

The Completion of Humiliation

⁸ 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. (Phil. 2:8)

Imagine walking into a weight-loss gym or studio, and all the staff who meet you are morbidly obese. You're a bit surprised, but you're even more surprised when you are introduced to your personal trainer, who is too obese to even get up. And between bites of doughnut and swigs of milkshake, he tells you how his weight-loss programme is guaranteed to work.

You'd be rather perplexed, and you would start to lose confidence in the place. The same would happen if you walked into a clinic for drug-rehabilitation, and found that the staff were all high on drugs, some were comatose on the floor, with plenty of drugs and needles lying around. Or if you went to a financial advisor's place and found it dilapidated and shabby, and if he asked you to loan him some money for food and transport before you left. If you went to a mechanic, and found his car wouldn't start. We expect that when people say they have solutions for us, it is working for them as well.

That's then the experience of anyone who walks into a church, and finds it is torn apart by pride. A church riddled with conflict, envy, strife and rivalry is a contradiction in terms. It is people claiming to know the secret of health, who are themselves very sick. The church claims to have the answer to human pride, selfishness, and perpetual conflict. We have the solution to racism, class warfare, marital conflict, abuse of women and children.

At the heart of any sinful conflict is pride. Count on it. If you remove pride, the conflict ends.

Proverbs 13:10 By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised *is* wisdom. (Prov. 13:10)

Proverbs 22:10 Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; Yes, strife and reproach will cease. (Prov. 22:10)

At the root of every act of disunity and strife and conflict is one or more parties hanging on to being right, or looking good, or not admitting they were wrong. It is impossible to have two humble people in a perpetual war with no resolution.

The answer to pride-based conflict is humility-based service, empowered by the cross of Christ. And so if there is one thing that the church should be characterised by, it's humble, selfless service of each other that leads to unity.

When churches are ripped apart by splits and in-fighting and jealousies and rivalries, it is because the people in that church have either never understood, or only partially understand the gospel. Within the gospel is the story of the one who was Highest, but descended to the lowest, in order to save others. The gospel is a story of selfless service, of someone giving up His rights, laying down His privileges and prerogatives to serve others. The example of Jesus and our supernatural union with that example should forever humble any Christian who is thinking of demanding his rights, and insisting upon certain treatment, and quarreling with anyone who does not do so.

For this reason, Paul wants the Philippians to imitate Christ in their treatment of each other. He wants them to adopt His attitude of selfless service, so that when the Roman world, which is just dripping with pride and ambition and conflict, sees them, they see the gospel in action. Before a church has even preached the message of Christ dying and rising for our sins, the world should see the effects and the fruits of the gospel.

Paul has told the Philippians in verses 1-4 to serve each other selflessly. He then began explaining that the one mind they should all have is the mind of Christ in verse 5.

We have already seen from last week that Jesus relinquished His royal rights even though He had the right to hang on to all the status and badges of Deity. Instead, He received a servant's role. He disrobed, He emptied Himself, so as to fulfil His mission.

Today we look at what is likely the second stanza of this hymn, where we see three more steps of humility that Jesus took. As we dwell together, as we serve together, we should ask, how low am I willing to go in my service of others? How far down the scale of humiliation am I willing to stoop to serve others? The Lord Jesus humbled Himself to become a man, to become a mortal, and to be misunderstood.

I. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to Be a Man

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself

Here is the second main verb of this hymn. The first was in verse 7: he emptied Himself (or made Himself of no reputation). Here the main action is: He humbled himself.

When you hear the word *humbled*, think of the ideas of lower, descending, abasing. It carries the negative connotation of being demoted, defeated, even shamed and dishonoured. It is no surprise then, that our English word *humility* is directly related to the word *humiliate*.

In fact, for the ancient Greeks and Romans, humility was not something to be admired or sought after. *Pietas*, yes, *Gravitas*, yes, *Dignitas*, yes – but not *humilitas*. And when you define humility as we just have, I think we have an aversion to it as well. Who wants to seek their own humiliation, demotion, abasement?

Why did He humble Himself? “Being found in appearance as man”

Here we have the reason for Jesus humbling Himself. He was found in appearance as a man. That doesn't mean He found Himself in a situation He was unprepared for. It means once He was in this situation, He humbled Himself. He responded to and adapted Himself to this new situation.

The word for appearance is the Greek word *schemati*. You might remember from verse 6 that when Paul says Jesus was in the form of God, the Greek word is *morphe*. It doesn't mean He was a fake man, or just projecting an image of being a man to people; it means that He was more than just a man. He was fully human, but more than fully human. On the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples got to see that He was more than fully human.

Once he found Himself as Jesus of Nazareth, He humbled Himself, He stooped to adapt to that position. And it was humbling, make no mistake. How humbling would it be to go from Deity to creature?

“Lying at your feet is your dog. Imagine, for the moment, that your dog and every dog is in deep distress. Some of us love dogs very much. If it would help all the dogs in the world to become like men, would you be willing to become a dog? Would you put down your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, hobbies, your art and literature and music, and choose instead of the intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into the beloved's face and wagging

your tail, unable to smile or speak? Christ by becoming man limited the thing which to Him was the most precious thing in the world; his unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father.”
C.S. Lewis.

What do you think the Lord's attitude was to being a man?

Did He scoff and scorn at human nature with its limitations? Did He say, I used to see all things without so much as moving my eyes, now I have to stare out of these two squishy eyeballs that need to blink every few seconds? Did He say, I have never needed anything, but been the supplier, the fountain for everything, and now I have this ridiculous body that needs to be fed and watered and rested and washed? Did He walk through those dusty streets of Nazareth, and compare it to the glories of Heaven, and feel continual disgust? Did He despise these needy, ignorant, aging, weak people around Him? Or was the Incarnation a humble embracing of human nature?

No, the text says, being found in fashion as a man, that is being found in human form, He humbled Himself. But we're told here that he humbled himself. It is an active verb, not a passive one. He did this; it was not done to Him. When He found Himself in human form, He embraced the task with humility. He embraced it. He did what He did that night when He washed the disciples' feet. He disrobed, accepted a role He needed to play, and did it without grudge.

We're all in different places in life, some through God-given ability, some through God-given opportunity. And in one church, you will have people of very different levels of education, and wealth, and knowledge, and personal beauty. And some people don't smell as nice as others, and some are really awkward in conversation, and some are difficult.

As Christians, we descend to the level of our brother and sister to dwell with them. Paul says in Romans 12 ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. (Rom. 12:16)

When next you are tempted to scorn someone at church, or feel he or she is beneath your conversation, or not smart enough or clever enough or wise enough to be interesting to you, remember that the Lord embraced being human.

But He stooped lower.

II. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to be a Mortal

“and became obedient to the point of death”

The Son's humility was revealed in submission. He obeyed. We saw last week what it meant that the Son became a slave. He had always existed with complete independent authority, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. He had never been in a place where He only acted because of an order from someone else. We saw last time that He became a slave to His Father and to the Spirit.

So the question becomes: how far was He willing to obey? Ask yourself, how far would you obey one of the authorities in your life? The Government, your boss, your pastor, your parents. Leaving aside sinful commands, which we cannot obey, how far would we be willing to go? We all have limits.

When Alexander the Great once approached a city with a small army and demanded its surrender, they laughed at him from their high walls. He then ordered his men to throw themselves off a nearby cliff. As the men began doing that, one by one, the people in the city watched amazed from

the walls. Alexander told his men to stop, and turned back to the city. The city, once they saw the unquestioning obedience of Alexander's men, voluntarily surrendered the city.

History has enough examples of people willing to obey unto death. Brave soldiers accept that risk. Firefighters, rescue workers are willing to obey to death. Kamikazes and suicide bombers obey unto death. But the difference between those people and the Lord Jesus is this: those people, like us are all already under the curse of death. As part of Adam's race, death is inevitable at some point. Those people are simply bringing the date forward, or being willing to face it earlier than natural causes would bring.

But the Lord Jesus was not under the curse of death. He was the Second Adam. Born of a virgin and without a sin nature, He was not going to die of natural causes. He was immortal. He was what Adam and Eve were before the fall. For Him to obey unto death was to take something that was not His natural fate, and swallow it, drink the poison of the cross.

Think moreover that not only was He the Second Adam, but as God, He was immortal. You and I have life, He is life.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (Joh 1:4)

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (Joh 10:10)

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (Joh 11:25)

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Joh 14:6)

If I may say it, death is something foreign to the person of God. Death is what creatures face when they turn away from the life that is God. But how does the Life face death? How does the fountain of Life experience the drought of death? Was it forced? Did He have to?

18 "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. This command I have received from My Father." (Joh 10:18)

He told Peter He could have called on legions of angels to deliver Him. Here was the Lord of life, willing to die. Here was God the Son, submitting to the curse for sin. Here was the Judge, voluntarily coming under His own judgement.

Why did He do it? For others. He laid down His life for mankind. He laid down His life for us.

⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (1 Jn. 3:16)

When we find we are hoarding: hoarding our time, hoarding our money, hoarding our advice, hoarding our counsel, defending ourselves against others, remember, what did Jesus lay down for us? Do I get to be defensive and self-protective and aggressive with brethren? Not if I have the mind of Christ. Then my attitude becomes: I am His, He is mine; He laid down His life, what is it that I am keeping to myself?

How low did He go? He became a man. He submitted to death. But he went even lower.

III. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to Be Misunderstood

“even the death of the cross.”

Paul takes it further and says “even the death of the cross” Jesus was willing to have His entire life and death be misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Jesus did not die in a bed. He did not die gloriously in battle. He died hanging on a cross, a punishment reserved for the dregs of society.

Crucifixion was not simply a form of execution in Roman times. When someone was executed, most often he was beheaded, or even given poison to drink. Beheading is quick and without much pain or humiliation. Crucifixion, on the other hand, was a form of death by torture and humiliation. Crucifixion would result in agonising pain, that could last for hours or even days. Crucified persons were usually stripped naked, and often placed along highways for people to see. Very often, crucified men were not buried, but left on the cross to decompose and be destroyed by birds, animals and insects.

Roman citizens could not be crucified. Middle and upper class people could not be crucified. Crucifixion was so humiliating, so distasteful, so obnoxious, that only the poor, the slaves, the rebellious from other nations could be crucified. The Roman statesman Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty" (Verrem 2:5.165), and also said “the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears”.

Crucifixion was regarded in Rome as a slave's death. The expression *servile supplicium* (“slaves’ punishment”) came to be used as a technical term for death by crucifixion. To see a crucified man was to see someone who had offended the world in the deepest way, or had been at the very bottom of society.

The idea of a god having been crucified was so laughable to Romans, that ancient graffiti has been found mocking the idea. The Alexamenos graffiti has a donkey on a cross, with the inscription “Alexamenos worships his god”.

The kamikaze, the suicide bomber, the soldier, the rescuer all go that far because theirs is a noble death. They at least know they will be heroes. Jesus humbled Himself and embraced a death of shame, ridicule and scorn, a death that was easy, if not inevitable to misunderstand and misinterpret.

Would you go that low, if you knew that your ultimate sacrifice would be misunderstood? Would you be willing to have your whole life's mission misinterpreted? Why did He do this? For the sake of His Father's glory, and for love of the world. Selfless service.

Are you willing to sometimes be misunderstood? To have your service misinterpreted, your actions maligned, your sacrifice regarded as no sacrifice at all. You will have to, at some point, if you are a believer, dwelling with other believers. Why would you do it? Because Christ did, and you follow Him down the J-Curve.

If you take verses 6 to 8 in one, you can spot exactly seven steps going down, or giving up rights, of emptying and humbling himself. First, he didn't cling to His rights as being equal with God. Second, he emptied Himself. Third, he took the form of a slave. Fourth, He came in the likeness of man. Fifth, he humbled Himself, Sixth, he was obedient to death. Seventh, to the death of the cross.

How low did He go? From royal privileges, down, down to being a slave to his Father and the

Spirit, down to being a man with the limitations and finiteness, down to being a mortal, embracing the very opposite of His own life-giving nature, down to the death of the cross a place of shame, and worst of all, the place of separation from His Father.

That's how low He went.

"In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the whole mass before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders. Or one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too."

If this is one we worship in the church, and this is what He did, to what degree can I claim my rights and my prerogatives? How much may I demand that I be given certain privileges? What role may I refuse to take on? How much should I defend my reputation? To what degree should I fight for position and status in the church? No, all of that is pride, and it belongs to the old world, the old life. It is part the the disease, not the cure, part of the problem, not the solution.

When people walk in here, they should not see that we preach a solution to conflict that doesn't work here. We should not be overweight fitness instructors, mechanics whose own cars are broken, piano teachers who can't play. No, within the house of God, self-emptying, humility and selfless service should be a way of life. Why? Because we absorb and copy the mind of Christ, who emptied Himself and humbled Himself for others.