



Speaker:
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The Humility of Christ

Series: Philippians · 5 of 5

5/6/2022 (FRI) | Bible: **Philippians 2:1-11**

You may recall that this book of the Bible was originally a letter. It was written by the apostle Paul while he was in jail. It was his habit to write to the various local churches he'd been involved with. Here, he writes to the congregation in the town of Philippi.

His letters contain some of the elements you'd find in one of his sermons. So we find him encouraging good things and discouraging bad things.

His opening greeting was friendly and set the tone for the rest of the letter. When we looked at this together several weeks ago, we were also able to spot references to church government. The typical church had a pastor, elders, and deacons.

Paul went on in his letter to encourage growth in the Christians. We are supposed to grow in a spiritual way. And Paul told them they should look to increase in love, knowledge and wisdom. And of course that's for us too.

Paul then mentioned something quite remarkable. His being in jail didn't cause the Christians to be scared for themselves but made them more courageous! They'd previously been like most people in the church, even today. Most Christians are very nervous about sharing their faith. God himself only knows how our nation would be turned upside down if all of us had more courage.

You remember that Paul was aware some people were preaching through bad motives. They wanted to make things harder for Paul. But Paul said he didn't care as long as the gospel was being preached.

And then last time we looked at this very plain reality in Paul's mind. He wanted to depart this life and go and be with his saviour. Of course he did! But he knew he still had work to do. He said for everything he needs in this earthly warfare he has Jesus Christ. And when he dies, it gets a whole lot better!

Today, I want us to spend a short while thinking about **the humility of Christ**. It's my hope that, in looking at the example of humility Jesus gave us, we'd pay attention to that quality in our own lives—that after listening to God speak to us today through his word, we'd appreciate how great his humility was *and* we'd be that bit humbler ourselves.

And there's no better example of humility than that which has been given to us by Jesus Christ. So today, we'll look at:

- Christ's humility in his coming to earth as a man
- His humility during his life
- And the great act of humility where he allowed himself to be treated as the worst of mankind in order to save his people.

Hopefully, we'll be able to take something home from this that will make us more like him.

Humility in his incarnation

If you have a look at vv 6 & 7, it tells us Jesus was "*in the form of God*" and was *equal to* God. There he was, existing in a state of perfection within the heavenly godhead:

- He enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit
- He received the adoration of angels and was feared by devils
- He sat as creator of the universe and actively governed it by the same power
- And he left it ALL behind

He stepped down from the throne, placed his crown to one side, and removed his royal robes. And in some incomprehensible way, he crossed into our world as a man.

V7 says, in doing this, Jesus "emptied himself". What we are to understand by this is Jesus divested himself of that glory, **but he did not discard his deity. He remained God.**

In the first chapter of John's gospel, we see Jesus being described as "the Word". It not only tells us this Word was God; it describes the Word as the one who came into this world and lived among us.

Jesus Christ kept the essence of God, but he was fully human. And this incredible being made the Christianity of the Old Testament a hundred times clearer.

For some people though, this mystery couldn't be accepted. On the one hand, you had the Jews who refused to believe he was divine. And on the other hand, there were sects who refused to believe he was human. Faith involves accepting it while not fully understanding it. That's what we're to have.

Jesus came into this world as a helpless baby. I promise you: if his mum hadn't fed him, he would have died.

You can even see his humble beginnings in the family he was born into. It was what today we'd call a "working-class" family. And they were from a deprived area. There were no posh houses in that little northern town.

What a huge contrast! From the glorious family of heaven to this poor family on a sin-filled earth. Truly humble beginnings.

Humility in his life

As soon as the baby Jesus became the *toddler* Jesus, his parents would've noticed an unusual level of obedience in the child. And they'd see it more as he got older. It says in Luke 2:51—And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.

All children know their parents are sometimes unreasonable. Sometimes you question their judgement. And whether they see you doing it or not, you'll frequently roll your eyes or mutter something because of something they've said you thought was unfair or stupid. (We know this because we used to do it at your age!)

We can safely conclude that the parents of Jesus were sinful. Joseph and Mary were **not** perfect parents. But even if they made a request of Jesus that wasn't entirely reasonable, his humble state involved submitting to them. If Mary asked him to do some job around the house, he'd listen carefully then say "Okay, mum."

When Jesus grew up, it was time for him to start his ministry proper. And this included baptism. So he went on a long hike and found John the Baptist. And he asked John if he could be baptised. Now remember: John was baptising people as part of their public *repentance toward God*. In other words, it was for sinful people.

Jesus wasn't sinful. So John says, *What? You should be baptising me, not the other way round!* It was awkward for John. But Jesus told him to do it anyway. He's waited in line to be baptised, with sinful people in front of him and sinful people behind him. Here was Jesus, humbling himself even to the extent of identifying himself as one of them—and him being utterly sinless.

You'll remember how awkward it was for Peter, too, when Jesus sat at his feet and began to wash them. We can all imagine exactly how Peter felt. Yet this is how far Jesus went to show that the Christian life is a path of humility.

We could then consider the humility of Jesus *during his ministry*. He was in a state of constant submission to his Father. Have a look at John 5:30—"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, **because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.**"

Back in our passage, have another look at v6. Equality with God was Jesus's by nature. It was not something he needed to seize by force, like in some military coup. So we have here the Son publicly confessing his submission to one he was equal to. How he humbled himself! And if you're a believer, **you can know that all this was done for you.**

When Jesus's life on this earth was coming to an end, we see his humility continuing right up to his death. Even as he was verbally and physically abused, his humility meant he didn't curse them. Man was made in the image of God, but sin deformed us into hideous creatures. Violent and greedy. Perverse in all our ways. Yet Jesus in his humility allowed himself to be ill-treated by such creatures.

Humility in his death

V8 in our section tells us Jesus's humility extended to his death: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death."

This is taking humility to its most extreme. This goes much further than living in poverty, submitting to faulty parenting, getting baptised among a sinful crowd, and getting on the ground and washing someone's filthy feet like a common slave. **Jesus was to let himself be killed.** To enter the same grave as all mankind. The eternal Word of God, the source of all life, is placed lifeless in a tomb.

And so it is in his famous hymn Charles Wesley expresses the struggle to consider that which makes no sense when he says:

"Tis mystery all: the immortal dies!"

These few verses from 5 to 8 give us a glimpse into the very mind of Jesus Christ. It's saying **our** thinking should be like Jesus's here. It's a sacred insight into how Jesus thought. In these thoughts, he knew he was part of the divine trinity. But also in his thoughts **he was consciously humbling himself** so that he might carry out his mission to save his people from their sins.

Throughout the countless centuries of Israel's history, God was continually reinforcing the principle of atonement. In the system of animal sacrifice, the people were presented their whole lives with this image of their sins being transferred to an innocent animal.

And then he came. The promised Messiah emerged onto the world's scene. The whole system of animal sacrifice could now be dismantled. **THE GREAT LAMB OF GOD WAS HERE!** All of us who are God's people; all those throughout history who've belonged to that chosen race of those born again by the Spirit of God; **WE HAVE ALL, as it were, PLACED OUR HANDS ON THE HEAD OF THE LAMB OF GOD, HAD OUR SINS TRANSFERRED OVER, AND WATCHED AS HE WAS TAKEN AWAY FOR THE SLAUGHTER.**

Matthew 20:28—the Son of Man came not to **be** served but *to serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many." His death was itself an act of humility.

Sinners only need to go to God humbly and beg their sins be taken away. And those who seek him with all their heart will find him. And they will discover that long ago, on an ancient

hill, the Lamb of God took their sins upon him and paid the ultimate price for their deliverance.

So there we have it: the state of humility. From his entrance into this world, to his growing up, to his ministry, all the way to his death, there was this clear humility. And as the story progressed, the humility deepened.

Humility in his followers

You sometimes hear me refer to what *Paul* is saying to us in this letter. But we believe he wrote under such special Holy Spirit guidance that we can also talk about what *God* is saying to us in this letter. So on that basis we return to our passage. And God's word here teaches us firstly what we're *not* to be and then what we *are* to be.

The negatives are given to us in v3. There's "selfish ambition" first of all. Now we've come across this before. Remember those gospel preachers who were hoping to cause trouble for Paul? He uses the same phrase to describe them. You can have a quick read of it again in v17 of the previous chapter.

So we know this type of ambition can result in that sort of behaviour. But of course it's much bigger than that. Ambition can lead to all sorts of sinful paths. And it's by nature selfish. It applies to anyone who puts their own gain before everyone else's. It existed in Paul's day, and I'm sure there's not a church in existence even today where it can't be found.

It also mentions here "conceit". I think when we refer to someone as conceited today it means they love themselves. That's not the sense here. This is describing someone who boasts about themselves or their achievements but in reality have nothing to be proud of. The old Bibles call it "vainglory".

I'm going to assume everyone here today surpasses me in all things spiritual. I'm going to assume you pray more than me, read your Bibles more than me, evangelise more than me, and enjoy a closer walk with God than me.

And yet you mustn't boast about any of it! To take pride in any of these things is to suffer from vain conceit. Boast away, but make sure you're boasting about Christ. What *he's* done *through* you. The only reason you're better than me in all those things **is because of him. His grace. His enabling. His cleansing of your words and activities to make them acceptable to God.**

These behaviours—pursuing your own benefit even if you have to sin to get it, and stupid boasting—are the very opposite of Christ-like humility. So what *are* we to be like?

Paul's telling the believers how they can complete his happiness. If they follow his guidance on this, it'll be the icing on the cake of his joy. HE'S IN JAIL FRIENDS! Yet he doesn't spend a

minute feeling sorry for himself. If he can only see some improvement in the behaviour of the church, he'll be so happy.

What he wants to see is unity. V2 says:

- He wants them to think the same—that is, a godly way of thinking
- He wants them to really love each other
- He wants them to be so like Christ that they are constantly agreeing with each other
- He emphasises he wants them all to be on the same page.

You see in the first verse he gives a little list of reasons why they'd want to pursue these good attitudes. It begins with "if". IF these things are true.

Now don't misunderstand. He's not thinking, "I wonder if these things are true..." It might help if you read each one like this: "If there is any encouragement in Christ—and there is..." "If there is any participation in the Spirit—and there is—then do such and such."

So he gives some good reasons why the Philippians—and us—should pursue these godly objectives:

- We have the encouragement of Jesus Christ himself. Through both his teaching and his example, he encourages us towards unity with each other.
- There's the incentive of the great comfort which comes from loving the brethren, putting them first.
- There's our partaking of the Holy Spirit who influences us in this direction.
- And he's hopeful that the qualities of affection and sympathy, or "affectionate sympathy", are already present in the hearts and minds of the brethren.

By the grace of God, all the conditions are right for this selfless attitude to prevail among them all.

I said that Paul wanted unity among the brethren. But how, specifically, did he want them to act? What are the opposites of selfish ambition and foolish boasting?

Verse 3 directs them and us to have such a degree of humility that **we count other people in the church as more significant than ourselves**. Brethren, you're to treat the rest of the people in this room as more important than yourself.

Say Ann turns up today and has bought each one of us a cake. And I do a quick headcount and discover there's one cake short. *I'm to make sure everyone else has a cake and not me.* Not only am I supposed to do without, but if it's done in a Christ-like way, *I'm to be happy* while you all sit there enjoying your cakes! The selfish person Paul warns about would say to themselves, "I'd better grab a cake quick before they all go." That's the opposite of Christian humility.

We only see each other once, twice or three times a week. Even if you attend all the meetings, our time together is a very small fraction of the week. And so if someone has difficulty in the company of someone else in the church, it's not so hard to muster the patience to get along with each other for those few hours.

When you live with somebody, that can soon deplete your resources of patience! If you're married, and your spouse is annoying the life out of you, you don't have the option to think to yourself, *Just one more hour and I won't have to see them then for a few days*. You have to get on with each other **every day**.

The principle Paul urges on the believers is then especially useful in the home. If we understand the humility of Christ at all, we'll see **we're supposed to always put the interests of our spouse before our own**. We're supposed to always put the interests of our siblings before our own. We're supposed to always put the interests of our parents or children before our own.

I'm not saying I've always done this in my own family, or even that it's possible for sinful people to achieve this level of self-sacrifice. But I imagine if every married person in the land at least tried to put this into practice we'd see very few marriage breakups.

We read in v4 that we're to look to see how we can meet other people's needs as well as our own. So we do need to see to our own business as well. We're not meant to neglect proper responsibilities so we can run round after everyone else. The point is we're not meant to *restrict* our care to ourselves and our own families.

As you try to have the humility of Christ, you can think of this as trying to OUTDO each other. If they see some good in you, try to see even more good in them. Try to search out deep-rooted sins in yourself more than other people do in *themselves*. Try to help others more than they help you.

You might think this isn't going to work! It's like the nuclear arms race, where NATO and the Soviet Union were constantly overtaking each other in the number of nuclear weapons they had. And the day came when they said, *This is stupid. This is spiralling out of control!*

In Romans ch.12, Paul urges the brethren to outdo one another in showing honour to the brethren. In a sense, it's meant to be like an arms race, with everyone trying to overtake each other. But in doing this, they don't risk spiralling out of control but are instead spiralling *upwards* to Christ-likeness.

To emphasise what Paul says, I'll add to his point. **You should treat the other people in church with the honour you'd show Jesus if he came to our meeting today**. The Lord himself said as much. He says if you serve others in the church, you're in a way serving *him*. So if you ignore someone in the church, or you gossip about them, it's a direct snub to *Jesus himself*.

That phrase in the first verse of our chapter reminds us of something. It has a slight likeness to one of the benedictions we use. Quoting 2 Corinthians we say, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” So love is there associated with God the Father. And in v1 of our reading we see mention of (1) Christ, (2) love—which we can assume is the love of God the Father—and then (3) the Holy Spirit.

A faint reminder of the Trinity. And I believe that when the Holy Spirit comes to live in someone’s heart, he instils in them a hint of that communion enjoyed within the godhead. The perfection of the triune relationship may be infinitely superior to anything we can experience now, **but that perfection is what we must aim for.**

Today, the job of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to you is mine. And inasmuch as I’m sincere, I share the “other” Paul’s desire. You people bless my soul. And the icing on the cake for me would be to see YOU grow in love and unity, serving others to the extent you put their interests before your own.

To see such a thing would not only be a blessing to me but would be a great testimony to those outside the kingdom of God. If each of us were to display the type of humility presented to us in the example of Jesus, the world would marvel.

And they’d approach you and ask you how these things can be. And you can tell them about the one who you try to model yourself on: the Lord Jesus Christ. And if they are sincerely looking for the saviour, you can share with them his own words when he said:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Amen.