

To Humble the Prideful – Philippians 2:5-11

Main Idea: The birth of Christ is the meeting place of past and future, and every detail of His birth bears the purpose of saving sinners.

I. The Nature | Philippians 2:5-7

Every year during the Christmas Holidays we meditate upon the significance of the birth of Christ and all that it signifies. Every year, **our goal is to preserve and proclaim the truth of the birth of Christ and what He accomplished.** This year, we want to look at the Christmas story from the view past the event of the Incarnation of Christ, and we'll do so by looking at the fact the Word/Logos became flesh and dwelt among us from the perspective of the NT Epistles. In our previous study, we marveled at the truth revealed in Galatians 4:4-7 where Paul unequivocally affirms that Christ's birth is the meeting place of past and future and that every detail of His birth bears the ultimate purpose of saving sinners. As we continue our study of the miracle of Christ's Incarnation from the perspective of the NT Epistles, we come to Paul's writings to the Philippian church. **Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Philippi while imprisoned, likely in Rome around 60-62 A.D.** Despite his circumstances, the tone of Philippians is overwhelmingly joyful and encouraging. The church in Philippi, located in a Roman colony in Macedonia, was the first European church planted by Paul (Acts 16:12-40). This congregation supported Paul faithfully financially in his ministry and through their partnership in the gospel. However, like many early churches, they faced challenges. These included external pressures from a hostile Roman culture and internal tensions arising from issues of pride, disunity, and self-interest. Paul addresses these struggles not by rebuking them harshly but by pointing them to the example of Christ's humility and sacrifice.

In Philippians 2, Paul calls the believers at Philippi to embrace unity through humility and to live lives shaped by the mindset of Jesus. This passage is both doctrinal and practical. It presents one of the clearest affirmations of Christ's divinity—Incarnation, and exaltation. Practically, it shows that true greatness in God's kingdom comes through humility and servanthood. Paul urges the Philippians—and us—to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (v. 5), whose descent from heavenly glory to human frailty, and ultimately to death on a cross, models the radical humility Christians are called to imitate. **In a world that often glorifies pride and power, Philippians 2:5-11 challenges all believers to embrace the humility and selflessness that characterize Jesus.** This passage not only reveals who Jesus is but also how we are to live as His followers. In verses 5-6, Paul describes the nature of the Incarnation from the perspective of Christ's greatest act of humility, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (V.5-6). The inner reality of Christ's birth affirms His pre-incarnate existence. To be "in the form of God" (v.6a) refers to the inner reality, essential nature, and divine character of God. By His very nature, Jesus is, always has been, and will forever be truly divine (John 1:1-2, 14; 8:58; Col. 1:15).

In light of the profound reality of Jesus' full deity, His incarnation was the most profound possible humiliation. From a divine perspective, to become man requires descent—to forsake living as a creator to live as a creature. By not regarding equality with God as "a thing to be grasped" (v.6b), Christ did not consider His rights, position, title, or even His glory as something of greater importance than saving sinners. In His divine path toward humility, the next step downward was for Christ to empty Himself "by taking the form of a servant" (v.). The word translated as "servant" (doulos) is literally translated as "slave." An enslaved person owned nothing but was completely dependent on his master, including His life. The One who "was in the beginning with God" and "through whom all things were created" (John 1:2-3) claimed as His own nothing that He had created, but as a slave, He carried other people's burdens fulfilling the words of the OT prophets to the letter (Isa. 53:6). **In God's mission of saving sinners, it did not cost Christ more to die a terrible death than to step out of glory taking the form of a slave. In Jesus the humility that pleases God is displayed in a form that we believers can see, understand and imitate.**

To Ponder:

1. Biblically, what does it mean to be humble?
2. How does Jesus' example challenge your understanding of humility?

II. The Path | Philippians 2:8

Paul traces Christ's descent in two stages: first, He "emptied Himself" by becoming a human being, with a slave's disenfranchised status (Phil. 2:7). Then he "humbled himself" further through obedience to the point of death, even the criminal's death on a cross (2:8). **He came as a servant—a slave, without rights—whose whole purpose in life was to meet the needs of others.** Instead of demanding his right to be served as God, he stooped to perform the slave's most menial task: washing the road filth from his friends' feet (John 13:1-20). In Philippians 2:8 Paul makes explicit what his allusions to Isaiah 53 affirm that: He who was in very nature God, equal with God—the everlasting God, the very source of all life—this One, having become human, having embraced his calling as servant, delivered Himself to die in the place of sinners. **Death on a cross is the final drop-off point in Christ's descent from the heights of glory to the depths of death.** This is the ultimate insult. Salvation was accomplished because Christ, while in human form, did not do anything to please Himself but all to please God for the benefit of saving sinners. **Because Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, we can be confident in the great Savior whom God has given to us.** Whatever it may cost you now to put your own interests, comforts, and conveniences in second place behind others' needs, in the end, you will discover that you have lost nothing of value in having your heart turned inside out to serve others. Death was never forced upon Christ, but He willingly sacrificed Himself for "the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). **As humility incarnate, Christ became the perfect example of the truth He Himself proclaimed: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down His life for His friends" (John 15:13).** In God's perfect plan, Christ's redemptive mission as the Lamb was to reconquer, reclaim, and re-create us to be worshipers of the living God, who alone deserves worship.

To Ponder:

1. How does Christ's example of humility, even to the point of dying on the cross, challenge the world's view of power and success?
2. In what ways can we grow in humility in our daily lives as followers of Christ?

III. The Glory | Philippians 2:9-11

Nothing else in history could possibly match the scorn that fallen men inflicted upon the Son of God during His Incarnation. But in verses 9-11, Paul depicts the magnificent exaltation that was bestowed on Christ for His work of redemption, "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (v.9-11). **Christ's ascent from the depths of despicable death has carried his whole person—including the humanity in which he served and suffered—to a point higher than the highest of all his creatures.** As the victorious Redeemer of God's guilty but beloved people, he emerged from the grave on the third day, entered heaven forty days later, and celebrated his enthronement by pouring out his Holy Spirit in power on his people. He has carried our humanity, now bursting with new created life, up from the grave into the heavens to take his seat at the Father's right hand. To the glory that has always been Christ's as the eternal God and Creator of the universe, a new and unprecedented splendor has been added: through his descent, he has rescued his enemies and turned us into beloved children of his Father! Christ's request of his Father in route to the cross has been magnificently answered: "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:4-5). And his ascent is not merely a return to the preincarnate status quo. Now, because of his obedient suffering, an enlarged audience adores the glory of God's grace: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Many so-called Christians have been feverishly slaving to win the "blessing" of other "lords"— financial security, others' approval, romantic love, academic achievement, and pleasures of various kinds. If that is true of you, the fact that the servant who once suffered now wields all authority "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (v.10) is your wake-up call. No other lord can deliver on its promises; no other lord deserves your unquestioning allegiance—only Jesus does. **His resurrection from the dead turned human history in a new direction,** leading to the day when every knee will humbly bow and every tongue express devotion to this living Lord.

To Ponder:

1. How can churches ensure that Christ is the only to receive glory as His kingdom continues to advance?
2. How can we make sure that Christ gets the glory in our homes?