

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Don’t Seek for ‘Empty-Glory’ — Seek to Empty Self”

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 8:9; Is. 14:12-14; Gen. 3:4-6; Mk. 9:35; 10:42-45; Jn. 13:3-16; Matt. 16:24; Rom. 12:2

INTRODUCTION: A Song That Is Supposed to Be Lived

There is something in all of us that wants to be noticed. We want somebody to recognize what we have done, appreciate what we have sacrificed, acknowledge what we have contributed, or at least say, “Thank you.” And when that does not happen, something inside us can begin keeping score: “I do all this, and nobody notices. Nobody thanks me. Do they have any idea what I have done?” It can happen in our careers, in marriage, in the workplace, in friendships, and even in the way we serve the Lord. Before long, something that began as service can quietly become a search for recognition. Paul calls that *kenodoxia*—“empty glory.” It is glory that looks substantial but is actually hollow, because ultimately it is still centered on self.

That is why Paul does not simply tell the Philippians, “Be humble.” He points them to Yeshua. After calling them to the same mind, the same love, unity of spirit, and concern for the interests of others, he says, “*Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua*” (Phil. 2:5). What follows in verses 6-11 may have been a familiar hymn or creedal statement among the early believers, but Paul does not give it to them merely as theology to recite. He gives it as a life to imitate. **This is not simply a song to be sung; it is a song to be lived.** What we understand in our heads and confess with our mouths is supposed to shape the way we treat one another. If we want to know what the mind of Messiah looks like, Paul says: look at Yeshua.

1. THE MIND OF MESSIAH DOES NOT GRASP FOR POSITION

Paul begins, “*Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua, who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be grasped*” (Phil. 2:5-6). Yeshua did not consider equality with God something to be seized, snatched, exploited, or used for His own advantage. He did not walk around demanding, “Do you know who I am?” He was not grasping for position, status, recognition, or power. And that stands in sharp contrast to the spirit of the world. In Is. 14, the adversary says, “*I will ascend to heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will make myself like Elyon*” (Is. 14:13-14). The way of the adversary – of *this world* is “I ... I... I.../Me...Me... Me!” It is the hunger to rise, to possess, to rule, to be recognized. In Gen. 3:5, the serpent tempts humans with the same lie: “*you will be like God*”. Being “like God” could be grasped, taken; something could be snatched to make self greater.

That same struggle still lives in the human heart. We see it in governments, businesses, relationships, churches, marriages, and, if we are willing to look honestly, within ourselves. We want the upper hand. We want our rights recognized. We want our contribution acknowledged. We become offended when someone fails to treat us according to the value we believe we deserve. But Yeshua shows us another way. The One who truly possessed all authority did not spend His life grasping for authority. The One who truly deserved all glory did not go searching for empty glory. This is why our minds continually need to be transformed and renewed. The question is not simply, “Do I believe Yeshua is Lord?” The question is, “Is His mindset becoming

mine?” Am I still grasping for recognition, position, and control, or am I learning to lay those things down?

2. THE MIND OF MESSIAH EMPTIES SELF AND TAKES THE PLACE OF A SERVANT

Paul continues, *“But He emptied Himself—taking on the form of a slave, becoming the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man”* (Phil. 2:7). There is a powerful connection between this verse and Phil. 2:3. Paul had just told the believers to do nothing from *kenodoxia*—empty glory—and now he says that Yeshua *ekenōsen*—emptied Himself. There is the contrast at the very heart of this passage: **Don’t seek empty glory; seek to empty self.** Instead of selfish ambition, Yeshua took the form of a servant. Instead of demanding advantage, He laid advantage aside. Instead of using His position for Himself, He gave Himself for others. As Paul tells the Corinthians, *“even though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9).

And in doing this, Yeshua was not hiding what God is like—He was *revealing* what God is like. When He took the form of a servant, it was not a disguise. Remember that at the Passover Seder, Yeshua knew that the Father had placed all things into His hands, that He had come from God and was returning to God. And what did He do with that knowledge of His authority? He got up, wrapped a towel around Himself, knelt down, and washed His disciples’ feet (Jn. 13:3–5). That is what divine power looks like. Yeshua said, *“whoever wants to be great among you shall be your servant... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”* (Mk. 10:43, 45). He was not saying that service is simply “paying your dues” until eventually you are promoted into greatness. He was redefining greatness itself. When you serve another person in love, you are not on your way toward greatness. In that moment, you are walking in the greatness of Messiah because you are becoming like Him.

3. THE MIND OF MESSIAH HUMBLING ITSELF INTO OBEDIENCE

Paul takes us still lower: *“He humbled Himself—becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:8). The movement of the passage is breathtaking. He did not grasp. He emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant. He humbled Himself. And then His humility became obedience—obedience all the way to death, even death on a cross. We naturally want to place boundaries around humility. “I will humble myself, but only so far. I will serve, but there comes a point. I will forgive, but enough is enough. I will surrender my rights, but I still have my dignity.” Paul points us toward Yeshua and asks us to consider how far His obedience went. The answer is uncomfortable: all the way.

We can easily forget what the cross meant to the Philippians. It was not yet a polished religious symbol. Nobody was wearing one around the neck as jewelry. The cross represented disgrace, humiliation, suffering, and execution at the hands of Roman power. Yet the One who was equal with God became obedient even to that. This is the measure Paul gives us when he says, “Have this attitude.” Our model is not the world’s understanding of dignity, power, status, or self-preservation. Our model is Messiah. Yeshua said, *“If anyone wants to follow after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me”* (Matt. 16:24). And this exposes something within us: when disrespect overwhelms me, when my lack of recognition consumes me, when my wounded pride controls my response, perhaps I am discovering places where I am still very full of myself. Yeshua shows us the freedom of being emptied of self so that obedience to the Father becomes more important than protecting our own image.

CONCLUSION: EMPTY GLORY OR EMPTY SELF?

There are really two ways of living laid before us in this passage. One is the way of grasping: reaching for position, protecting status, demanding recognition, insisting on our rights, trying to make ourselves important. It is the ancient voice of the adversary saying, “I will ascend.” It is the serpent whispering, “You can take this and become more.” It is the fallen instinct that continually says, “Me first.” And then there is the way of Yeshua. He did not grasp. He emptied Himself. He served. He humbled Himself. He obeyed. The world says greatness means climbing high enough that others serve you. Yeshua reveals that true greatness kneels down and serves others.

Perhaps our prayer today needs to be very simple: “Lord, show me where I am still full of myself.” Where am I grasping or keeping score? Where am I offended because someone did not recognize me? Where am I demanding my way, my rights, my comfort, my acknowledgment? Bring those things to the Lord today. Do not defend them; surrender them. Ask the Holy Spirit to expose the places where empty glory has found a home in your heart and to form in you the mind of Messiah. Come to Him and say, “Yeshua, I want Your attitude to become my attitude. I do not want to spend my life seeking empty glory. Teach me to empty myself, to serve, to humble myself, and to obey.” Let this be a time and place of surrendering self—not so that we become less valuable, but so that Messiah becomes more visible through us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Phil. 2:5–8, what specific qualities of Yeshua’s attitude does Paul present as the pattern for believers?
2. How does Yeshua’s refusal to grasp for equality, position, and privilege contrast with the attitudes displayed in Is. 14:12–14 and Gen. 3:4–6?
3. Where are you most tempted today to seek “empty glory”—recognition, appreciation, control, status, titles, or having the upper hand?
4. Think about one current relationship—your marriage, family, workplace, congregation, or friendship. What would “emptying self” and considering the interests of the other person actually look like this week?
5. When humility begins to cost you something—your comfort, pride, reputation, preferences, or sense of being right—where do you usually draw the line? How does Yeshua’s obedience “*to the point of death, even death on a cross*” challenge that boundary?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You for showing us Your heart through Messiah Yeshua. Forgive us for the times we have sought empty glory—for the times we have grasped for recognition, fought for position, demanded our rights, or become consumed with whether others noticed what we have done. Search us and show us the places where selfish ambition, pride, or wounded dignity are still shaping the way we think and respond.

Holy Spirit, continue transforming our minds until the attitude of Messiah becomes our attitude. Teach us not to grasp, but to release; not to seek empty glory, but to empty self; not to demand to be served, but to serve. Give us the humility to put others before ourselves and the courage to obey even when obedience costs us something. May our lives reveal the heart of Yeshua, and may everything we do ultimately bring glory—not to ourselves—but to God our Father.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.