

“The Humble Servant-King”

Philippians 2:5-11

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“being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient”

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:5-11, ESV

What if I told you I bought a new car and got a great deal on it only to reveal later that it doesn't actually have an engine or transmission or drive shafts. It has all of the outward features of the car and all of the safety equipment; in fact, it has all of the passive equipment but just none of what makes it go, none of the active equipment. How long would it take you to realize I had not purchased an automobile at all but just a nice, expensive sculpture?

Here's the sad reality: Many professing Christians have an understanding of Jesus and of salvation in Him that is just as incomplete as my ridiculous, hypothetical car. If you ask most Christians what Jesus did to save them, they'll tell you that He died on the cross for their sins. If you ask them for more – Did He do anything else? – they'll say He rose from the dead. And while the death and resurrection of Jesus are absolutely centrally and vitally important to our salvation, didn't Jesus do more? After all, why would He be born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger 33 years before His death if all He needed to do to save us was to die on the cross and rise again 3 days later?

Even saying that Jesus lived a sinless life so He could be qualified as the spotless Lamb of God is still only partially complete. What's missing in all of this is Jesus' active obedience, which He needed to complete to fulfill all righteousness for His people. In Joshua 1:8, Moses charged Joshua, *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”* (ESV)

God's requirement for Joshua – indeed, God's requirement for ALL of His people – is full, active, personal, and complete obedience of everything written in the Law. In Ezekiel 20:13, God pronounced His judgment on His people by saying, *“But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he*

shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them." (ESV)

God is perfectly holy, and His Law is holy, just, and good. God requires perfect, personal, perpetual obedience to His Law because, in the end, God cannot excuse, overlook, sweep away, or indulge any sin or wickedness in His kingdom among His people. Heaven is a perfect place, and the coming new heavens and the new earth will be a place where righteousness dwells and where no evil is allowed to enter or flourish.

So, for us to be right with God and to live with Him forever, we have two massive needs: We must be sinless, which means that all of our wrongdoing must be forgiven, but also, we must be perfectly righteous, which means that we must fulfill all the righteous requirements of God's Law. Seeing both of these needs clearly shows us why we need a Savior and what kind of Savior we need, for we cannot either remove the guilt and pollution of our own sin nor can we fulfill all righteousness. We need someone who can do both of these things for us.

Today, we will be focusing on the active obedience of Christ to fulfill all righteousness, to fill out in His person all the righteous requirements of the Law and all of Scripture regarding the work of the Promised Messiah. This is our exploration and meditation on Philippians 2:8: *"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient."* And then, on Thursday, at our Maundy Thursday service, we will pick up with exploring and meditating on *"obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

The Humble Obedience of Christ at His Baptism

Let's begin our exploration by going to the baptism of Jesus, in Matthew 3:13-17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." – Matthew 3:13-17, ESV

John the Baptist baptized people with a baptism of repentance. Jesus Himself did not need to repent, because He was the sinless Son of God. And while Jesus' baptism by John was the occasion God the Father used to anoint Him with the Holy Spirit for His earthly ministry, that still doesn't fully answer John's objection to Jesus. John was right in saying that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, for John was a sinner and needed repentance. But Jesus was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness," because He was our righteous substitute, the one fulfilling in Himself the human

righteousness we all need. One thing we all need is repentance, but repentance is a righteous act of obedience that we're not capable of on our own. We must be granted repentance by God by His grace. In Acts 11:18, the church in Jerusalem heard the good news of the Gospel of salvation coming with power to the household of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christ: *"When they heard these things, they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, **'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.'**" (ESV)*

Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**"*

Well, if God is going to grant repentance, then it is a positive righteousness, a gift of grace, and it was earned for us by Jesus. Jesus secured the gift of repentance for us in His baptism, as part of His fulfilling of all righteousness, to give us a complete human righteousness, lacking nothing.

The Humble Obedience of Christ in His Temptation

Immediately after His temptation, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert wilderness of Judea, where He fasted for 40 days and then was tempted by the devil:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

*"You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve."*

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,

*"He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,'*

¹¹ and

*"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."*

12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13, ESV)

Notice that Luke 4:13 says that *"the devil had ended every temptation."* This isn't just some casual, throw-away, filler phrase. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (ESV) The temptations of the devil come in three major forms: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Jesus faced all three of these temptations in the desert personally and powerfully and He withstood them all. He passed each test.

Sometimes Christians think that the major take-away from the passages of the temptations of Jesus is to teach us how we, too, can fight against temptation. And certainly, Jesus is a good role-model for us here, but He is much more than that. He overcame temptation for us, to earn a perfect righteousness for us, so we can receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. He sympathizes with us in our weakness, but He also helps us because He has overcome for us.

The Humble Obedience of Christ in His Teaching

But Jesus' perfect obedience involves more than just overcoming temptation. In His teaching, Jesus was obeying His Father and fulfilling what Scripture had said He would do. In John 8:28, Jesus said, *"I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."*

The Scriptures of the Old Testament prophesied the teaching ministry of Jesus, and He fulfilled these prophecies in active obedience to His Father, who sent Him into the world as the Word of God made flesh to teach the truth in righteousness.

*"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old"* – Psalm 78:1-2, ESV

And so, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness in His teaching ministry, too.

The Humble Obedience of Christ in His Miracles

Jesus also fulfilled all righteousness in His miracles. When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* And Jesus answered them, *"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk,*

lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Matthew 11:3-6, ESV)

Now, why did Jesus give this answer to John’s disciples? Because Jesus was perfectly fulfilling what Isaiah had prophesied:

In that day the deaf shall hear

the words of a book,

and out of their gloom and darkness

the eyes of the blind shall see.

The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,

and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. – Isaiah 29:18-19, ESV

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

then shall the lame man leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert – Isaiah 35:5-6, ESV

Jesus did His miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to His Father and in fulfillment of Scripture. In John 5:36, Jesus said, *“the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.”*

In John 10:37-38, Jesus said, *“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.”*

Jesus’ works demonstrated the power and good character of God and fulfilled His work in His role as the Messiah. This active obedience of Christ fulfills all righteousness, and the obedience of Christ in teaching and working miracles as His Father called and gave Him to do these works made Him the fulfillment of Scripture and the fully qualified Messiah and High Priest for His people.

The Humble Obedience of Christ in Triumphal Entry

And so, now we come to Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry. Zechariah 9:9, which we read as our Call to Worship today, foretold this entry of the Lord, and the rest of Zechariah 9 unpacked what Jesus would do to fulfill the work of salvation.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

*Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. – Zechariah 9:9*

Notice how Zechariah describes the coming king:

- *righteous and having salvation is he*
- *humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*

Jesus came mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey so the people would recognize that Zechariah's prophecy was being fulfilled. That should have let the people know that He was also coming as the righteous one, the one having salvation. Even His name, Jesus, told this, as Jesus means "salvation."

Jesus had lived 33 years of sinless obedience, fulfilling all righteousness for His people. He had lived for us, had kept the Law perfectly for us, had secured the grace of repentance for us, had endured and overcome every kind of temptation for us, had fulfilled His prophesied role as Messiah for us, and now He was riding in as the Promised King to make peace.

Kings rode into cities on white war horses when they came to conquer, and this is how Jesus is pictured in Revelation 19 when He comes again to judge the world. But on Palm Sunday, Jesus' triumphal entry was on the back on a donkey, and kings rode donkeys into cities when they came to bring peace, not war. A donkey is a low-to-the-ground humble beast of burden, not something you ride into war. That alone should have told the Jewish people that He was not going to lead an army against the Romans, which many of them were hoping He would do.

Zechariah 9:10 speaks of Jesus bringing peace to the nations (Gentiles):

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Now, Jesus brought this peace in a very surprising way, but it's a way that was prophesied in Zechariah 9, too, in verse 11: "*As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*"

So, in the context of promising peace to the nations, God promises that "*because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*" "The waterless pit" is a

reference to the grave. We'll explore this verse in more detail on Thursday night at our Maundy Thursday service.

As Jesus is riding into Jerusalem on a donkey to the loud shouts of "Hosanna!" from the crowds, He knows He's riding into Jerusalem to bring peace. Although it's hard to know with 100% certainty, Jesus likely entered Jerusalem on the 10th Day of Nisan, which is the day when the Passover Lambs were selected, were set apart. They were brought into the house where the family could bond with the lamb and carefully inspect it to ensure it was indeed spotless. Jesus was brought into Jerusalem and was hailed by the crowds. He was carefully examined by the religious leaders in Matthew 22 and they could find no fault in Him.

The crowds shouted "Hosanna!" that day, which means "Save now!" Jesus knew, although no one else did, that for Him to bring peace and for Him to save His people from sin and death would require the most horrific and painful death ever endured by anyone – not because He was crucified by the Romans but because He was crushed by His Father for our iniquities.

And yet Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient. He stayed on the humble donkey, showing that He was bringing peace, even though bringing that peace would cost Him everything He had. Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient. He did so because we needed a perfect righteousness, a fulfilled perfection before God that only Jesus could accomplish by His obedience.

Romans 5:17-19 tells us the good news of Jesus' perfect obedience this way:

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (ESV)

One man's obedience makes many righteous. And 1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption"

Praise God for such love and for such a perfect and wonderful Savior!