time of His incarnation to become a sacrifice for the sins of those He loved.
- **Unique, face to face, intimate relationship with the Father** - The One who existed as and with God from the beginning became a curse (Gal. 3:13), becoming sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and experiencing the forsaking of the Father (Matt. 27:46) as He received the full brunt of God's wrath.

He emptied Himself of these and took on the **form of a servant**. Remember, this is the word "*morphe*", meaning he did not dress Himself as a servant, but **became by nature a slave**. Jesus did not just dress up like a servant, but took on the nature of one. This was not an ACT, like so many can do for a time if the outcome is worth it, He BECAME one. **He did not exchange the nature or form of God for that of a slave. Instead, He displayed the nature of God in the nature or form of a slave, showing clearly not only what His character is like but also what it meant to be God.**

A slave had no rights of his own but existed in the service of the master (see Luke 17:7-10). He was required to do the lowliest of tasks with no thanks or even reward, and he did this day in and day out. Jesus did not come a **King**, although He is **KING OVERALL**. He did not come as a **Master**, although He is our Lord. He did not come **owning anything**, even a house, even though He **OWNS** everything. Perhaps there is no greater illustration of this than when Jesus took a basin of water and wrapped Himself in a towel, stooping down to wash the filthy feet of His disciples, men who bickered over kingdom assignments, who was greatest, and who could not keep awake for an hour in prayer (John 13). He even washed Peter's feet, even though Peter would deny Him within a few hours, swearing that he didn't even know Jesus. Just as Jesus stooped to wash, so Jesus stooped down from glory to take on humanity, serving us to the point of death.

Why? Because that is exactly what He called us to, knowing that there is NO GREATER CALLING in this life than being a slave or bondservant of Christ. He owns us, and that brings the greatest freedom we've ever tasted. **True humility, then, sees oneself as a servant** on top of seeing others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves. Jesus did not come to **be served but to serve**, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

The Humble King Became Obedient to Death

Philippians 2:8 - *And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Perhaps one of the most bewildering statements in all of Scripture is the fact that God the Son **humbled Himself**. Humility comes when we realize that others have surpassing value greater than ourselves, but there is none more valuable or glorious than God. He is a Jealous God (Exodus 34:14) who refuses to share His glory with anyone (Isa. 48:11). Most false deities or those in power will force humility from everyone else, and though God demands that of His creation, in order to bring fallen humanity back to Himself, He was the one who **uninitiated and self-emptied in humility**. He demonstrated this in several clear ways:

- **Born in the likeness and appearance as a human man** - Only God could save us from God, but only a man could take our place. Jesus becoming a man was essential for Him to satisfy all the Law of God in perfection, and then die as a perfect sacrifice for those who could not. The first Adam plunged humanity into sinful darkness, while the second Adam came to bring life. This meant that Jesus had to take on all the **frailties, limitations, problems, and suffering** that are the effects of the Fall without being tainted by sin. This meant He was born like all the rest of us, **felt pain, hunger, thirst, temptation, sadness, weariness, and happiness as a man**. But He also had to endure wicked and Fallen humanity treating Him merely as a man. The God who created it all placing Himself in the hands of those who SHOULD HAVE FALLEN DOWN IN WORSHIP, saw Him as nothing more than a mere mortal.
- **He obeyed to the point of death** - No one took Jesus' life from Him, since He freely laid it down (John 10:18). **Hebrews 5:7-9** explains something intensely amazing, "*In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence (fear)*". Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, **He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**" What's amazing about this is that in His humanity, Jesus was filled with the same dread of death and pain that we are, yet He was willing

to endure **in His humanity**, entrusting Himself to His Father, so that He could offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice. Yes, there was joy in moving toward the cross (Heb. 12:1-3), but it was willingness to obey the Father to the point of death that sets the example

- **He Died on a Cross** - Death on a cross was excruciating, long, and intended to bring public shame. Rome had devised a plan to put down sedition by crucifying any and all who would rise up against the government, and they wanted everyone coming into a city what would happen to them if they crossed Rome. Jesus was not only willing to expose Himself to death, but set up the means by which He would die, becoming a curse while hanging on a tree, being lifted up that any and all who would see Him would LIVE!

In the narrative of Jesus march toward the cross, we keep waiting for vindication or rescue. Sure Jesus was humble, but when would He or the Father say, "**ENOUGH**", "That's it", and stop the whole procession. When would all the wrongs be made right? When would Jesus be avenged? The reality is, it would not happen until AFTER Jesus died, and for us it may not happen that way either. The Father WOULD vindicate the Son, exalting Him and giving Him the name LORD, so that every knee will bow and tongue confess that **this Jesus Christ IS LORD**, whether it's in worship as a son or in judgment as an enemy. God will be glorified, either in saving His own by grace through faith or exercising His wrath on the disobedience and faithlessness of those who reject.

The Humble King's Call to Humility

Philippians 2:5 – *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"*

How does this help us think at Christmas? Not only must we see Jesus as the fulfillment of eternal covenants, but also as the epitome of humility. When we see our Lord and Savior willingly condescend and take on servanthood, we now have a clear path of thinking and action for our life. The first and greatest example is Jesus Himself, so he took time to unpack who Jesus was and what He did. There are **four principles to glean from looking at Jesus:**

- **Humility Starts in Right Thinking** - The call of this verse is to somehow adopt the same mindset that Jesus had when He left glory and became a man. The word "*mind*" means to "*think, judge, or set one's mind on*". This means that Jesus is the ultimate model for us in how to live and walk in humble, self-sacrificing, self-giving service. He does not leave a lot of wiggle room. He humbled Himself among the unworthy, the selfish, the ungodly. We are called to consider others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves, be it an ornery neighbor, and belligerent spouse, or a pestering church member. ***Humility starts with right thinking, so we must START with fixing our gaze on Christ.***
- **Humility is Possible Through Union with Christ alone** - Again, it seems monumentally simplistic to say "just be like Jesus". But we remember that all of this comes out of our union with Christ, that we are "*in Him*", that we have received encouragement from Him (2:1), and we already possess the "*mind of Christ*" (1 Cor. 2:16). This is NOT some moralistic, duty filled call to action, but a command that flows out of an assured reality that we are saved, safe, and united with Christ. This is one of the central thoughts of Philippians, that we are to **let our manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, meaning we are united with Him in His life, death, and resurrection.

- **Humility overflows in Sacrificial Service** - True service and ministry does not exist in the *margins of life. It is our life.* Notice that the humility shown by Jesus in His condescending down to put on humanity cost everything and WAS everything. It meant that He could not be half-hearted or nominally committed. Here is the immense consideration for us: *do we view service/ministry to each other a marginal importance?* **Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing."** When it comes to serving and even giving, we want to engage just enough before we get to the pain threshold, just enough before it begins to hurt, and then we stop. I've noticed that generationally, people will serve, but not commit long term. They will give to causes, but not on a regular, sacrificial basis. Jesus did not just give everything at one time on the cross, the whole of His taking on humanity required sacrifice. Our lives in Christ are given to Christ as instruments of service but also sacrifice, and whatever He wants to do with them is up to Him. This is the challenge for every believer here this morning: is your life a reflection of humility in the service of others? Is service what you do, or is it **who you are? Do you see your life as a minister of the gospel or one that participates once in a while?**
- **Humility is Essential in Salvation** - For those this morning who do not know and love Jesus, or think you are a Christian even though there has never been any change of affection, attitude or action, I call you today to humility. **Salvation requires that we humble ourselves**, recognizing that we are NOT the Lord of our life. We are sinful. We have offended a holy God, so we need to **ask for forgiveness**, admitting our sin and turning from our sin to follow Christ in obedience. This morning can be a time for you to stop trying to do it all on your own, stop living for yourself, and *stop the mirage that you can control your own life!* You cannot come to Christ and remain in control, but salvation demands **yielding yourself to the Lordship of Jesus**, loosening the chains of sin, shame, addiction, and vain attempts at happiness. In turning to Christ, we receive a new love, a love for Jesus that breeds obedience, sacrifice, and service, which is the greatest freedom we could ever know.

What is the message of Christmas? A divine Savior, who out of love for His Father's glory and those given to Him as a gift, humbled Himself and took on or added humanity, so that He could live our life perfectly, offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice to take our place, so that God would pour out His wrath on Him, and not us. We now LIVE, abundantly, to God's glory, through the pathway of **humility and selfless sacrifice, emulating our precious Savior, who came so that we would have our joy be made full.** The gospel breaks our pride. We remember that we no longer live for ourselves, but for God's glory and others, calling others to walk in the light of our redeeming king. May THAT be the greatest joy and gift of Christmas.