

Humility beyond measure

- Philippians 2:5-8
- I feel about as adequate trying to preach this passage as I would if I were trying to critique the work of Michelangelo on the Sistine chapel. When I look at this passage, I think of Paul's question, "Who is sufficient for such things?" Books have been written about this passage, volumes, and multiple thousands of sermons preached on it. What can I possibly say that will add to what has already been said? Of course, I could ask that question about any passage I preach, and the answer I hear in my soul is the Lord's reply, "My grace is sufficient for you." So I will preach, trusting only in Him to comment through this lisping, stammering tongue on four of the most important verses in the Bible. Yes, we could stop here and camp out and gaze into these four verses for weeks. Maybe someday we will. But for now, I choose to give you the big truths, as I see them, and leave it to you to dive deeper. I hope that you often do that, and I hear from some of you that is the case. You dig deeper, and I am glad to hear it!
- The big idea, the great theme of this passage is this, I believe: "The greatest example of humility was the greatest gift to mankind, and was offered by the greatest of all, the God-man, Jesus Christ." Paul encourages the Philippians in the previous verses to humble themselves, to count others as more significant than themselves, and to look out not only for their own interests but also for the interests of others. Perhaps in anticipation of their question, OUR question, "How can we possibly do that?" Paul points to the Savior. He says,
- **"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."** In other words, put on the mind of Christ. Think as Christ, which will help you to act like Christ and to humble yourselves. Humility is just a word until someone actually humbles himself. Peter didn't say, "Think about humility and feel humility and *act* humble so that at the proper time God will exalt you." No, he said, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." When the disciples gathered in the upper room for the last supper with the Lord, no one remembered to bring along a servant who would wash everybody's feet. You can imagine the twelve guys looking around and looking down and thinking, "I'm not going to wash feet. Not my job. Besides, these are some nasty feet in here. And they stink. Turns my stomach to even think about washing these feet." Then Jesus got up, girded Himself with a towel and took a washbasin and got on his knees and began to do the job of a servant. He humbled Himself. When he was done, Jesus said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to think about washing one another's feet?" OR, "feel what it would feel like if you were to wash one another's feet?" OR, "Humble yourself in your mind by imagining what it would be like to wash one another's feet?" NO! He said, "You also ought to wash one another's feet!" What do we see in the picture of John 13? **God** washing feet. Who is this who knelt and washed the disciples' feet?
- **Verse 6: He was in the form of God.** If we say that in English to describe something, it doesn't mean the same thing as it does here. If you said something is shaped in the form of a cross, that doesn't mean it is **the cross**, right? But the word here for form is "morphe," a Greek word that can be translated "essence." Paul says, Jesus was in essence, God. Even that can be confusing, because if I said, "Well, Jack was not the president of the club but he was acting in the place of the president, so in essence, he was the president that night." Jesus never 'acted' in the place of God. Jesus was God. Spiros Zodhiates says that in the Greek understanding, "You cannot be in the form (morphe) of God unless you are God." The writer of Hebrews says this about Jesus: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." (Hebrews 1:3) Go ahead and try to hold up the universe, and see how long you can do it. Only God can. Then Paul writes that Jesus **"did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped."** This was humility in heaven. We will learn about it in heaven, I am sure; it's one of the mysteries of the Gospel: God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, making a plan for the salvation of mankind that would require God to decree it, Jesus to carry it out, and the Holy Spirit to apply it. In order for this plan to happen, Jesus would have to leave glory and take up a cross and die.
- **Verse 7: (Jesus) emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.** This is humility on earth. Jesus

took on the form (same word, essence) of a man. Important to understand that Jesus became a man; remember, you cannot take the essence of God unless you are God. You cannot take the essence of man unless you are man. Jesus did not pretend to be a man. He was a man. There has been much confusion over this word “emptied” and hymns that mischaracterize the humility of Christ. Jesus did not “empty himself of all but love,” as Charles Wesley stated in his hymn “And Can it Be.” The divine attributes of God were still fully represented in Jesus. Remember, He is the morphe, the essence, of God. The divine attributes were veiled, they were hidden, but they were NOT removed. Kent Hughes writes, “Christ did not *exchange* the form of God for the form of a slave. Rather, he *manifested* the form of God in the form of a slave.” Or as Tony Merida puts it, “remaining all that He was, He became what he was not.” The ruler of the universe took on the form of a servant. Saints, what would happen if each of us did the same? What would happen in your marriage if you became a servant to your spouse? You say, “Well, I will start to serve her when she starts to serve me!” No, what would happen if we took the form of a servant, like Jesus did, not waiting to reciprocate, but choosing to initiate.? Would that be a sign of weakness, if we were to start serving others? Only if we see Jesus as weak.

- Bryan Chappell tells the story of a missionary to Africa who witnessed something like this. In the village where he was working, the chief was always chosen because he was the strongest of all the men in the tribe. He wore a very large headdress and ceremonial robes. One day a man was carrying water out of the shaft of a deep well and he fell and broke his leg. He lay helpless at the bottom of the well. In order to get to him, you would have to go all the way down into the well and climb back up, carrying the man on your shoulders. Because none of the other men in the village was able to do this, the chief was summoned. When he saw the poor man at the bottom of the well, he laid aside his headdress and his robe, climbed all the way to the bottom of the shaft, put the injured man on his shoulders, and carried him up to freedom. He did what no other man could do. That’s what Jesus has done for us. He came to rescue us. And he laid aside His heavenly glory, like the chief laid aside his headdress, in order to save us. Did the chief cease to be chief when he laid aside his headdress? Did Jesus cease being God when he came to rescue us? Of course not. Alistair Begg said that for Jesus, obedience to the father in coming to save us was a greater priority for Him than his own uninterrupted glory.
- I like stories about “famous Christians” who are idolized by others and see that as silly. They see themselves as just people who have been given an opportunity to represent Christ to others on a bigger platform. Bill Brown said, “In other countries heroes made history; in our country, they made albums or touchdowns.” Anyway, some of you may have heard the story about Derek Carr, the quarterback of the Oakland Raiders who was just signed to the largest NFL contract in history: a 5-year deal worth 125 million dollars. But the real buzz was around the interview of the Christian quarterback who obviously doesn’t have a lofty opinion of himself. When asked what he would do to celebrate the huge contract he laughed and said, “Probably just go to Chick Fil-A.” Really, he was asked? That’s all? “Well,” he said, “the first thing I’ll do is pay my tithe like I have since I was in college. That won’t change. I’ll do that.” Carr went further: “The exciting thing for me money-wise, honestly, is this money is going to help a lot of people,” Carr said. “I’m very thankful to have it, that it’s in our hands because it’s going to help people. Not only in this country, but in a lot of countries around the world. That’s what’s exciting to me.”
- **Verse 8: And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**
- This is humility on the cross. This was the pinnacle, the highest point of Jesus’ humility, and without it, nothing else He did would have mattered. Humility in heaven, to leave glory and come down. That’s great. Humility on earth, to be born as a man and become a servant to a few followers. That’s wonderful. But then to balk at the idea of dying for the lost, especially on a cross, would have meant death for all of mankind. But Good news! Jesus did not balk. Neither was he coerced. He said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:17-18) He humbled himself. He lay down on the cross willingly, and watched as they drove the nails

into his hands and his feet. He was lifted up on the cross in humiliation, suffering what Roman society would have called an obscenity. In that day to even mention the cross in polite conversation was to use a curse word. He humbled himself even to death on a cross. John Calvin wrote, "For by dying in this way He was not only covered with ignominy (disgrace) in the sight of men, but also accursed in the sight of God. It is assuredly an example of humility as ought to absorb the attention of all men: it is impossible to explain it in words suitable to its greatness."

- "The greatest example of humility was the greatest gift to mankind, and was offered by the greatest of all, the God-man, Jesus Christ."
- What does this mean for us? As Paul started this passage: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." What mind? The mind that counts others more significant than myself. The mind that looks out for others' interests, not just my own. Is Paul writing to give them a theological treatise? No, he is writing to correct a problem in the Philippian church and in our own lives as well. We think too highly of ourselves so we argue with one another and do whatever it takes to win. We think too highly of ourselves so we cut people off who offend us and treat them as nonentities. We think too much of ourselves so we expect others to serve us, even thinking they should be glad of the privilege. We think too much of ourselves when we ignore our spouse and bury ourselves in work and hobbies. We think too much of ourselves when we ignore the discipline and training of our children. We think too much of ourselves when we amuse ourselves to death with entertainment.
- **Have this mind in 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. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**