

Subject: *The Humble and Exalted Christ*

Scripture: *Philippians 2:5-11*

The theme of Philippians 2 is the mindset and the privilege of serving others. It is essential that we have a submissive attitude or servant spirit. This chapter focuses on three aspects of a servant spirit: the reasons for a servant spirit (vs. 1); the requirements for a servant spirit (vs. 2-4); and the role models for a servant spirit (vs. 5-30). In this text we have one of the greatest descriptions of the Christian life and one of the greatest statements about Christ in the New Testament.

1. Christ is the supreme example of humility (vs. 5)

The key to serving others is an attitude of humility and Jesus is the greatest example of this servant attitude. Believers must have the mind (mindset, attitude) of Christ.

A. Jesus taught the importance of humility

Matthew 23:12 *And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

B. Jesus modeled the virtue of humility

Matthew 11:29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* This is the only description He ever gave of Himself.

2. Christ is perfectly co-eternal and co-equal with God (vs. 6)

A. He has the same nature as God

In order to fully appreciate Christ's humiliation we must understand His eternal glory. Verse 6 speaks of His perfect deity. He was "in the form" (*morphe*, inner essence) of God. This term does not refer to outward appearance, but to the essential, unchanging nature of something. He was God (Jn. 1:1-3, 14).

John 1:18 *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

Colossians 2:9 *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

Hebrews 1:1-3 ¹ *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,* ² *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;* ³ *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Christ is the express image (exact representation) of God.

B. He has perfect equality with God

He was not only eternal, but He was equal with God. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or seized. Deity was His by right. J. Vernon McGee comments: "He was God without effort." MacArthur adds: "Though Christ had all the rights, privileges, and

honors of deity—which He was worthy of and could never be disqualified from—His attitude was not to cling to those things or His position but to be willing to give them up for a season.” The point is obvious: if anyone had the right to be self-centered, it was Jesus. As God He had all the rights of deity, and yet during His incarnate state He gave up His right to manifest His visible glory and splendor.

3. Christ laid aside His divine rights to become a man (vs. 7)

Back in July we celebrated the anniversary of man’s first walk on the moon and those famous words: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” The greatest step ever taken was not when man walked on the moon, but when Jesus stepped out of heaven to earth. It was a step that Bible scholars refer to as the “humiliation” of Christ.

A. He made Himself of no reputation (emptied Himself)

This verse describes Christ’s incarnation. It tells us what Christ gave up and what He took. He willingly chose to make himself “of no reputation” (literally, he emptied himself). What did He empty himself of or what did He lay aside? He did not lay aside His divine nature. He laid aside the constant use of His divine rights and privileges. He laid aside the independent use of His divine attributes. He laid aside His heavenly glory. One writer said that “He left the immunity of a heavenly life.”

John 17:5 *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

John 17:24 *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

2 Corinthians 8:9 *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

MacArthur suggests that He set aside His privileges in five areas: 1) heavenly glory; 2) independent authority; 3) divine prerogatives; 4) eternal riches; and 5) a favorable relationship with God the Father.

B. He took upon him the form (nature) of a servant

This is the same word used in verse 6 (form of God). He did not just appear to be a servant, but He had the very nature of a servant. Elisabeth Elliot: “Does God ask us to do what is beneath us? This question will never trouble us again if we consider the Lord of heaven taking a towel and washing feet.”

Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

C. He was made in the likeness of men

He was made in the likeness of men. The word “likeness” suggests similarity but difference. Though Jesus was fully human, He was different than other men because He was without sin (Heb. 4:15). He was the eternal Son of God and yet limited Himself to time and space. He gave up His complete freedom to be confined to a human body. He gave up the constant use of His

omnipotence for human weakness. He was in every sense a human being, except without sin. He was hungry, thirsty, tired, wept, and was tempted. As a man He was poor (2 Cor. 8:9), so that He was constantly borrowing. He borrowed a place for His birth, a house to sleep in, a boat to preach in, an animal to ride on, a room in which to institute the Lord's Supper, and finally a tomb to be buried in. Jesus further demonstrated His servant spirit in the manner of His birth, His submission and obedience to His parents, in His refusal of personal honor, in His washing of the disciples' feet, in His ministry to the needy and outcasts, and ultimately in His death on the cross.

4. Christ humbled Himself even to death on the cross (vs. 8)

This was the lowest step in His humiliation. Death on the cross was the most shameful and horrible means of death. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals. Christ did this in complete obedience to God the Father in order to fulfill His eternal plan. We recall Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done."

5. Christ was exalted and rewarded by God the Father (vs. 9-11)

God the Father is the subject in these verses. Because Jesus was willing to humble Himself and obey the Father's plan, God the Father has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above all others. In addition to receiving back His glory (Jn. 17:5), Christ's new status as the God-Man meant that God gave Him privileges He did not have before His incarnation. The extent of His sovereign authority is revealed in verse 10.

- His authority over *those in heaven*: cherubim, seraphim, holy angels, and all saved people
- His authority over *those on earth*: all human beings
- His authority over *those under the earth*: all unsaved people and evil angels in hell

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. There are no exceptions. Every nation and language, every race and color, every religion, every man and every woman, every king and rich man and every servant and poor man. Some will make this confession willingly and some unwillingly, but all men, all angels, and all demons will acknowledge that He is Lord and in that confession God will be glorified.

This passage covers Christ in His eternal and heavenly glory, His earthly humility as a servant, His incarnation as a man, His obedience in crucifixion, and His exaltation as Lord. This is the story of Christ from glory to earth and then back to glory.

What is the point of this passage? It is to follow Christ's example and to have His mindset. Look again at verses 3-5. There is to be no divisiveness, selfishness, strife, jealousy, ambition, self-seeking, putting others down, air of superiority...there is to be humility and a concern for others.