

## Christmas 2020: Let This Mind Be in You (Sunday, December 27, 2020)

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**Scripture:** Micah 5:1-4; Philippians 2:5-11

### INTRODUCTION

I have chosen for a Christmas meditation a familiar text from Philippians.

I know we have looked at this text before.

It is so beautiful and important that it is good to again consider.

As we focus our attention on the truth of our passage, two thoughts came to mind as I studied this text.

I compare the study of this text and others like it, to standing on the edge of an incredible cliff or on a balcony of a very tall building.

The view is amazing but can also be frightening.

The truth of God's Word is what we need.

At the same time, we want to be careful to make sure that we are sticking close to Scripture and not our own ideas.

As we consider this text, what also comes to mind is our own insignificance before God.

Who are we to figure out the mysteries of God?

Again, we must depend on what has been revealed.

As far as revelation goes, we go

Where it ends, we must end!

**Let this mind be in you which Jesus Christ demonstrated!**

**Let us bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!**

## 2] PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11, LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU

A very important thing from Scripture to keep in mind is that the Doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ are not just something we put together from a couple of passages here and there.<sup>1</sup>

The entire NT in connection with the OT is the basis for our understanding of Jesus and the Triune nature of God.

Our text then, as you well know, is one of many incredible texts that we could and should often consider.

Paul wrote the book of Philippians after the book of Thessalonians, even though Paul was first in Philippi before going to Thessalonica.

Philippians is one of the Prison Epistles.

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<sup>1</sup> See Letham, 50, and his quote of Torrance on this subject.

I have noted that there are some similarities between the two letters; both are joyful letters written to encourage faithful churches and believers to stand fast in God's truth.

It is amazing again to consider that such rich truth was given to young believers.

Sound, deep doctrine is vital for all believers!

The word **mind** used in verse 5 is a key word used in the book of Philippians.

The word mind is a verb that is used **11 times** in Philippians.

It can be awkward to translate the command because of how it is given in the Greek.<sup>2</sup>

What we have in verse 5 is not a suggestion or good advice, it is a command.

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<sup>2</sup> We do not have third person commands in English like you find in Greek.

The meaning of the verb as used here means to **develop an attitude based on careful thought.**

*Let the same kind of thinking dominate you as dominated Christ Jesus.*<sup>3</sup>

This is the key command of this section.

It is part of the important instruction that comes before it and after it in terms of the unity and love that should characterize God's people.

We will come back to this command later, but here we note it serves then as the foundation for the beautiful teaching that follows.

What mind, way of thinking, or attitude could be greater than what we see in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Some believe the verses that we have in this section are a hymn.

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<sup>3</sup> BDAG.

There is a possibility of this, but hymn or not, this is some of the most profound instruction that we have on the person and work of Christ.

There are some scholars who don't believe this passage teaches us about the preexistence of Christ.

Rather we are told this passage is a comparison of Jesus and Adam.<sup>4</sup>

We are right to see the pre-existence of God the Son is in view here.

Part of the reason I am having us return to this text is because of how rich it is. There is a lot going on in this text and it is easy to forget some of the details.

Let us continue as we focus on a number of key words used here starting with verse 6.

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<sup>4</sup> Dunn is one who thinks the comparison is Adam and Christ. Letham interacts with several scholars who show this is not a good argument.

First, let us consider the word **being**.

This word speaks of an unchanging reality for the Son of God.

It is not something he became or something that changed.

The Son of God has always been the eternally begotten Son of God.

The WCF in 2.3 states:

**2.3.** In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

The word **form** is a word used only 3x in the NT.

Here it means that God the Son shares the same essential attributes as the Father.<sup>5</sup>

**God the Son is truly God.**<sup>6</sup>

Now, this first part of the verse can be understood to be expressing a **reason** for the following actions.

Because God the Son existed in the form of God, this is what He did...<sup>7</sup>

The second half of verse 6 gives another incredible statement.

The language translated from Greek can be translated in different ways.

Older versions read: **did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.**

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<sup>5</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Lightfoot's Commentaries on the Epistles. Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), paragraph 2737.

<sup>6</sup> NET Bible.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, 44.

The word translated as robbery in our versions is used just this one time.

MacArthur points out that the word originally did mean a thing seized by robbery.

**It eventually came to mean anything clutched, embraced, or prized, and thus is sometimes translated “held on to.”** 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.

Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God or did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.

This is one of the most incredible statements that you will find in the Word of God.

It is breathtaking to consider.

The Son of God made a choice that has eternal ramifications for us and for Him.

What we can say is that this choice was part of the eternal plan to redeem sinners.

This was the only way and yet it was a choice that God the Son made.

What was the choice that God the Son made?

It was to become incarnate – to add to His divine person and nature a fully human nature.

Again, listen to the WCF 8.2.

**8.2.** The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being

conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance.

Look at verse 7.

He made himself of no reputation.

The verb in Greek means to make something **empty**, but the translation that we have here – **made Himself of no reputation** – is a good translation.

What did Jesus give up?

It was not His deity as heretics say. He did not empty Himself of His divine nature, but He did give up something.

It is important to observe that this was not just something that happened to God the Son, but an action that He did.

**He made Himself of no reputation!**

As we stand on the edge of this beautiful cliff, we must be careful!

So how did Jesus make Himself of no reputation and yet still did not cease being God?

John MacArthur gives an thoughtful explanation of what this means.

1] A profound change in glory.

**John 17:5** And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

2] Independent authority – Jesus Christ entirely submitted to the Father’s will.

3] Divine prerogatives – He set aside the voluntary display of divine attributes and submitted to the Spirit’s direction.

4] Further we can add that God the Son gave up heavenly riches in exchange for earthly poverty.

**2Cor. 8:9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

5] Incredibly, Jesus Christ would bear our sin and face the full wrath of the Father because of our sin.

**He would cry on the cross, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**

This is the horror that we see later explained in this passage.

Let's continue here with the second part of verse 7:

Taking the form of a bondservant or slave.

God the Son did not grasp to the benefits of His deity. Instead, He took the form of a slave.

The word **form** is the same word used in verse 6.

Form of God

Form of a slave

Truly God and truly man

Notice the word **taking**. It is a very important contrast with what goes before it.

God the Son did not grasp the glory of His divinity.

Instead, he grabbed onto being a slave!

Further, **coming in the likeness of men**.

The word **coming** is an important word in connection with the word **being** used in verse 6.

God the Son was **already existing** in the form of God.

He **came/became** in the likeness of men.

There is great emphasis here on the true humanity of Jesus Christ:

- form of a slave
- likeness of men
- appearance as a man

Our word schematic comes from the Greek word translated appearance.

When you looked at Jesus Christ you would see someone that looked just like an ordinary man.

**Is. 53:2** He has no form or comeliness;

*And when we see Him,*

*There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

The final part of verse 8 brings the humiliation of our Lord to its greatest point.

**He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**

**He humbled himself** – not simply that He was humbled by life or circumstances.

He humbled Himself!

**He became obedient.**

The verb **became** is the same verb in verse 7 - **coming** in the likeness of men,

He became obedient to death, **even death of the cross.**

There is something that should always be shocking, scandalous when we think of or hear these words, **the cross.**

They are so familiar. It does not shock us to hear them, but it should.

We are not going to hear these words like they would have been heard the first time, but it is good to keep in mind the absolute horror of the death on the cross.

J. B. Lightfoot<sup>8</sup> wrote:

It was a death which involved not intense suffering only but intense shame also: a death reserved for malefactors and slaves: a death on which the Mosaic law has uttered a curse (Deut. 21:23), and which even Gentiles consider the most foul and cruel of all punishments (Cic. *Verr.* 5.64); which has been ever after to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks foolishness.’<sup>9</sup>

Remember the first time your husband or wife told you, I love you?

Those three words took on a meaning at that time that they don't after you have heard it thousands of times.

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<sup>8</sup> Quite a name considering two key politicians in Illinois.

<sup>9</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, paragraph 2753.

Never lose sight of the horror of the cross, because in these words we see the horror of our sin and rebellion before a holy God.

The only way your incredibly disgusting sin and pretense of righteousness could be washed away was with the most incredible humiliation and choice of God the Son to suffer for you!

We move from the most incredible testimony and explanation of self-giving to now the greatest example of glory and exaltation!

There is **no greater contrast** in all of existence you can say between verses 6-8 and 9-11.

Again, we have to be careful here.

How is Jesus Christ exalted when He never ceased being the eternal Son of God?

The exaltation is in terms of what was given up voluntarily in this passage.

Further the exaltation is connected with what Jesus voluntarily became for us.

**He is now forever the God-man!**

There is nothing so magnificent to consider as what we have here.

Jesus Christ is now highly exalted.

He is given the name which is above every name!

Now **name** is not just name as we commonly use it – John, Larry, or Sally.

Name here is that of office, rank, and dignity along with the title Lord as we see in verse 11.

**Jesus is Lord!**

Lord as used here is the equivalent of Yahweh.

Now from the beginning this was a title that God the Son enjoyed from eternity.

But in light of His humiliation, suffering, and victory, and who He is, this glory and this title are given!

**Is. 45:23** I have sworn by Myself;

The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness,

And shall not return,

That to Me every knee shall bow,

Every tongue shall take an oath.

**Now how do we understand the timing of verses 10 and 11?**

We can say three things.

First, all of creation is called to worship Jesus Christ as Lord. This is the mandate given to all intelligent creatures – men and angels!

Second, some do this now in terms of salvation or for angels in terms of a right relationship now enjoyed.

Third, one day all will bow and make this confession, though for some it will be made in terms of judgment.

This is not a passage of universal salvation but rather of universal declaration!

So there is a glory that still awaits in terms of God's incredible plan for this world and all that He has made.

All of history in terms of God's great plan of redemption is moving in this direction no matter what difficulties and trials we might suffer and have to endure.

## CONCLUSION

I want to close by reading J. B. Lightfoot's masterful interpretive translation of our text and then two points of application.

## **Lightfoot's Translation**

'Reflect in your own minds the mind of Christ Jesus. Be humble, as He also was humble. Though existing before the worlds in the Eternal Godhead, yet He did not cling with avidity to the prerogatives of His divine majesty, did not ambitiously display His equality with God; but divested Himself of the glories of heaven, and took upon Him the nature of a servant, assuming the likeness of men. Nor was this all. Having thus appeared among men in the fashion of a man, He humbled Himself yet more, and carried out His obedience even to dying. Nor did He die by a common death: He was crucified, as the lowest malefactor is crucified. But as was His humility, so also was His exaltation. God raised Him to a preeminent height, and gave Him a title and a dignity far above all dignities and titles else. For to the name and majesty of Jesus all created things in heaven and earth and hell shall pay homage on bended knee; and every tongue with praise and thanksgiving shall declare that Jesus

Christ is Lord, and in and for Him shall glorify God the Father.'

**Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!**

Wow. How could we ever humble ourselves in a way that would be comparable to what our Lord did?

The point is not to compare what you do to what Jesus did!

The point is to seek to demonstrate the attitude in **reverence** to Christ not in **comparison** to Christ!

Have you ever seen the Grand Canyon before?

Even if you haven't you know how amazing it is.

The **Grand Canyon** is bigger than the state of Rhode Island and is a mile deep, 277 miles long and 18 miles wide.

Now imagine you had to dig a big pit or trench in your back yard to fix some problem.

Would you ever call over your friend who had just been to the Grand Canyon and try to impress him with the little pit or trench you dug in your yard?

The point is similar to what we have in this text.

Your obedience is never to be directly compared to what Jesus did.

What we exalt is not our own humiliation or work.

We exalt always what our Lord did for us!

You might also say, I haven't really had to humble myself in any significant way.

I live an ordinary life.

Well, you never know what God will call you to do.

Again, the point is never live so that you impress others but live in light of what a glorious Savior we have!

**Never point people to you! Point everyone to Christ!**

Second, D. A. Carson has an encouraging word in his short book on Philippians related to evangelism.

Maybe you have a friend or someone you know who says, I am glad you think Jesus has helped you. That's great, but I don't really need that. It's great for you, but not for me.

What do you say in response?

Carson suggests our response be along the lines of this.

“You are a friend, and I wouldn't want to lose your friendship. But I have to insist that the Jesus I talk about is not some sort of personalized therapy. The Jesus I am talking about made you. You owe Him. And one day you will have to give an account of your life to Him. Every knee will bow to Him sooner or later, whether in joy or in shame and fear. Not to see this is already a mark of horrible lostness from which only He can enable you to escape.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Carson, 49.

**Let this mind be in you which Jesus Christ  
demonstrated!**

**Let us bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is  
Lord!**

**Prayer**

**Hymn 123**

**BENEDICTION – 1 TIMOTHY 3:16**

And without controversy great is the mystery of  
godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the  
Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles,  
Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.