

The Christ of Christmas – Part 1

Philippians 2:5-11

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Let's read Philippians 2:5-11. I'll read, you follow with me in your Bibles. Paul says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation;"—we'll come back to that important statement, it means He emptied Himself—"and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Whenever I come to this famous passage known as the kenosis passage, I always kind of feel like Moses at the burning bush where the Lord spoke and said, "Take your shoes off for the place where you're treading is holy ground." This text is considered by many of the great Bible scholars to be one of the greatest New Testament passages, or for that matter in the whole Bible, on the Person of Jesus Christ. What a blessing to be able to meditate on who Jesus is at Christmas.

J. Vernon McGee said, "It's one of the greatest theological statements in the Scriptures, some consider it the greatest doctrinal statement in the New Testament relative to the Person of Christ." I like what James Boice said, "This passage is among the most glorious sections of the New Testament. In these few verses we see great sweep of Christ's life from eternity past to eternity future," so it's a great Christological passage that focuses for us on the Person of Jesus Christ.

The question is why at this point in the book of Philippians, which has as the theme the joy of the Lord, is Paul talking about Christ? Well, first of all, he'd been pleading with them in verses 1-4 for unity and for humility. Look at verses 3-4 with me. He says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind"—or humility of mind—"let each consider others better and more important than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own interests, but every man on the interests of others." You say, "What translation were you reading there?" I was reading the John Miller translation. I was kind of bypassing the old English and putting it in more modern language. But this is a marvelous point where Paul in the epistle says, "Look, I want you to have the same mind that Christ had. I want you to have the lowly, humble mind. I want you to consider others more important than yourselves. I want you to look not on your own concerns or interests but on the interests and concerns of others." He was pleading with them for unity and for humility.

In light of that, Paul moves to Christ our example. So, there's the pleading for unity and humility, and then there's the pattern that Jesus Christ is our example. Here's the cool thing. We have

this great passage on Christ—it's deep, it's theological, it's doctrinal—but its purpose is not for information, it's for life transformation. Some people say that doctrine is not practical. I tend to disagree with that. I believe that doctrine is practical. You can't live the Christian life without knowing what the Christian life is. In the middle of this practical exhortation to be humble, to walk in unity, to consider others more important than yourself, he gives us the example—the supreme example—of Jesus Christ. Paul's purpose in the passage was not to teach doctrine but to use the doctrine of Christ to illustrate his exhortation to oneness, lowliness, and to helpfulness. Paul's picture of the Lord Jesus as our pattern or example is a powerful incentive to unity and humility. So, when you spend time looking at who Jesus is, it motivates us to walk in humility.

I want to outline for you verses 5-11. This is not exactly what we're going to cover tonight, but I want you to get a good feel for this section of Scripture. In verse 5, we have Christ the illustration or the illustration of Christ walking in humility as having the mind of Christ. In verses 6-8, we have the humility of Christ. In verses 9-11, we have the exaltation of Christ. Tonight we're going to look together at verses 5-8, and we see the illustration and the humility of Christ.

First of all, if you're outlining tonight's message, verse 5, we see the illustration of Christ. Christ illustrates for us what it means to walk in humility, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul does two things in verse 5: he issues a command, and then he gives us the example of Jesus Christ. Now, the command there in verse 5 is to let the " . . . mind be in you, which was all in Christ Jesus," and that is what's called a present imperative in the Greek. In other words, it's not a suggestion. It's not just do it if you want to do it, it's a command. It's an imperative, and it's in the present tense. It means we are to ongoingly, continually have the mind of Christ. Then, he gives us the example, verse 5, " . . . which was also in Christ Jesus." So, verse 5 is a transition from exhortation to illustration.

What does Paul mean by the mind of Christ? You might translate that humble attitude or unselfish devotion. The same attitude, same heart, same outlook, same humility that Jesus had, we also are to have. Now, if Christ is in you, then He wants to reproduce Himself through you. It only stands to reason the Holy Spirit is trying to produce Christlikeness in us. If Christ was humble, we should be humble; if Christ thought of others, we should think of others; if Christ denied Himself and gave Himself for others, we should do the very same thing in our Christian walk.

What does Paul mean by the mind of Christ? He means the disposition of the eternal Son of God even before He came to earth He regarded no sacrifice as too great, no humility as too painful in accomplishing His redeeming work. I love what Charles Erdman said, "As Christ stooped from heaven to earth that He might secure our redemption, so His followers should be willing to make sacrifices to undertake lowly, self-forgetful tasks in the service of others." Jesus is always our prime example. Amen? And we should be more like Him. Write down 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he"—that is, Christ—"walked." So, if you're a Christian, and you're abiding in Jesus, then you should be walking even as Christ walked. That's the exhortation and the illustration.

Secondly, we have, verses 6-8, the humiliation of Christ, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This is the humiliation of Christ. In these three verses, Paul paints three pictures of Christ. This is where I do want you to take some notes and write down these points. It's very simple, but it's very clearly from the text.

First of all, verse 6, we see Jesus the sovereign, His deity. He's God. In verse 7, we see the servant, Christ humbled Himself, ". . . and took upon him the form of a servant." In verse 8, we see Jesus the sacrifice, that He gave Himself on the cross, the death of Christ, for our sins. We will see seven steps down from heaven to earth in this section, that He comes from heaven to earth. It's really a beautiful Christmas text as well, that He left heaven, right? When we think of Christmas, we need to think of Him leaving heaven and coming to earth. What a blessing that is.

I want to point out first of all His sovereignty in verse 6, His sovereign deity, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Now, what does the word "form" mean here? I know you've heard me teach this passage before, but I want to remind you. It's the Greek word *morph*. The word *morph*, translated "form" does not mean outward shape as we would say maybe when you're playing tennis, "Look, he had great form as he played tennis." It's speaking of inner essence. It's speaking of inner nature. It denotes the inner nature, not the external appearance. It's saying, "Jesus is God." This is one of the clear affirmations in the New Testament that Jesus Christ is divine.

Some people say, "Jesus never claimed to be God," which is wrong. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." They picked up stones to stone Him. He's claiming to be God. Every time Jesus used the word *eg S eimí*, "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" "I am the door;" "I am the bread of life;" "I am the good shepherd," He was claiming to be Jehovah. Amen? Here Paul makes it very clear that He is God, "Who, being in the form of God" It's saying Jesus is God. The NIV actually translates this, "Who, being in very nature God," and that is a really good translation.

Notice ". . . being in very nature God," means that Jesus did not become God. To be in the form of God because as God He was from all eternity divine. He is the eternal God. One of the attributes of God is that God is eternal, right? God always has been; God always will be. I know we can't wrap our minds around that, which in my case is no big deal, my mind can't get around a lot of things. I get lost on my smartphone where I don't know what's going on. How could I understand God's nature? But God is eternal. He's always existed. There was never a time when God did not exist, and that was true of Jesus Christ. ". . . being," indicates His essence, that He's always been eternal God.

Jesus, as the second Person of the triune God, is eternal. Write down John 1:1. I know I quote it a lot, especially at Christmas time. What does it say? "In the beginning was the Word, and

the Word was with God,”—and then, get this last statement—“and the Word was God,” or it would actually read, “And God was the Word.” So, there’s three things said about Jesus in John 1:1. He’s the eternal God, “In the beginning was the Word;” He is the personal Word, “and the Word was with God.” Do you know what that word “with” means? It literally means face to face. So, you have the Father and the Son, face to face. Then, it says, “and the Word was God.” He’s the divine Word. So, He’s the eternal Word, He’s the personal Word, He is the divine Word. Jesus Christ is God.

Jesus Christ was not the most God-conscious man who ever lived, nor was He simply Godlike, rather He was equal with God because He was divine. Jesus pre-existed Bethlehem. He said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” In Colossians 1:17, “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist,”—or are held together. In John 17:5, Jesus talked about the things He had with the Father before the world was ever created. Jesus possessed divine attributes. All the attributes that are true of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are true of Jesus Christ, and Jesus claimed to be God in John 10:30. He said, “I and my Father are one,”—one in essence. He is divine.

The Bible says in Hebrews 1:8, “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” There God calls Jesus God, so don’t ever let some sign on the 215 freeway deceive you, a big sign on the freeway, “Jesus is not God. He never claimed to be God.” Nothing could be further from the truth—antichrist bulletin board. Jesus is God. It’s so important. Jesus is the eternal God in heaven with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity past. Write down Micah 5:2, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old,”—even—“from everlasting.” This is who Jesus is, and this is where Jesus came from. He’s the preincarnate Son of God.

Notice secondly, verse 7, we have His servanthood. So, His servanthood conveys His humanity. You might make a note that verse 6 is sovereignty or deity; verse 7 is His servanthood, His humanity. Go back to verse 7, “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” This is the verse that we get our phrase that He emptied Himself or kenosis, He poured Himself out. So, the sovereign becomes the servant.

The first three steps down begin. Don’t let me confuse you with these steps down, but what we’re going to see seven steps down tonight, and then we’re going to see the seven steps up in the exaltation next Wednesday night as we celebrate communion. Now, notice step one, verse 7, He “made himself of no reputation,”—literally, that means He emptied Himself. This is the kenosis statement. What does He mean by He emptied Himself? Most importantly, I want you to note He did not, He could not, empty Himself of His deity. God can never stop being God. One of the worst interpretations of this verse that you could possibly have is to say that Jesus laid aside His deity. Never, ever, ever did Jesus lay aside His deity. That’s an impossibility.

God is also immutable. Do you know what immutable means? It means does not change, and

actually God is the only thing—this kind of always has blown my mind—that never changes. You change, I change, we change. If you don't believe that, go look up your high school annuals from 25 years ago, and look at your picture. Look at people that you went to school with. Everyone changes; nothing stays the same. But God never, ever changes. He's “. . . the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Praise God for that. So, He did not lay aside His deity. In Malachi 3:6, “For I am the LORD, I change not . . .” His divine attributes, He did not give those up. He did not cease to have them, being God He had them.

What He did give up or empty Himself of let me list for you. He temporarily divested Himself of His divine majesty, splendor, and glory. Someone called this the insignia of His majesty. So, all the glory that He had as God, He temporarily laid it aside by veiling His deity in humanity. Remember when He was on the Mount Transfiguration and it says that He shined brightly before the disciples? I picture this as Jesus pulling back His humanity and allowing His divine nature to shine forth, so we sing, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see / Hail th' incarnate Deity! / Pleased as man with man to dwell / Jesus our Immanuel.” So He laid aside His majesty, His glory, and His splendor. That's what it means that He laid it aside or emptied Himself up.

Secondly, He also emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine authority. In other words, He came as a Man, that's His humanity, and He submitted to the Father, and He only used the miraculous power when it was in the Father's will, plan, and purpose. Remember when He was tempted of the devil in the wilderness? “If thou be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” He didn't do that because it wasn't God's purpose, plan, and time. He wasn't going to use His miraculous power outside of the will of the Father's plan and purpose for Him. So, He laid aside the independent use of His divine authority.

Thirdly, He emptied Himself of the voluntary exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus, when He was here on earth in His incarnate state, had all the divine attributes—He was omniscient, He was omnipotent, He was even omnipresent. He was all those things, but He didn't use them in a way that would take Him out of His humanity. He lived as a Man in dependence upon the Father.

Fourthly, He emptied Himself of His eternal riches. Write down 2 Corinthians 8:9. He emptied Himself of His eternal riches. Fifthly, He emptied Himself temporarily of His face-to-face relationship with the Father. Remember as He hung on the cross and He cried, “. . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” So, He actually laid aside that face-to-face relationship that He had with the Father. What an interesting thought. Jesus Christ emptied Himself.

Notice step two, verse 7, “. . . and took upon him the form of a servant . . .” Again, the morph , the form. This is a reference to His humanity. He was in the form of God, verse 6, in essence God. In verse 7, “. . . took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Jesus Christ became a true human. Sinless because of the virgin birth and His holy nature, but He was a full human being, a true human—He was thirsty, He was tired, He was hungry, He had to sleep, He had to eat, He had emotions that were human. He became a man just like us. So, “. . . and took upon him the form of a servant . . .” The divine Son who with the

Father was supreme over all now became the servant of all and wholly submissive to His Father.

When you celebrate Christmas remember that Jesus came from glory to earth in the form of a baby. Someone said, "God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man." What an amazing thought. That Child born in Bethlehem is actually God in the flesh. This was for the first time in all history a true incarnation—not a manifestation, but an incarnation. Humanity was fused together with deity for all of eternity. Wow! What an amazing thing! That's what we celebrate at Christmas.

Here's step three, verse 7, ". . . and was made in the likeness of men." He was truly a Man. This is His full humanity—the supernatural conception of Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. Write down John 1:14. It says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." That's literally, He pitched His tent among us. Think about that. He pitched His tent among us. He came in the form of a man, amazing! "(And we beheld his glory"—the glory He had with the Father before the world was—"full of grace and truth." Someone said He, "Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day, And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay," the true humanity of Jesus.

It's important that you understand that His humanity was sinless. He was in all points tempted like you are and I, but He was without sin; sinless humanity, so He could be the substitute for our sin. Jesus was truly Man, but not merely a man, that's a false teaching. Isaiah 9, ". . . a child is born . . . a son is given," so He's the Son who was given, that's His deity; He's the child who was born, that's Christ's humanity. Jesus in His humanity was just like us, except no sin. He did experience suffering. He did experience sorrow. He did have disappointments. He did face temptations. But unlike us, He never sinned.

Thirdly, look at the sacrifice, our last verse tonight, verse 8. So, we have the sovereign, verse 6, His deity; we have the servant, verse 7, His humanity; and we have His sacrifice, verse 8, His crucifixion, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." So, where have we gone? We've gone from heaven to earth to the cross. He came from heaven, went to the cross, then He's going to be resurrected obviously from the dead, and we'll look at His exaltation and ascension next week.

Look at verse 8 with me, step four, "And being found in fashion as a man," now, I've already alluded to the fact that He was truly Man. You know, so often we focus mainly in defending the deity of Christ, which is right and proper and we should, but did you know it's just as heretical and greatly in error to deny His real, genuine humanity. That's known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics taught that Jesus wasn't really a man, He was just a manifestation, and He wasn't really in flesh, that God could never interact with flesh that way. So, we cannot deny His deity, but we cannot deny His full humanity either, ". . . being found in"—appearance—"as a man."

It's been said, "Those who find in Christ only ideal manhood and nothing more have not yet discovered the Christ of Scriptures." This is what theologians call the hypostatic union. That means two natures in one Person—fully God and fully Man; truly God or truly Man. He's the

God-Man. That's why He's the perfect One to save mankind. He's the bridge builder. He's the only hope to heaven. In John 1:10-11, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not." In 1 John 1:1-2, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)". So, He was a Man, truly a Man.

Notice step five, verse 8, ". . . he humbled himself . . ." Not only did He come from heaven, not only did He become a Man, not only did He become a Man, but He became a humble Man. He humbled himself. Jesus was not humbled by others, rather He humbled Himself. He voluntarily submitted Himself to the will of the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, remember how He prayed? He said, "Father . . . not my will, but thine, be done," when ". . . his sweat was as it were great drops of blood." He agonized about going to the cross, having to drink the cup of suffering and the sin of the world placed upon Him. He was feeling all that in His sinless, perfect humanity. He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." How powerful, Jesus Christ truly divine.

Here's step six, we're almost there, verse 8, ". . . and became obedient unto death," Jesus actually died. This is why I was telling you these are the steps down. We still have one more step. He left heaven, came to earth, born humble in a stable, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and then He's going to go to the cross, ". . . and became obedient unto death." He voluntarily gave His life upon the cross. Only a divine being can accept death as obedience. That's an interesting thought, for ordinary men it is necessary. He ". . . became obedient unto death." There's no issue for you or me about whether or not we're going to be obedient unto death. We're going to die whether we like it or not. But Jesus voluntarily gave His life and died for us upon the cross.

Here's step seven, verse 8, ". . . even the death of the cross." Not only did He take on humanity, not only did He become humble, not only did He die, but He died upon a cruel cross by crucifixion under the Roman government. Jesus not only died, but He died by crucifixion. His death was a cruel execution. You know, even Paul the apostle, who wrote the book of Philippians, being a Roman citizen couldn't have been crucified. But Jesus actually was crucified upon a cross. The extent of Christ's humiliation can be seen in that He went from the throne of divine majesty to the cross of agony. He went from the throne of divine majesty to the cross of human agony. He became sin for us. Jesus died for us. He suffered in our place.

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Let me give you three things about that death on the cross. He did it to rescue us from sin. This is what's called redemption. When you think of Christmas, you think of Him coming from heaven, taking on flesh to go to the cross to suffer and die. He was born to die—redemption. Secondly, to defeat the devil—conquest. He came to conquer Satan and to defeat Satan at the cross. Thirdly, He came to reveal the Father's love.

I love John's gospel, chapter 1, verse 18, where it says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," it says in the King James Bible. That word "declared" means to explain, to reveal. We actually get our word exegete or explain. God came into this world at Christmas to explain Himself so that we can see His love, see His grace, see His mercy, see His compassion, understand Him. He also came to be a sympathetic and compassionate High Priest, and He also came to be our example as Paul lays out in this great passage on Christ these important doctrinal truths that we should have the same mind or attitude " . . . which was also in Christ Jesus," that we should have it in ourselves.

Remember in John 13, when Jesus was in the upper room, we just finished the Upper Room Discourse, and Jesus got up from supper and put a towel around His waist, and He got the basin and the bowl and began to wash the disciples' feet. At the end of doing that He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." How can we learn these important truths about Christ and not have the same mind, the same heart, the same attitude? How can we learn these important truths and not be humble, not be servants, not sacrifice, and not give ourselves for others? Jesus is our example. Amen?