

Text: Philippians 2:3-8

Title: The Humiliation of Christ

Truth: Christmas teaches us humility.

Date/Location: Sunday 12/16/2012; revised 12/19/2021

Introduction

Christmas is part one of a three-part series of events in which our Lord Jesus Christ was brought down to the lowest depths of reality. Part one is the incarnation, part two is the human life He lived for 33 years, and part three is His death and resurrection for sinners.

I. The Command – Be of Humble Mind, v. 3-5

Around this time of year, the virtue of gratitude is often emphasized. And rightly so, because we are thankful for God’s provision, for blessings beyond count, and especially for God’s sending of His Son. But did you know that another character trait we can learn at Christmastime is *humility*? That’s right. That is what Jesus demonstrated when He took on flesh and dwelt among us.

A. God gives grace to the humble, and He tells us throughout the Bible to humble ourselves (James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:5-6). But it is a very difficult thing for us to do. We often see ourselves in a lofty self-exalted status. To humble ourselves to a very low place is not our natural desire. Some may have financially humble circumstances, but it is still possible to be as proud as can be even in that condition. Others look down on supposed “lower classes” of humanity and think of themselves as morally superior, and consequently, they think, they are more well off

because of their superiority. Do you know this trap of pride?

Go beyond the question of “are you humble?” to the question “would you humble yourself to the lowest of lows because you love God and people?”

- B. The context Philippians 2:3-4 lays the groundwork for the section we will be studying in verses 5-8. God teaches us here how we should do things:

How Not to Live	How to Live
Do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit	In lowliness of mind esteem others better than yourself
Do not look out only for your own interests	Look out for the interests of others

- C. To drive home the important point about humility, Paul gives an extended statement about the humblest person who ever lived. And no, that is not Moses, but close (Numbers 12:3)! Verse 5 commands us, “Let this mind be in you.” We are told to develop an attitude based on careful consideration and as a result to be disposed or minded in a certain way—a humble way. Yes, we are told by God how we ought to think!

II. The Best Model of Humility – Jesus Christ, v. 6-8

The mindset we are to have is that of Jesus. He is objectively far better than all of us—infinite and sinless—but He esteemed us better and worth His sacrifice because of His grace and our deep need. He did not care about His own situation but took compassion on us in our mire.

A. Jesus existed with God in exaltation and glory. He had (and still has) the very **form** and nature of God. He is equal with God (John 1:1, 14). This is a direct statement of His deity in what is called in theology His *preexistent* state. Before He entered the human race, He was deity—and always will be. It is true that there is no verse that uses the word *Trinity*, but there are *many* verses that teach the co-equality of the Father and the Son, and the Spirit. This is one very clear passage. Hebrews 1:2-4 is another. Romans 9:5 is another. If you believe the Bible, you believe this. If you do not believe this, you do not truly believe the Bible.

The word for *form* is “*morphe*” which can be the outward appearance or the innate character of a thing. This is contrasted to another “*morphe*” – the form of a bondservant in 2:7. *Innate character* is the point here.

B. Jesus had (and still has) a humble mindset: He didn't strive for position or glory. He strove to offer Himself for others.

1. *Robbery* is a bad translation. The word means something prized, something to be grasped or held onto for personal advancement, gain or advantage. Jesus inherently *was* that form of deity mentioned earlier, and though it could never be taken from Him, and was His by very nature, He did not hang onto its overt manifestation and glory.
2. His thinking was that it was not so important that He maintained His glorious position in open manifestation, but that He could shed it for a time for the benefit of His creation. Application? If you think you are something—when you are nothing (Galatians

6:3)—you need to check your pride because not even the God-man proudly held onto his position.

3. In the end, His being lowered ended up exalting His glory even more. One reason is that it is most glorious to shed glory for the purpose of service to others.

C. Instead Jesus lowered himself, not a little bit but a lot.

1. No reputation (NKJV). Everyone is worried about reputation because they are worried about *self*. But he “emptied himself” from the verb *kenoō* – humbled, laid aside glory.

The whole idea of the verb *kenoō* and *kenosis* theories is not something we can ignore. We should clearly understand what it means. What it does not mean is that He surrendered His essential nature as deity. Instead, He laid aside His glory and submitted Himself to the Father as an obedient Son. It does not mean that He became a son when he was incarnated. Instead, He always was God’s Son.

The focus on this “self-emptying” concept can become a distraction from the meaning of the paragraph. We know that Christ pre-existed, that He came in the form of a man, and is Lord. These things are clear to us who are orthodox Christians. Whatever he was “emptied” of does not degrade His essential deity at all. Let not those thoughts distract you from the main point: **YOU TOO ARE TO HAVE THIS KIND OF MINDSET. Serve others. Wash others’ feet. Clean the toilets at the church. Give time in helping other people, etc.**

2. Took **form** of a human bondservant. This is the same word as 2:6's **form** of God. He went down to the bottom of the totem pole. He could have come as a human king—that would have been a lot of humility for Him because a human king is much lower than what He is.

He went even further: coming in the likeness of *men* where He was lower than even a king. Notice verse 8 where it says that he had the appearance of a man. He was truly a man, and had the outward appearance of a man, but in fact He was more than a man: He was God-man.

But He went even further and became a *servant*. Consider Hebrews 2:17 in this connection.

3. And then He went further. He lowered Himself and became obedient to **death**. He was not obeying death. Rather He was obeying God to the extent of death, to that low level. The Bible is telling us that this must be our mindset too.

4. And He went even further. He was humbled even to the cruelest death of a **cross**. The cross and its suffering (Luke 24:46) aptly demonstrates the wrath of God against sin. "Without shedding of blood, there is no remission" of sin (Heb. 9:22).

D. Note the difference between this illustration and what is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-14. Lucifer wanted to go up, up, up. Jesus came down, down, down.

III. Application

In comparison to Jesus:

A. We are not exalted. We never will be *that* exalted.

B. We are not *that* humble. Until we are that humble, we have something to strive for.

C. We have not humiliated ourselves like He did. Too often we think:

1. I need this or that. Look out for #1. But Jesus concerned Himself with the needs of others.

2. I'm too good for that. But He took the form of a slave.

3. I'm too important to serve others, much less give myself to them. But He did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

D. But what we *have* we ought to be willing to let go for others. Jesus is our standard to strive for.

1. What would it be like if we had a church full of people with "this mind" in them? What would it be like if we had thousands of churches like that?

2. What would you be like if you had "this mind" in you?

3. What would Christmas be like around the globe if everyone took to themselves "this mind"?

E. Maybe you are in a lower socioeconomic class. Jesus understands where you are at. He went down to the lowest of low. Look at His parents financial position at His birth! Look at His torture and death.

F. Maybe you are having problems in your family or workplace. Take on Christ's attitude. No "holier than

thou” or “better than thou” attitude is becoming of a Christian. Loving service is what ought to mark us— toward our husbands and wives and children and extended family and in our work place and in our church.

G. Maybe you don’t have the “I will” syndrome of Isaiah 14. Perhaps it is the “I won’t” syndrome of rejecting the Word of God, of rejecting humble service to others. “I won’t do that for them!” That is a sinful attitude, not a “Christ-minded” attitude.

Conclusion

Once again, we return to the question: “Would you humble yourself to the lowest of lows because you love God and people?” Jesus Christ has given us an example. We are called to follow it.

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