

Jesus The Humble King

Philippians 2:6-8

Pastor John Miller

I want to read from verse 5 all the way to verse 11, because I want to get it in your mind and I want you to see the whole text.

Paul says in Philippians 2:5-11, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In the Old Testament, Moses approached the burning bush, the voice of the Lord was in the bush and He spoke out and said, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Every time I open this passage in Philippians 2, I almost hear the Lord's voice saying to me, "John, take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground." This is one of the greatest, most holy and awesome passages in all the New Testament about the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

James Montgomery Boice said, "This passage is among the most glorious sections of the New Testament. In these few verses, we see the great sweep of Christ's life from eternity past to eternity future." Theologians call it the "kenosis passage." It's a famous passage that talks about Christ emptying Himself. We're going to see what that means. This is really the Christmas story, as told by Paul, as he wrote to the Philippians in chapter 2.

Why is this passage about Jesus Christ in Philippians 2? If you go back to verses 1-4, you find that Paul is exhorting the believers in Philippi to unity. He wants them to get along and be of one accord and one mind. The way to do that is for them to be humble; he knows that humility will lead to unity. So in verses 3-5, Paul says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit..."—or "strife" or "vainglory"—"...but in lowliness of mind..."—that's the theme of the whole passage—"...let each esteem others better than himself," or it could be translated "more important than themselves." "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind..."—or "attitude" or "outlook"—"...be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." At the end of verse 5, Paul mentions "Christ Jesus." Then without skipping a beat, he goes to verse 6: "...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God," and he goes on to give us the kenosis passage.

This passage was never meant to teach doctrine, although it does that wonderfully. It was written for practical purposes, to teach us humility. Jesus, who was God in heaven, came down to earth, became a man, went to the Cross and died for us. It's that simple. If Jesus could

humble Himself and come down from heaven, become a servant and die for our sins, then we need to humble ourselves and serve others. So the passage is really practical in that it wants us to follow the pattern given to us by Jesus Christ. What we find in verses 6-8 is first, the humility of Jesus the King.

Now there are three portraits that we are going to see. The first, in verse 6, is where we see that Jesus is the sovereign; we see his deity or divine nature. "...who..."—referring to Jesus Christ—"...being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." The word "form" here is the word "morfē." It doesn't mean outward shape; it means "inner essence." We use form to mean outward shape, but it doesn't convey that in the Greek. The form of God is, in essence, God. So what you have in this passage is a very clear, very powerful, very forthright proclamation and declaration of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is divine. Jesus Christ is God. It is not talking about an external appearance but an inner essence. Verse 6 also says, "who being in the form of God." Jesus did not become God; He is the eternal God. The NIV translation of this says, "who, being in very nature God."

There are a lot of people today who say, "Well, the Bible doesn't teach that Jesus is God." I beg to differ. I believe that the Bible does clearly teach the divinity and deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus isn't just a prophet—although He is that; He's not just a priest—although He is that; He's not just a great teacher—although He is that; He's not just a great healer—although He is that; and He's not come to just give us words of wisdom. He is God manifested in the flesh. You'll miss Christmas if you don't realize who this baby is who was born in Bethlehem.

Let me give you some other evidence from the Scriptures on the deity of Christ. As the second Person of the Triune God, Jesus is eternal. That's found in John 1:1, where it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the Greek it's even clearer: "and God was the Word." So Jesus is eternal: "In the beginning was the Word." Jesus is the personal God: He was face to face with the Father. He is the divine Word: "The Word was God." So Jesus is eternal.

Secondly, Jesus claims to be God in John 10:30 where He says, "I and My Father are one." The word "one" in the Greek is the neuter word, so He's not talking about one person; He's talking about one in essence. He's not saying, "I'm the Father, and the Father is the Son." He's actually saying, "I am one in essence with the Father; that we are both divine and we are both God." He is claiming equality here with the Father.

Thirdly, Jesus is declared to be God in Hebrews 1:8 where it says, "But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" That is a quote from Psalm 45:6. God the Father is speaking about God the Son and calls Him "God." So I don't know how anyone who studies their Bible can miss this.

In verse 6 of our text, Jesus "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." Jesus was not stealing something that did not belong to Him.

So the Bible is very clear. And let's be clear about Christmas. At Christmas, Jesus is "Immanuel," or "God with us." He's the "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," the Father of eternity. He's the God who took on humanity. So the baby born in the stable in Bethlehem is none other than the sovereign, eternal, omnipotent God.

In Micah 5:2, 700 years before Jesus was born, Micah the prophet said, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." So there the Bible clearly states that Jesus is the everlasting God.

So fact number one, He is the sovereign God. Fact number two, we see in the picture in verse 7 that Jesus is the servant. In this we see His humanity and His humility. Verse 7 says, "...but made Himself..."—still talking about Jesus—"...of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." "Made Himself of no reputation" literally means that He emptied Himself. This is where we get the concept of kenosis or emptying.

And the question we need to ask is, "What did He empty Himself of?" It is talking about the Christmas story, when God left heaven and came down to earth. Let me first tell you what He did not empty Himself of. He did not empty Himself of His deity. That would be impossible to do. The Bible says in Malachi 3:6, "For I am the Lord, I do not change." The Bible tells us that God is immutable or unchanging. The same God who created the heavens and the earth hasn't changed one bit.

I'm glad God never changes. I change and you change. If you don't think you change, look at your high school graduation picture and weep. I'll never forget going to my 25th high school reunion. I haven't been back since; it's too frightening. "Hey, John, remember me?" I'm thinking, No! Wow! What happened?! It was so scary.

When you get older, your body changes. I had a grandson who spent the night this week, and I was stupid enough to take him skateboarding. Not him skateboarding, us skateboarding. I hadn't been on a skateboard in a long time. I used to skateboard a lot. I thought it would be a breeze. It was my idea to do a slalom down a hill. I take off and I'm going faster and faster, and it was time to get off. Thank God I didn't fall or I would be one big scab. I was convinced someone from the church was going to run me over in the street.

My body changes as I get older, but I'm so glad that the fixed point that never changes is God. His mercy never changes. His love never changes. His grace never changes. And you can fix your focus on that; God never changes. He is immutable. He is the rock who never changes, and I'm so thankful for that.

So Jesus didn't put aside His deity. Nor did He put aside His divine attributes. Sometimes I'm asked about this. People say that Jesus, in His Incarnation, wasn't omnipotent and omniscient and didn't have these divine attributes. That's not true. He was still God; He still possessed His divine attributes. The truth is that He only used them when directed by the will of God the

Father. So He voluntarily and temporarily laid aside His majesty and His glory. He didn't lay aside His deity and His divine attributes, but He laid aside His majesty, His splendor, His glory and the independent use of His attributes and His authority.

Jesus also laid aside His face-to-face relationship with God the Father. We don't often think about that. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." In the Greek, "was with God" actually reads, "face-to-face with God." Jesus, the eternal Word, is Jesus, the personal Word. You have God the Father and God the Son in heaven. So Jesus gave up that fellowship with His Father to come down to earth and become man.

I would say also that He temporarily and voluntarily laid aside His eternal riches. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

If you miss this, you miss Christmas. Christmas is all about Jesus laying aside the majesty, the splendor and the glory of who He is. In John 17:5, He prayed, "O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Jesus was looking for that glory to be restored. So Jesus is the great God who laid aside His majesty, His splendor and His glory.

Look what Jesus did in verse 7 of our text: "...taking the form of a bondservant." This is speaking of the fact that He "morphed" or He took on humanity, and He was made in the likeness of men. So He truly became a man. This is the Christmas story; Emmanuel, God with us.

"God contracted to a span

And comprehensibly made man."

The sovereign Son of God became a humble man, and He became just like us but without sin, because He came through the womb of the Virgin Mary.

You don't have Christmas without the virgin birth, and with the virgin birth, you have the Incarnation, and with the Incarnation, you have the Son of God in the flesh. The only way to explain Jesus Christ is through the virgin birth and the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is unique; there is no one like Him. So He became the sinless man, lived a sinless life and died a substitutionary death.

What Jesus did in verse 7 is pictured in John 13. When Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples, before they had supper, Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Jesus stood up, laid aside His outer garment, tied a towel around His waist, took a basin of water and a towel and washed His disciples' feet. This is a picture of Him coming from heaven, laying aside His majesty, laying aside His glory, taking on the badge of a servant—humanity—and going to the Cross to die for our sins so that we could be washed, be forgiven and have fellowship with God. This whole foot washing in John 13 portrays Jesus laying aside His splendor and majesty.

Remember when Jesus was transfigured on the mount of transfiguration? He pulled back the veil of His humanity and allowed His deity to shine forth. Jesus Christ was God incarnate, God veiled in the flesh. We couldn't see that because we saw His humanity. But He was truly God manifested in the flesh.

There is a third and last picture which completes the humility of Christ, in verse 8. In verse 6, Jesus is the sovereign; in verse 7, Jesus is the servant; and in verse 8, Jesus is the sacrifice. Verse 8 says, "...being found in appearance as a man." Already in verse 7, Paul makes the statement that Jesus became a bondservant in the likeness of men. Now what He did was, "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross."

Verse 8 is packed with information about Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross. Jesus left His home in glory at Christmas to come down to die on Calvary. Verse 8 says, "...being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself." Jesus humbled Himself; no one humbled Him. He didn't die against His will; the death of Jesus Christ was voluntary. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He stepped out and asked, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' They drew back and fell to the ground." What amazes me is that they got back up and asked the same question. I would have said, "Okay, never mind. Enjoy your time in the garden. See ya!" I'd be gone.

But Jesus said, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." So the death of Jesus Christ was voluntary, and He died for you and for me. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." But we were His enemies, yet in love, He died for us voluntarily.

The second fact about the Cross, in verse 8, He "became obedient to the point of death." That means that the death of Jesus Christ was preordained. God the Father planned it out with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit before the world was ever created, in eternity past.

When Peter was preaching in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, he said about Jesus in verse 23, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." So the death of Jesus was voluntary, preordained. It wasn't an accident; it was planned by God.

The third fact is that the death of Jesus Christ was vicarious. Verse 8 says, "...even the death of the Cross." Jesus took our place on the Cross. He died in our place. His death was a substitution.

This is illustrated in Genesis 22:2, where God came to Abraham and said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him...as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." The first time that the word "love" appears in the Bible is in this verse. It is in the context of a father's love for his only son. It goes right along with John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten..."—or "unique"—"...Son." So verse 2 is the picture of the father's love for his Son offered upon a mountain.

Abraham and Isaac got up early the next morning, saddled the donkey and took the wood, the

fire and the knife with them. They went to the land of Moriah, up a mountain, which was the same mountain on which several thousand years later, Jesus would die for the sins of the world.

When they were walking up the mountain, you can imagine that Abraham's heart was broken. He's thinking, I have to sacrifice my son! And his son turned to him and asked, "My father... look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham said to Isaac, "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." That has two meanings, and I think both of them are Biblical. It means that God will provide the sacrifice—"Go so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"—and it also means that God will be the sacrifice—"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." Someone said:

"He hung upon a cross of wood,

But He made the hill on which it stood."

To think that God would die for me on the Cross!

So Jesus is pictured in this story of Abraham and Isaac. When Abraham lifted his knife to plunge it into Isaac, his own son, God stopped him. God said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him: for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes and offered it up in his son's place. That's the substitution.

We, too, come off the altar, and Jesus goes on the altar in our place and dies as the Lamb of God. He bore our sins on the altar. His death was a substitution. Someone described the Cross as "the self-substitution of God." I like that.

The fourth fact about the Cross, in verse 8, is that the death of Jesus Christ was victorious. Verse 8 says that He died on the Cross. Before He died on the Cross, He spoke seven times. One of His last utterances was, "It is finished." It is the Greek phrase "Tatelestai," which means "done" or "paid in full." It is similar to what happens when we owe a debt and pay it off. We get a receipt that says "Paid in full." When a farmer was plowing in his field and he finished the task, he would say, "Tatelestai," or "done." When an artist was painting a picture and he put on the last strokes of the brush, then put the brush down, he would look back at his painting and say, "Tatelestai," "It is finished." What an awesome thought that Jesus died on the Cross and finished the work of God saving us!

That victorious death of Jesus on the Cross breaks down like this: Number one, the law is satisfied. The death of Jesus Christ brings satisfaction. The theological term is "propitiation." It means that Jesus died to satisfy the demands of God's law, so that the Father is satisfied. God is holy, righteous and just, and His law has been broken—"The soul that sins shall surely die"—so Jesus died in our place, and God the Father is propitiated, He is satisfied.

Number two, another word that describes the Cross is "reconciliation." We were estranged and

separated from God, but He brought us back together through the Cross.

The third word is “redemption.” So we have propitiation—the death of Christ to satisfy the demands of God the Father; we have reconciliation—God reconciles us back to Himself; and we have redemption. Redemption means that God purchased us, and the purchase price was the blood of Christ. He died on the Cross to buy us out of our bondage to sin, to forgive us and to set us free. So we are redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The fourth word is “revelation.” Ancient theologians referred to the Cross as “the theater of the Cross.” I like that idea, because you can’t understand Christianity and you can’t understand Christmas without understanding the Cross. And you can’t understand the Cross unless you understand who died on the Cross and why He died on the Cross. Jesus died on the Cross to reveal God’s love, to redeem man, to propitiate the Father and to reconcile sinners. The Cross is a picture to remind me that God loves me.

If you go through hard times and wonder if God loves you, just look at the Cross. He loves you so much that “He gave His only begotten Son” to die on the Cross for you. Put John 3:16 alongside the Cross: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“The love of God is greater far

Than tongue or pen could ever tell.

It goes beyond the highest star

And it reaches to the lowest hell.

“Could we with ink the oceans fill,

And were the skies of parchment made;

Were every stalk on earth a quill,

And every man a scribe by trade;

To write the love of God above

Would drain the ocean dry;

Nor could the scroll contain the whole,

Though stretched from sky to sky.”

Christmas is all about the love of God in sending His Son to die for our sins, that we might be redeemed and reconciled and saved.