

THE HUMILIATION OF GOD'S SON

Acts 8:26-40

Intro: My text for today is taken from the account in the book of Acts which tells us about Philip's account with the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch was reading Isaiah the prophet as he rode along in his chariot. When Philip went to his chariot, he asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch responded by saying, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31). He was reading Isa. 53:7, 8. When the eunuch asked Philip if the prophet were speaking of himself, or of some other person, this is what we are told in Acts 8:35, Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

And so, if we needed further proof, we have evidence here that the prophet, in Isaiah 53, was writing about Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel.

The particular phrase that I want you to notice is found at the beginning of Acts 8:33, "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away"--a quotation from Isa. 53:8.

In Isa. 53:8 we read for that quotation in Acts, "He was taken from prison and judgment." How can we reconcile the differences?

Actually, as is often the case when OT passages are quoted in the NT, the Greek translation of the OT was quoted, not the Hebrew. But the meaning remains the same. This speaks of our Lord's arrest and trial as a time when justice was denied Him, and this because those who sought His death considered Him to be so contemptible that He was not worthy of a fair trial. Our Lord's arrest and the mock trial which was granted Him were a major part of *the humiliation* which our Lord experienced when He was here on earth. And that is what I want to speak to you about today: *THE HUMILIATION OF GOD'S SON.*

Let us begin by considering the difference between *humility* and *humiliation*.

I. HUMILITY AND HUMILIATION.

The words have the same root, and there are some similarities as far as the meaning of each of them is concerned, but there is also a great difference. Actually in the Greek of the NT, the same Greek verb is translated both

ways. For example, in Phil. 2:8, when Paul said that Christ “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross,” he used this word, ταπεινῶω. And when Luke, in writing the account we are considering today, spoke of *the humiliation of our Lord*, he used the noun which comes from this verb. It is the Greek word, ταπείνωσις. So the context would determine the meaning of the word wherever it might be used.

We know that a humble person is unassuming, lowly, one who in behavior and speech shows that he has a modest opinion of himself. It is to be free from pride or anything that indicates arrogance. In SS we have been studying the life of Joseph. Joseph was a humble man. He refused to do anything, or say anything, that would glorify himself.

To humiliate, on the other hand, is to abuse, to ridicule, to belittle, to treat with scorn. Joseph would be an example here as well. He was humiliated by his brothers throughout his life. They further humiliated him when they sold him to slave traders. He was humiliated when Potiphar’s wife lied about him and he was cast into prison.

Humiliation can be caused by what we ourselves do, or by what others do to us, or by circumstances which are used against us. In the case of our Lord, He certainly never did anything to humiliate Himself. He humbled Himself, but humiliation came to Him as the result of the circumstances of His life here on earth, and because of what others did to Him.

II. THE HUMILIATION OF OUR LORD.

Let me say as we look at the humiliation of our Lord that we can never fully appreciate either His humility nor His humiliation unless recognize Who He was. The Apostle Paul made that clear in that classic passage on the humility of our Lord in Phil. 2:5-11. Paul began that passage by saying that our Lord was “in the form of God,” meaning that He was God. He was Deity. When we see the exalted place that our Lord occupied in glory before He became a Man, and then the depths to which He went in His humanity, the span is infinitely wider than you and I could ever cover when we, by the grace of God, seek to humble ourselves. He was far higher than you and I will ever be, and none of us who know Him will ever experience the depths to which He went in order to fulfill His obedience to His Father.

The same is true of our Lord’s humiliation. We can very easily see how

our Lord was humiliated in His arrest, trial, and condemnation, but His humiliation started long before that. Those events plus His death, were the climax of His humiliation. But let me say that anything that identified the Lord of glory with the world in which we live and the humanity of which He became a part, was not only humbling for Him, but humiliating. He Whom angels adored, was made lower than they were, for the suffering of death. We need to meditate on these amazing truths and grasp as much of their meaning as it is possible for us to understand. A cursory reading of the Scriptures will not teach us the meaning. It takes reading and thought and prayer to plumb the depths of these great truths.

And so I want you to realize with me the honor which should have been given to our Lord when He became a Man. When the President of the United States comes to Portland, plans are made months ahead for his visit. There seems to be no limit to the amount of money that is spent to welcome him. The highest security is in effect. Everything is done to honor him.

But what was it like when the Lord Jesus came to earth?

It was humbling and humiliating for Him to be born as a human baby. His mother and her husband Joseph were not celebrities. They both had royal blood in their veins, but that meant nothing “in the fulness of the time” when our Lord was born. They were *nobodies*. When He was born, He was not born in Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem. And do you remember how Micah the prophet described Bethlehem? Let me read his description to you:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

Bethlehem has become very important to us, and you probably would not want to visit Israel without seeing Bethlehem. But it was our Lord Who gave meaning to Bethlehem. But before He came, it was not important at all. There were other places that were far more important. Ephratah, or Ephrath, as it is sometimes called, was the place where Rachel died and was buried. Most of the events recorded in the book of Ruth took place in Bethlehem. It is thought that David was probably born in Bethlehem because he was called “the son of...Jesse the Bethlehemite” (1 Sam. 17:58). But in the OT “the city of David” was always Zion, or Jerusalem.

So it was no honor to our Lord that He was born in Bethlehem. He was

the One Who made Bethlehem famous. And even today it does not seem that Bethlehem is held in high esteem among the Jews because, if I am not mistaken, it is now in the hands of the PLO.

And think of our Lord's birthplace in Bethlehem. It was not in the main inn in Bethlehem. There was no room for them there. Our Lord was born in a stable, and his first cradle was a manger where the cattle were fed. There could hardly have been a more unsanitary place than that. Again, remember we are not talking about one of the great men of the earth. Such a setting would have been humiliating to any of them. But we are talking about the Son of God, the Lord of glory, the One Who was destined to become King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is the One Who was born in a stable in Bethlehem, of a very godly mother, but one who was not even recognized among the great people of her day.

Remember also when we think of our Lord that Joseph and Mary had to take Him to Egypt to preserve His life. Would this not have been a humiliating experience for our Lord, the One Who made the heavens and the earth, to flee from a mere human ruler, regardless of who he might be.

Time will not allow me to go into detail regarding the humiliating experiences our Lord faced while He was engaged in His public ministry. One example will show the attitude of the Jews toward our Lord. It is the story of what the Lord did for the man in John 9 who was born blind. The Jews said this to him who was able to see for the first time in his life: "Give God the praise: **we know that this man is a sinner** (John 9:24). We would not be surprised if someone were to say that about us because we all know that we are sinners. *But this was a charge that was aimed at our Lord Jesus Christ! Could anything have been more humiliating to Him?* Our Lord was subjected to such charges because, as the Apostle Paul wrote later, God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), and most people never recognized Him as more than a man, and so sinners like everyone else. This was behind the charge that the Pharisees leveled at our Lord when they said that He had gone to be a guest of sinners, or that He was a friend of publicans and sinners.

When you think of our Lord being tempted in all points like we are, think of these incidents in the life of our Lord, and what an offence, what a trial this had to be with our Lord! Our Lord would be sensitive to all of these charges in a way that would never affect us.

The good works which our Lord did were always turned against Him. Do

you remember the time, or times, when the Jews said that our Lord was casting out demons by the prince of the demons, thus linking Him with the Devil instead of the Almighty God. See Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22). This was all a part of the humiliation that our Lord endured.

But then as He got closer to the time of His death, His humiliation was intensified. Think about the betrayal of our Lord by Judas. Do you remember what the Lord said to Judas when Judas came with the soldiers to arrest our Lord? Matthew (26:50) tells us that the Lord said to Judas, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" The Lord did not waste His words, nor choose them carefully. When He called Judas, "Friend," it was an indication that our Lord suffered because one so close to Him could betray Him into the hands of His enemies. Luke tells us that Jesus also said to Judas, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). Judas had told our Lord's enemies, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast" (Matt. 26:48). How despicable that was, and how humiliating to our Lord!

We get a glimpse from the life of David as to how such an experience can bring the greatest of humiliation. When David's counselor, Ahithophel, joined Absalom in his rebellion against David, this is what David wrote:

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me (Psa. 41:9).

And then David wrote also in Psa. 55:12-14,

12 For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him:

13 But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.

14 We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.

I feel justified in saying that if David were moved so deeply when his own dear friend turned against him, it was far more humiliating to the Son of God when Judas turned against Him. Let us not think that these things did not affect our Lord because He was the Son of God. They would have had a far deeper effect upon Him than they would have upon one who was only a man.

And then we can add the tragic words of Peter when he denied with oaths and curses that he even knew the Lord. No one seems to have been closer

to our Lord unless it was the Apostle John. But do you remember what the Lord did after Peter had denied the Lord, and the cock crowed? Luke has recorded what happened in Luke 22:61-62:

61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

Can you tell me that what Peter did, did not affect our Lord? How would you describe the Lord's look, a look that suddenly jolted Peter's memory, and sent him away to weep tears of regret. How clever the Devil is to strike at the very men who had been the closest to the Lord during His ministry here on earth!

I have already mentioned from our text the humiliation our Lord experienced when He was tried on false charges. He failed to receive the justice which was due Him. And so He was condemned to be crucified--a death which not only meant disgrace for Him, but also for His family. And insult was added to injury when He was crucified between two thieves. This was certainly one of the most humiliating experiences that our Lord had during His entire life on earth. And yet this was predicted by Isaiah the prophet hundreds of years before our Lord came to earth as a baby. Let me read Isaiah's words to you.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (Isa. 53:7-10).

After reading this last verse, perhaps you remember as I do those words which our Lord uttered from the Cross which speak of the intensity of His sufferings on the Cross. I am referring to His word, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). This would have been the

worst of all, to feel the presence of God withdrawn from Him as He finished the work which the Father had sent Him to do.

Concl: It has been a real exercise for my own soul to review the things we have seen again in the life of our Lord on earth--beginning with His conception, and going through all the way to the terrible death which He died on the Cross. Don't think for a moment that any part of it was easy for the Lord, or that because He was the Son of God it didn't affect Him like it would have effected us. It affect Him far worse than it would have affected us. Why did He endure it all?

It was for your salvation, and mine. And it was for the salvation of all who ever have or ever will trust in Him for their salvation from sin. There was no other way that we could be saved. When we look at the humiliation that our Lord experienced, we will get a greater understanding of the terrible nature of our sins. And for those of us who know the Lord, how our hearts should be humbled before the Lord that He was willing, and did endure, all of that for us! The birth of Christ was in order that He might die, die as our Substitute, die that we would not have to die, die that we might be forgiven and have life forever more. Should we not praise Him today and every day for what He has done for us, and the depths He went through to accomplish it for us?

But what about any of you who do not know the Savior? Can you survey the truth that we have considered today, and not find your own heart moved by the repeated humiliations of our Lord, and the terrible price He paid for the salvation of sinners? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to seek the Lord today while He may be found? Are you going to call upon Him while He is near? Or are you foolishly going to postpone your turning to Christ by faith, and asking Him to be your Savior. Oh, turn to Him today. He has promised that if we come to Him, He will receive us, and He will never cast us away! How wonderful it is to be able to proclaim today, a Savior Who died, but a Savior Who also lives, risen from the dead, because He finished the work the Father gave Him to do, and thus guaranteed the salvation of every sinner who comes to Him to be saved. Come to Him now. Put your trust in Him, and be saved. May God in His grace draw you to Himself.

A PRIEST TURNED PROPHET

Luke 1:76-80

Intro: Along with the account in Scripture of the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, was the miraculous conception and birth of another who was to play a major role in the life and ministry of Christ. That one was the one we know now as John the Baptist, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. The birth of Christ was the most miraculous birth ever to occur, when the Son of God became a Man, conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. But the birth of John the Baptist was also miraculous, not to the same extent as the birth of our Lord, but miraculous nevertheless because John was born when both of his parents were, as Zacharias said to the angel of the Lord, “well stricken in years” (Luke 1:18). In fact, Zacharias did not believe the angel, and so was stricken with dumbness until after his son was born.

The passage which I want to consider with you tonight is the latter part of what is called, *the prophecy of Zacharias*. Luke 1:67 tells us that Zacharias was “filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied,” and so we are to understand that he was speaking by divine inspiration. And he was fulfilling both ministries of a prophet--that of *forthtelling* and *foretelling*. And so Zacharias was, on this occasion, A PRIEST TURNED PROPHET.

The first part of his message had to do with what God had done in fulfillment of prophecies given to the OT prophets; the latter part had to do with the unique place that his son, John, was to have in the ministry of the Lord. And it is this part that I want to consider with you because it was not only relevant for John the Baptist, but for us as well.

It is hard for us to comprehend how low things had fallen spiritually at the time John the Baptist and our Lord were born, but it was described in the most graphic terms by the prophet Isaiah in words which we find in Isa.9:2. Let me read them to you:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light:
they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon
them hath the light shined.

This is describing the people of Israel when the Lord came (and also during a large part of the time before He came. They were walking in darkness. That is, they were living in spiritual ignorance and sin--and were content to have it their way. The nation to whom the prophets had been sent with the light of the Gospel, was now described as “the land of the shadow of death.” The light had almost been extinguished. The Lord

will never allow it to die completely, but conditions spiritually were very bad in Israel. Religion had become very legalistic. The Pharisees taught works to the exclusion of grace. The people were in darkness, and, consequently, without hope.

Notice how Zacharias described conditions in verse 79 of our text. (Read.) To “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” indicates not only where the people were spiritually, but that they were content to have things the way they were. Most of them were unaware that things could be different. People without Christ and without the light of the Word are always like that. They are like that today. They have no idea that Christ is the One they need. They face their problems and needs in their own wisdom, or in the wisdom of others who are just as blind and needy as they are.

Well, into this situation John the Baptist was born, and our Lord Jesus Christ was born. Both men were “sent from God,” but, as we have seen, in different ways. At this point in Zacharias’ life when his ability to speak had been restored to him, he predicted by the Holy Spirit what the ministry of his son would be. It seems that his son, John, was only a baby when Zacharias spoke these words, but there is no doubt but that he heard these words from his father many times during the years in which he was growing up. Let us look carefully at what Zacharias said about his son.

The first thing that he did was to tell John what he would be called:

I. “THE PROPHET OF THE HIGHEST” (Luke 1:76a).

Although Zacharias was here acting in the role of a prophet, yet his son was the first officially appointed prophet in approximately 400 years. He was the personal prophet, the forerunner (as he is so often called) of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord is here called, “the Highest,” *the Most High God*. This is the equivalent of what the Apostle Paul called our Lord in Rom. 9:5, “...who is over all, God blessed for ever.” The Lord is the Supreme God, the Sovereign God. There is none greater than He! And this statement indicates that John was commissioned by our Lord to proclaim to the people what the Lord wanted him to proclaim (Hendriksen, p. 127). Matthew Henry said it meant “that what he said was as his mouth, what he did was as his harbinger” (V, 595)--harbinger means *his forerunner*.

So we should not be surprised to read what his ministry would be.

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY (Luke 1:76b).

John was to “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” This was the prophecy which Isaiah uttered concerning John the Baptist. See Isa. 40:3. It is cited by Matthew in Matt. 3:3 where he was speaking of John the Baptist:

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

When the delegation of Jews from Jerusalem came from their leaders to find out who John was, he said that he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet that should come, but

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias (John 1:23).

His ministry was to exalt Christ, of Whom he said,

26 ...I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;
27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose (John 1:26-27).

In the latter part of John 3 we find several verses in which John the Baptist was speaking of his own ministry. One statement is especially important: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

John the Baptist was very careful to humble himself so that he could give the greatest possible glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, according to the prophecy of Zacharias, how was he to prepare the ways of the Lord? This brings us to:

III. THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1:77-79).

These are very important verses. They all add up to what the Gospel is. And remember that the Jewish people were not hearing the Gospel from their religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees and elders.

So John the Baptist was “to give the knowledge of salvation unto his,” the Lord's, “people by the remission of their sins.” And this is why the

Apostle John mentioned that John the Baptist's message was, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John did not hesitate to talk about sin. People are not ready to hear the Gospel until they are willing to talk about sin. It is sin that has separated us from God. It is sin that has put us under divine condemnation. The Lord did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. See Matt. 9:13. As the Physician of our souls, he did not come to those who were well and healthy, but to the sick. See Matt. 9:12. The Gospel gives the answer to man's sin, and John the Baptist proclaimed to the people of Israel that every sacrifice in OT times which had been offered for sins, was a type of the one, final sacrifice which would be made by the Son of God, His sacrifice of Himself which would forever put away the sins of those for whom the Lord died. Zacharias spoke of it as a "remission." This word speaks of being released from a penalty, of having all charges dropped because they had been fully satisfied. And the record against a forgiven sinner is cleared so completely that it is as though the sins had never been committed.

This was not the idea that the Jews in that day had about their relationship with God. Many felt that they were God's people because they were Jews. But John the Baptist had the difficult task of proclaiming the saving work of the Messiah Who had come.

But this was not all.

Always when people begin to understand that their problem is sin, they immediately want to do something about it, to atone for their own sins. And this is why it is so natural for them to turn to good works of some kind. Or they may feel, and rightly so, that they are not worthy of such a sacrifice by such a Person as the Lord is. And so this is why John the Baptist was to talk about "the tender mercy of our God." The very mention of the mercy of God does away with any idea of personal merit, or the need for any works. God is not moved toward sinners because He finds them attractive to Himself--in fact, we merit nothing but His judgment. And yet in His mercy He sent His Son to provide salvation for undeserving sinners. And God's mercy is sufficient to cover all of the sins of any sinner, regardless of how many there are, or how great they might be. Paul obtained mercy even though he said that he was *the chief of sinners*. Cf. 1 Tim. 1:15.

And notice that it was because God is a God of mercy that "the dayspring from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78b). The Lord is "the dayspring."

And He is called this because His coming was like the first rays of the sun after a long, dark night. And he did not come from some place on the earth, but “from on high”! He is the Lord from above. He is the Light of the world. And you will undoubtedly remember that He said, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12b). The Lord Jesus came to a people who were sitting in darkness “and in the shadow of death.” They would have been content to sit in darkness all of their lives if the Dayspring had not arisen upon them. There is nothing to awaken people to the truth in this world which is “in the shadow of death.” That is why Christ came, and that is what John the Baptist’s message was to do in preparing the way for Christ. It was not a popular message then, and it is not a popular message today. But it is the only message of salvation. There is salvation in none other. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and we can only come to God for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life when we come to Him through Christ.

And then notice how the description of John’s message ends: “To guide our feet into the way of peace.” People in every generation have been concerned about peace--personal peace, family peace, national peace, and world peace. But Christ is “the way of peace.” There is no peace when people walk in darkness. It is only when we are walking in the light of Christ and of the Gospel. There we find peace with God. There we receive peace in our hearts. And it is only in Christ and the Gospel that there can be peace on earth, “good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). And I am not talking about a cease fire; I am speaking about real peace, lasting peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Concl: It seems that little John the Baptist was only eight days old when his father, THE PRIEST TURNED PROPHET, uttered these words of truth. How do you think that John the Baptist was saved? Scripture does not tell us, but surely there is no need for that. With a father like he had, and a mother like he had, we can be sure that Zacharias and Elisabeth were the two main people who taught him about the Savior, and what his own ministry would be. John’s mission was short, but, oh, what a blessing! And it would be impossible to calculate how many were turned to the Lord by his faithful preaching of the Gospel. It is one of the outstanding stories of all of Scripture.

But why would I pick a Scripture like this on the last Sunday night before Christmas of this year? I trust that the Lord has led me. But personally it is because it is so apparent that we live in a world just like the one John

the Baptist was born in--a world where people are walking in darkness, and are content to walk in darkness, and who do not know that there is any other way that they could be walking. They do not know that peace about which so much is said at Christmas time, is never to be found in this world. I hear people talking about death all of the time with no thought that there is any need to prepare for death. Most people have no idea what David was talking about when he said, as he did in Psalm 23, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me..."

So what should this passage tell us for this day in which we live? It should tell us that we have the same mission and the same message that John the Baptist had. We do not have the relationship with the Lord that he had, but the needs of the world are certainly the same, and people are the same, and the Gospel is still the same, and it is still the only remedy for sin. We are reaping the harvest of our God-less and Christ-less and Bible-less ways. Morally the world has fallen apart. Our sins as a nation are mounting higher than Mt. Everest every day. May the Lord give us the boldness we need to prepare the way for people to come to Christ! We need to spread the message of the Gospel, believing that it is still the power of God unto salvation, and that it is a message that will always bear fruit, accomplishing what the Lord intends to do in reaching the hearts of sinners whom He intends to claim for Himself.

But what is going on today? (Read the note that Gary sent to me about the ad a church in Beaverton placed in the newspaper.)

May God forbid that we should ever follow that path. That is the way of darkness. Are we looking for big crowds, or are we preaching and praying that God will touch the heart of people in our day, and turn them to Himself? By the grace of God let us follow the example which John the Baptist has left for us. That is God's way, the way of life, and the way of blessing.