

Philippians 2:5-8
From Humiliation to Exaltation

Christmas Day is Friday of this week

- Stores have been getting ready for the “big day” for months

It is all too easy to become enamored with the feeling of Christmas without meditating upon the facts of Christmas¹

We often think about the Christmas trees, the gifts, the holiday decorations

- It is easy to become focused on the busyness of the season and lose perspective

As Christians, we should be the ones who are dwelling on the birth of the God-man, Jesus Christ

- If we don't ponder the significance of this season of the year, *who will?*

Let's balance this, however

- There is nothing wrong or unbiblical with celebrating Christmas with gifts, garland, Christmas trees, etc.

Romans 14:5-8 says, “One man regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”

- If someone wants to celebrate Christmas with all the trimmings, then do it!

If another person has a conscience objection, then they shouldn't do it

- That person shouldn't “push” his/her opinions on others

The true meaning of Christmas isn't about Christmas trees and garland

- *The true meaning of Christmas is Christ...*

There are many passages of Scripture that we could turn to this morning as we contemplate a special Christmas message

- Matthew 1 and Luke 1 both give the background on the physical birth of Jesus
- John 1 provides the reinforcement that the God-Man existed as the eternal Son of God

But I want us to turn to Philippians 2

- Some of you may not immediately see the connection between Christmas and this passage; however, I trust you will by the end of our time this morning

The book of Philippians is one of the “prison epistles,” written by Paul while in a Roman prison

- It was written about the same time as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon

A continual theme that runs throughout this book is “joy” or “rejoice”

- That settled conviction that God is in control of our lives; therefore, we can trust Him even when we cannot make sense of everything

¹ Taken from the cover of *Let Earth Receive Her King!*, produced by Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA.

Let's take a jet tour of the first chapter of Philippians

(1:1-11)

Paul commends these believers for their faithfulness, even in the midst of suffering and affliction

- He tells them how much he longs to be with them, even though he is currently in prison for preaching the Gospel
- He reminds these believers that God has begun a good work in them and that He will finish it!
- He then prays that they would continue to grow in their love for one another

(1:12-20)

For some of the Philippians, I am sure they thought that Paul's ministry had been stifled or diminished because of his imprisonment

- On the contrary, Paul writes, that his time in prison has actually "**turned out for the greater progress of the gospel**" (1:12)

There have been some prison guards that have heard the Gospel

- *If Paul hadn't been there, he would not have had the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel to them*

There were some in the Philippian church who received strength and encouragement from Paul – maybe they were thinking, "*If Paul can minister in prison, then I need to be faithful where I am!*"

There were even those who were trying to "get back" at Paul through preaching with false motives (wrong reasons)

- These people thought that if Paul heard that they were preaching from "**envy and strife**" (1:15), that it would dishearten the apostle
- They knew that he couldn't get out of prison and confront them!

But Paul rose above all of that and was grateful that God was still being glorified

- The word of the Lord was still going forth
- One day, God would take care of the motives of men's hearts

Paul's closing remark in this section was that God, "**whether by life or by death**" (1:20) would be glorified and honored

(1:21-26)

Then Paul makes one of those timeless statements that spans the globe

- One of those declarations that grips all of our hearts
- "**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain**" (1:21)

There, wrapped up in those 12 words, is a short statement of Paul's mission

- Paul's life was wrapped up in Christ

You know, staring death in the eyes causes someone to face reality

- Paul knew that he would leave prison one day
- He just didn't know whether he would be alive or not when that happened
- There was the real possibility that he may be killed for preaching the Gospel

But Paul wasn't afraid of death, for it would be an immediate gateway to eternity with Jesus Christ!

- If Paul lived, then he would be of greater use in the Lord's work
- If Paul died, then he would go to be with Jesus Christ

That is the place where you and I need to be as well

- Saying, "Lord, Your will be done! This isn't my life, it is Yours. Glorify Yourself!"

(1:27-30)

Paul closes chapter one with a reminder to the readers in the Philippian church

- Whether or not he would see them again, that didn't matter
- He wanted to hear that they were "**standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel**" (1:27)

Paul realized that he was only a guide, not a God, to these believers

- They were ultimately accountable to God

He reminds them that suffering is a natural part of the Christian life

- He makes no apologies for saying this, either
- As a matter of fact, he equates suffering as a Divine *gracegift*
 - o A privilege
 - o An honor to be like Christ!

There were those in the church who were at odds with one another

- We see a glimpse of this in chapter four, "**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord**" (4:2)
- There was a family feud in the church!

So Paul calls the church back to unity, "**make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**" (2:2)

- While there are many things that can divide us, Paul says, there is one thing that unites us
- That is Christ

That is a great reminder for us, isn't it?

- We can think of many things that can divide us here this morning
 - o Age
 - o Social status
 - o Financial status
 - o Spiritual maturity

But the wonderful principle that Paul points out is that *despite our differences, we are still one body*

- I believe the Lord designed our human bodies to be a living testimony of how the Church body should operate
- I have many parts of my body, but they are all linked together
- The same "essence" or "oneness" connects the individual parts together

The danger comes in when some Body parts aren't performing their tasks

- The Body suffers as a result of that

Paul's recipe for oneness was to look back to the Lord Jesus Christ

- Isn't He always our answer?
- Isn't He always the source of inspiration, encouragement, and consolation?
- Isn't He always the model from which to pattern our lives?

These two women had caused ripples throughout the church of Philippi

- Paul exhorts them, "**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others**" (Phil 2:3-4)

Rather than demanding to be served, these believers were to be looking for opportunities to take the initiative in serving others!

- Read that again in verse 3, "**Do nothing from selfishness of empty conceit...**"
 - o Not "do some things"
 - o Not "don't always be selfish"
 - o It says, "**Do nothing from selfishness of empty conceit...**"

How long has it been since you did something selfish?

- When was the last time that you decided to focus on yourself vs. others?

Do you realize that the Lord Jesus Christ never served Himself?

- Can you even begin to comprehend the fact that He, for 30+ years, was never selfish?

You and I can barely go an hour without thinking of ourselves first

- When you're driving in traffic, do you stop to let someone in front of you?
 - o Or do you look straight ahead and not even acknowledge them?
- Spouses, do you think of the other's desires?
 - o Or do you insist on your way?

This is where the application of Scripture really comes alive

- It is in the "little" details of the Christian life that our hearts are exposed
- Are we known as selfish individuals?
- In what areas do we need to confess known sin in this area?

Well, if you aren't convicted already, just wait

- Paul will paint such a lofty picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that the rest of us will be left with a clear portrait of our hearts

Philippians 2:5-8 will take us literally from the highest of heaven to the lowest of the earth

- This is one of the grandest texts on the person and work of Christ
- Paul's goal is that believers might see the ultimate example of Christ and pattern their lives after Him

During this season of the year, we celebrate Christmas

- The birth of the human Jesus

We know that the Christ has been eternal

- He has never had a beginning
- "**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 1:1-2)

So, it is vitally important that we understand the fact that Jesus Christ is

- 100% God
- 100% Man

In light of the Christmas season, let's revisit this Text...

Let's read Philippians 2:1-11

I. Jesus Christ as God (2:5-6)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

Paul had just spoken of the proper attitude of believers toward one another in 2:3-4, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”

- It is very easy for us to look out for ourselves...because we love ourselves!
- But it is often more difficult to love others

Jesus Christ was the ultimate Example of what it means to love others selflessly and sacrificially!

This attitude of selflessness and humility is heightened by the present tense of the verb, “have”

- More literally, the word refers to “think” or “have this mindset”
- *The verb is in the present tense, which tells us that this type of attitude is a continual, ongoing habit of our lives*

If you look back to 2:2, the verb is used twice, “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

- Once again, Paul goes out of his way to exhort the believers to have this type of mindset that was exemplified in Christ

It will be the same word that Paul uses to bring the family feud of Euodia and Syntyche back together, “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord” (Phil 4:2, emphasis mine)

Christians, we are called to be selfless in our service

- In the home
- In the workplace
- In the community
- In the church

Practically, there is never a time when we should demand to be served, rather than serving

- *This is not being Christlike*

This exhortation is addressed to the entire church

- So there is no one who is exempt!

You might think of a father who is walking ahead of his child in the snow²

- The father leaves footprints in the snow, so that when the child steps in the footsteps, he will know where to go

Christ has left a clear set of footprints for us to follow

- We often look at Christ and think that we could never be that obedient, humble, and submissive
- But the same Holy Spirit that filled Christ fills us
- We can never achieve the depth of Christ's humility, but we can certainly follow His pattern and example

One of the most memorable examples of Christ's service was in the Upper Room

- It was the Last Supper, and Jesus was ready to celebrate it with His disciples

But the disciples had other things on their minds

- *What were they doing?*
 - o *Arguing over who was the greatest...*

Christ responded...*not* with anger or frustration

- But with service

Jesus took a towel and basin and began to wash their dirty feet

- This was normally performed by a lowly house servant
- Through this, Christ showed them that there was never a time when they were "too good" to serve others

After washing their feet, Jesus said, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you." (John 13:12-15)

What a kind, humble, compassionate Savior we have!

6 who, although He existed in the form of God,

Paul makes it painfully clear that Jesus Christ has always been God

- Some religions think that Christ has not always existed
- In other words, He was a created being like any one else

The Apostle's point is that long before the Incarnation, Jesus Christ existed...as God

- God has no beginning or end
- He is the Alpha and Omega
- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." (John 1:1-3)

The term he uses is "form"

- It refers to the outward manifestation of an inward reality³

² Dr. Robert Gromacki, *Stand United in Joy*, 91.

³ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Philippians*, 122.

That's right...

- The little Baby that was lying in that manger was the very epitome and essence of Divinity
- Although a human baby, He had an eternal nature

Christ was just as much God after the Incarnation as He was before it

- The Incarnation wasn't a subtraction...it was an addition!
 - o It wasn't a removal of Deity
 - o It was an addition of humanity!

did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

In the eyes of the world, humility is a negative quality

- It is "forced embarrassment"⁴

But Christ took humility and elevated it to a positive level

- Christ was a humble person
- He didn't need to be humbled, because He had no pride
- Yet, He voluntarily humbled Himself in order to serve others

Jesus realized who He was

- He was on equal footing with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit

Listen to some of these statements in the Gospels:

- John 10:30, "**I and my Father are one**"
- John 8:58, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am**"

As a matter of fact, the reason why some Jews wanted to kill Him was because He claimed to be equal with God, "**For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**" (John 5:18, emphasis mine)

The author of Hebrews certainly taught that Christ was equal with God

- "**And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power**" (Heb 1:3, emphasis mine)

Christ was well content with who He was

- He didn't feel the need to prove His identity
- He simply stated who He was, and left the burden of proof fall on his opponents

Instead of walking around in pride, Christ chose to walk in humility

- Once again, this was intended to be an encouragement to the Philippian believers to follow suit (cf. Phil 2:3-4)
- This is why Paul cites the example of Jesus toward the divisive congregation of Philippi

Instead of turning the stones into bread, He chose to obey His Father

- Instead of calling down legions of angels to assist Him, He chose to endure the cross

⁴ Gromacki, 92.

Truly, Christ was Divine

- He submitted Himself to the Father in all things

This Christmas season, we celebrate the birth of the Savior

- But God chose to condescend even further than simply coming to Earth
- He did that often in the OT through theophanies – pre-incarnate appearances of God to men

Jesus did the unthinkable

- He clothed Himself with humanity
- That's right, He took on the robe of flesh

II. Jesus Christ as Man (2:7-8)

7 but emptied Himself.

There has been a lot of confusion over this passage due to some misconceptions

- The point of confusion lies in answering the question, “Of what did Christ empty Himself?”

Some say that Christ emptied Himself of deity

- What is wrong with this approach?

You have a good Man who wasn't Divine!

- If He wasn't Divine, He cannot atone for man's sins

Let me say it this way

- “Christ emptied Himself of the independent use of His attributes”
- That navigates the theological ship through the rocky precipices of heresy

As God, Jesus could have exercised His Divine prerogative

- But as a human, He submitted Himself to the Father

Jesus Christ still had “access” to His Divine attributes

- However, He chose not to exercise them except when permitted by the Father

He exercised omnipotence when He healed, multiplied bread and fish

- He exercised omnipresence when He knew Nathaniel before He even met him (John 1:48)
- He exercised omniscience when He quoted certain facts regarding Nathaniel prior to meeting him (John 1:47)

He emptied Himself of the privilege of self-assertion

- That is humility!

This makes His obedience even more precious

- Christ could have rightly asserted Himself, because He deserved to be served
- However, He chose to serve others, laying aside the independent, self-reliant attitude

This is the application to our lives

- There may be times when we may actually have the opportunity or right to be served
- The genuine servant-leader will take the opportunity to serve others rather than demanding to be served

taking the form of a bond-servant.

It is amazing to ponder the significance of this statement

- The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Who had been worshipped and adored by angels and heavenly beasts, now becomes a Servant
- He left the heavenly home of glory, praise, and honor to descend to a place where He would be despised, mocked, disrespected, and killed

“bond-servant” is the translation of *doulos*

- Christ was the bond-servant of God

John 8:29, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”

- Is 42:1, “Behold, My Servant”
- Mk 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”

The same word for “form” in 2:5 is used here in 2:7

- It refers to the internal nature of someone

In other words, just as much as Christ had the nature of God in the Incarnation, so He had the nature of a servant

- It’s not that He acted like a servant
- In His very being and essence, He was a servant!

Jesus didn’t merely put on a slave’s garment

- In the fullest sense, he became a slave⁵

What makes this even more special is the fact that Christ did this voluntarily!

- No one coerced Him to do it
- *He didn’t owe the world a favor!*

and being made in the likeness of men.

Christ was made to be in the “likeness” of mankind

- His conception was supernatural, having bypassed the normal channels of childbirth⁶
- He was born of a virgin

As such, He was exempt from the consequences of sin

- He had no sin nature
- He was not subject to the wrath of God for His own sins

Scripture attests to His perfect nature, spotless from sin

- Heb 7:26, “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens”
- 2 Cor 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

⁵ MacArthur, 129.

⁶ Ibid., 97.

- Heb 4:15-16, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”
- 1 Pet 2:22, “WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH”

Otherwise, Christ experienced “normal” human growth

- Lk 2:52, “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

The author of Hebrews writes this, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17-18)

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

Paul has been using the word *morphe* to convey the inward nature of Christ

- We have seen that God’s nature is both Divine and Servant-Driven
- But did Christ’s outward appearance differ from other men?

Paul switches and uses a different word

- “**appearance**” translates a noun that refers to the outward, external form
- Not the inward, but the outward, appearance

From an external perspective, Christ was no different than any other human male

- He looked like a typical male
- He dressed like a typical male
- He had similar needs for food and drink as other males

Herein lies the problem

- Christ didn’t come into the world with a halo around His head
- He didn’t have a glow emanating from His body⁷

So, when He uttered statements that made Him equal with God the Father, His opponents wanted to kill Him!

- They thought that the Messiah would be a fearless Dictator who would overthrow the government and set up His kingdom on earth with force

But when they saw Jesus, a meek and mild Servant-Leader, they scoffed at Him

- Ultimately, the Jews rejected their King and chose to kill Him instead of worship Him

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,

Christ was so much like other men that He was even subject to death

- This is not to say that He didn’t have the power to avoid death
- However, it was the Father’s plan for Him to die physically and to rise from the grave to ensure the justification of those who would believe!

⁷ Ibid., 97.

It should continue to amaze and humble us that Christ would voluntarily humble Himself in obedience to the Father

- His obedience had no limits!

We look at our own lives and see limits of obedience

- We put boundaries and restrictions on your obedience
- “Lord, I’ll obey You if...”
 - o You keep me in good health
 - o You give me children
 - o You bless me financially

Christ could have called heaven to intervene, causing thousands and thousands of angels to come to His aid

- However, this would not have achieved salvation
- “The only person in the world who had the right to assert His rights waived them”⁸

Sometimes you and I get too self-oriented, and begin thinking, “I deserve better than this!”

- It’s in those times that we need to remind ourselves:
 - o We were dead in our trespasses, but Christ gave us life
 - o We were dark, but Christ made us light
 - o We were helpless, but Christ died for us

Christ is the ultimate Example of obeying

- *No matter the cost or consequences*

“Look at Him – this amazing Jesus! He is helping Joseph make a yoke in that little carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. This is the One who, apart from His self-emptying, could far more easily make a solar system or a galaxy of systems.

Look at Him again! Dressed like a slave, with towel and basin for His menial equipment, He is bathing the feet of some friends of His who, but for their quarrelsomeness, should have been washing His feet...”⁹

even death on a cross.

Christ’s death was no ordinary death

- He could have been stoned (attempted on a number of occasions)
 - o But stoning was not the Father’s plan

He could have been killed with the sword

- But this was not the Father’s plan, either

Jesus Christ died on a cross

To the Romans, crucifixion was the most agonizing and gruesome manner of death

- It was reserved for criminals and aliens
- Yet, this was the sovereign allotment given to Christ
- An innocent man taking on the punishment for sinners
- We call this Substitutionary atonement

⁸ Hendriksen, 109.

⁹ MacArthur, 132.

To the Jews, crucifixion was an accursed way to die

- Gal 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”

I am sure that most of us are somewhat familiar with crucifixion

- It was a cruel death
- A death that caused pain in every part of the body

Jesus didn't deserve to die on a cross

- He should have been worshipped and praised and adored
- However, He was ultimately killed by those who were the religious leaders of the day

This passage informs us of the Incarnation

- “The Son of God became the Son of man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God”¹⁰
- What a statement!

Had it not been for the Incarnation, there would be no justification

- We come this morning to remember the true meaning of Christmas
- The birth of
- The Christ-Child
- The God-Man

So as you celebrate Christmas this week, exercise your Christmas liberties pertaining to presents, Christmas trees, decorations, garland, and other goodies

- But don't mistake that for the significance of Christmas
- If you do, you are no different than the unbelieving pagan

Believers, we are to be different

- What an amazing act of humility for Divinity to be clothed with humanity
- He is worthy of our praise, both this morning and every day of our lives

There is no better time to embrace Jesus Christ

- The Son of God
- The Son of man

Humble yourself before God

- Realize your sinfulness!
- Confess your need of Jesus as Lord and Savior!

¹⁰ John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians & Philippians*, 88.