

Christ's Humiliation

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5-7)

One of the topics that came up often enough between the twelve was who was really the boss, and who would be greatest when Jesus was on His throne. The Bible doesn't tell us the debate, but you can picture them saying, "Jesus chose me first!" "Jesus did a miracle to call me!" "Jesus invited me onto the Mount of Transfiguration, and not you!" "I was one of John the Baptist's disciples and then Jesus chose me!" And even though He had taught them on several occasions that the greatest one is the one who serves, and humility is the path to promotion, they were still arguing about this to the very end. And so on that most special night of Passover, when every Jew would have looked forward to a special meal with special hospitality, the twelve found themselves in a borrowed Upper Room without a clear host or hostess, without servants, and so they all came in and looked around wondering what to do about the customary washing of feet that needed to be done. At that point, Jesus took off some of his outer garments, rolled up sleeves, tucked in and tightened loose garments, and took a basin and began washing each man's feet. It had to have taken some time, for Jesus to work His way through all the twelve. And as He did so, I imagine the embarrassment, and the awkwardness, and the shame they felt, as their Master was the only one among them willing to be a servant. Perhaps that graphic lesson of servanthood finally cured them of the me-firstness and the competition among them.

Paul wanted the very same lesson to come home to the Philippians. The Philippians lived in an "I'm-the-greatest culture". Philippi was a Roman colony and the Roman had something known as a *cursus honorum*. An honours' race, where you climbed the social ladder, accumulating titles. At some point, those titles would be publicly proclaimed in some kind of inscription or statue erected either by someone they had benefited, or by themselves.

For example, this is an actual inscription found in Philippi: "Publius Marius Valens, son of Publius, from the tribe Voltinia, honored with the decorations of a decurion [town council of Philippi], aedile, also decurion of Philippi, priest of the divine Antoninus Pius, duumvir [the highest civic office in the colony] sponsor of games"

Now in that culture, Paul has been telling the Philippians to do the opposite. Instead of exalting themselves and competing, they are to allow the gospel to fill them with the mind of Christ. We saw in verses 1 to 4, that this same mind is a mind of selfless service, not a mind of selfish ambition.

It is this mind we are supposed to have: verse 5: ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus

And now in verses 5 to 8, Paul is going to describe this mind of Christ. In one of the most exalted passages in the New Testament, Paul shows us what kind of attitude and mind should characterise Christians within the local church. Scholars have debated over whether this was already a hymn used by the church, or whether Paul authored it. It has some of the structure of a hymn, and some of the form of what in ancient rhetoric was called an encomium: an ascription of praise. Tonight we'll study just verses 6 and 7, and see two acts of profound humility that are to be the kind of mind we are to have with each other.

I. The Lord Jesus Relinquished His Royal Rights

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, (Phil. 2:5-6)

This likemindedness that we should have, this one mindedness that will show forth the gospel to the world is the very same mindset that Jesus had. The Lord Jesus relinquished His royal rights.

Where do we see that? First we're told in verse 6 ⁶ who, being in the form of God,
A literal translation would be “who existing in the form of God”. He had always existed like this, and still does.

What does 'the form of God' mean? The word *form* translated the Greek word *morphe*, and it means the true nature of something, as well as its outward appearance. The form of something is its actual quality, its essence. It is the inner character or quality.

This is one of the strongest statements in all of Scripture of the deity of Jesus Christ. Before Bethlehem, the person we now call Jesus had always existed and lived with the glory and splendour of being God the Son. Before He took a human, material form, Jesus had always existed as God. Before the universe was brought into being, before the beginning of the beginning, Jesus had been in the form, in the *morphe* of God.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.

John 17:5 "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Paul's point to us is not merely what He always was, but what He did with that honour and that status. What does the text say that He did, even though He had always existed in the form of God?

did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

This is a difficult phrase and it comes out a bit clumsily in our English translation. A hyper literal translation would be this: He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

A lot hinges on what Paul means by this word translated *robbery* in the NKJV. It is used only here in the New Testament, and it's a very rare word. It can mean something seized unlawfully, like robbery, or it can mean something held onto and gripped tenaciously for personal advantage. So the text either means Jesus was not equal with God and didn't try to steal equality with God, or it means, Jesus was equal with God did not cling and fight to hold onto the privileges of equality with God.

Paul has just told us that Jesus had always existed in the form of God. So Paul must mean Jesus had always existed in the form of God, and yet, He did not regard His status as being God something to be so tightly gripped that He could not surrender its advantages or prerogatives. He did not regard His position as equal to God the Father and God the Spirit with all its royal privileges as something to be protected and fought for and defended.

What were some of those royal privileges?

25 To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen. (Jud 1:25)

Glory means beauty. That which is most excellent, most attractive and precious and valuable. One of the royal rights of the Son was unequalled beauty that was the pleasure and delight of all to behold. The Lord never earned this or made this, or improved upon it. He had it by right. But He

was willing to surrender it for an appearance which Isaiah 53:2 says, “ He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is* no beauty that we should desire Him (Isa. 53:2)

Majesty means importance or greatness. Amongst all the ranks of greatness in the heavens, and Scripture shows quite a sophisticated hierarchy archangels, dominion, thrones, principalities, powers, amongst the millions of created angelic beings with their princes, generals, captains, footsoldiers, supreme above all was the importance and greatness of God Himself. He was willing to give that up to be an unknown carpenter in Nazareth.

Dominion – sovereignty, the control over creation. God the Son had always enjoyed absolute, unmediated sovereignty over all created things. He was willing to give that up and live with limitations.

Power – authority, the right to exercise that sovereignty.

Infinite beauty, unmatched supremacy, unequalled control, and unquestioned authority. These were the badges of royalty that God the Son wore.

The Bible says that God the Son made a judgement in His mind, and the judgement was this: He did not have to hang on to the privileges and rights and honours and delights of being God the Son. For the sake of our salvation, for the sake of bringing grace, Jesus did not cling to His rights.

This was the attitude of Jesus Christ before He came to earth. This was His attitude when He came to earth. Here is God, saying, I do not have to have all my privileges and glory and status all the time. I can surrender them for the sake of this dying race of rebels, called mankind.

Do you know what's interesting? When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, what did he say? Eat of this, so you can be equal with God. Though you are not God, reach up, and take it, because God is keeping it from you. How wickedly deceptive. God was actually willing to give up some privileges, if necessary. Satan was the usurper, and encouraged our race to become usurpers.

And ever since then, which mindset, which attitude is natural to man? “Give me mine! Give me my rights! Don't deny me my privileges! I deserve this status, this honour, this recognition! I must have what is due to me!”

Well, have you ever heard someone say, “Do you know who I am?” What is such a person saying when he or she says that? He is saying, “You have mistreated me. I deserve the highest, and I will in no way submit to this kind of treatment. You will recognise and honour my rights, my privileges.

That's what Paul says to the Philippians as they live in a society competing for honours. And it is what he says to us. With such a Saviour do we dare treat each other with a “Do you know who I am” attitude? When One so high, relinquished those royal rights, how can we become touchy about how we are treated? Or protective over my ministry, or my position, or my duties? Or insistent that I be recognised, credited, thanked? Or brittle if he or she speaks to me in that way? Or quietly envious that everyone seems to just love her or praise him, or admire her, or thank him?

No, this is the mind we must have: the only One who had ever had the right to demand His rights, chose to relinquish them. I don't have rights; all the more I should be willing to lay down my imagined rights and titles and status so as to selflessly serve.

That leads us to the second humble action that the Lord did.

II. The Lord Jesus Surrendered to Submissive Service

Philippians 2:7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:7)

The Lord Jesus made Himself of no reputation. Again, this is a slightly awkward translation. The straight literal translation is: He emptied Himself. What does that mean? There have been some false teachings surrounding this verse. The Greek for emptied is *kenoo*, and so in theology people talk about the *kenosis*: where Jesus emptied Himself. But what did Jesus empty Himself of? Some have said it means He emptied Himself of His Deity. According to them, He emptied Himself of His divine nature. But that's not what this means. If God could empty Himself of being God then what is left? Who would the God-man be if He could divest Himself of deity?

Paul tells you what it means with His next words: taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Here is what it meant that Jesus emptied Himself. He took the form of a slave – He embraced submission and service. He surrendered to submissive service.

Now you have to know how that would have been heard in Roman ears. In Roman culture, there was nothing worse than being a slave, a *doulos*. Dio Chrysostom, a Greek philosopher of this era said that, “slavery is the most shameful and wretched of states”. Tacitus, a Roman historian of this time said slaves are the “dregs of society”. Philippi was populated by the descendants of the Roman soldiers who had established the colony at Philippi. Slaves were excluded from Rome’s citizen army.

Paul says, this One, the one who had existed always in the form of God, surrendered to being a slave.

What does a slave do, that a king does not? What has a slave been emptied of? A slave has lost his own freedom. He now lives entirely at the will of His master. He lives under another's authority. He lives a life of total surrender and total obedience.

As always having existed in the form of God, and continuing to exist in that *morphe*, Jesus enjoyed the prerogative of being served, and being obeyed. He had given the orders, and they had been obeyed. He had sat on the throne of majesty, and had ten thousand times ten thousand angels adore Him and serve Him. His will was the same will as that of the Father and Spirit.

But now as the God-Man, He had two wills: the will He had always had, but now a second will that submitted to God. One person, but two wills. We see that in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the Person of Jesus is wrestling His human will to conform to His and the Father's divine will. Jesus was now in submission. Now He embraced the life of a slave.

But it hadn't been that way in eternity past, where Father, Son and Holy Spirit lived in mutual joy, in co-equal glory. Now the Son was a slave of the Father and the Spirit. As you read the Gospel of John, you will find everywhere Jesus is reporting on His submissive relationship to the Father.

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (Jn. 5:30)

⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (Jn. 6:38)

⁵⁰ "And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. (Jn. 8:50)

There's a second way He emptied Himself. Paul says He came in the likeness of men. To accomplish His mission He not only embraced a new position under the Father and the Spirit, but He genuinely became a man.

By *likeness*, Paul does not mean Jesus only looked like a man, but wasn't really a man; he means Jesus truly appeared as a man, but was more than just a man. He was God before He was man. But then He added to Himself a true human nature. He was the God-man.

Before Bethlehem, we see the Son of God appearing to men as a man. But before Bethlehem, He had not become a man. He appears to Abraham and Jacob, and Manoah, and several others. They see a human form. He is called the messenger, the angel of Yahweh. But he had not become a man.

To become human is to embrace dependence and limitation. Part of what this meant is that in His Incarnation, the Son of God gave up independent, sovereign exercise of His will and of His powers. He never stopped being fully God. But He handed the exercise of His powers and rights entirely over to His Father and to the Holy Spirit. So He lived a life where His Father's will and Word was His Law, and His will, and the Holy Spirit was His power and strength upon whom He was totally dependent. That sounds a lot like the Christian life, doesn't it?

*Once did the skies before Thee bow;
A Virgin's arms contain Thee now;
Angels who did in Thee rejoice
Now listen for Thine infant voice (Latin Hymn of 11th century)*

Augustine said, "The word of the Father by whom all time was created, was made flesh and born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one of those days for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of the ages. Born of an earthly mother, He entered on the course of the years on that very day. The maker of man became man, that He, ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast, that He, the bread, might be hungry, that He, the fountain, might thirst, that He, the light, might sleep, that He, the way, might be wearied in the journey, that He, the truth, might be accused by false witnesses, that He, the judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge, that He, justice itself, might be condemned by the unjust, that He, discipline personified, might be scourged with a whip, that He, the foundation, might be suspended on a cross, that He, courage incarnate, might be weak, and He, security itself, might be wounded, and He, life itself, might die."

Why did He do this? For the sake of others. For the sake of the gospel. He relinquished His royal rights, and He surrendered to submissive service.

Now Paul says, let this mind be in you. You too embrace the submission and dependence in service of each other.

Life in a church is a life of mutual submission.
²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Eph. 5:21)

We submit to one another's needs. We submit to each other's preferences. We submit to each other's level of maturity. That doesn't mean we compromise. It means helping the weak, causing no offense, accommodating others, bearing with others, limiting our freedoms.

We happily accept limitations for each other.

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (Rom. 15:1)

to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. (1 Cor. 9:22)

Probably some of the apostles had told the apostle Paul of that night when Jesus washed their feet. They told him of how He took off His outer garments, and there on His knees, looked like a common household servant. “And yet, we knew He was our Lord and Master. We had never been so humbled as when in the presence of His humility. We could never again speak of “being the greatest” or “being recognised”. His humility broke our pride.”

Paul wants all Christians to feel what those apostles felt that night, seeing Jesus take off the outer garments of His royal rights, get down on His knees as a submissive servant, accepting a human nature to save us. We too, are supposed to get the message:

"Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ "If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (Jn. 13:12-17)