

THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST

Philippians 2:6-8

Intro: As we come to the Christmas season, those of us who know the Lord are grateful for the opportunity to concentrate on the amazing coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God into a world permeated with sin, and under divine judgment as a result of that sin. And for Him to come into the world, not with His glory displayed for all to see, but to come as a Man, and in such a manner that countless numbers of people would never think of Him as anyone but a Man. How thankful you should be if we can say with the Apostle John, although not with the fulness in which he could say it, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The passage which I want to consider with you today and for the next two Sunday mornings has to do with “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet. 1:11). And it appears in an epistle where we might be least inclined to look for it. It is not a digression from the message of the epistle, but the very foundation upon which it was written. As you probably know this was one of Paul’s prison epistles, and yet there is a strong emphasis upon rejoicing in the Lord. And yet we would not know that if it were not for an expression like we find in chapter 1, verses 7 and 13 where he mentioned “my bonds” or, “my bonds in Christ.” There is no complaining, no frantic appeal for the believers in Philippi to do anything that they could to help obtain his release. But instead we see clearly that Paul was concerned about them, about their relationship with the Lord, *and especially about their love for, and concern for, each other.*

One thing that stands out in the epistles of the NT is the concern that the people of God had for each other. This stands out, for example, in Paul’s reference to Epaphroditus in chapter 2. Paul said that he “was full of heaviness,” not because he had been sick, in fact he had almost died, but Paul said that Epaphroditus “was full of heaviness, because” they “had heard that he had been sick.” Such was the concern that Epaphroditus had for the believers in Phillippi. He was concerned about them because they had been so concerned about him.

Notice at verse 3 in chapter 1, and reading down through verse 8, how Paul expressed his love for them, and then he told them not only that he

was praying for them, but what he was praying for. And such words were usually characteristic of Paul's letters. They were not just words that came from his pen, but they were words that came from his heart.

We have just finished studying the letter of Paul to the Colossians. This same emphasis was in that letter. Paul had never been with them in Colosse when he wrote to them, but he mentioned in 1:3 that he had been praying for them ever since he heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, *and of the love that they had for "all the saints."* Paul always was concerned about how professing Christians felt about other Christians, and he looked for signs of their love for each other. And so we see the same emphasis here in Philippians.

The Apostle John was also very strong on this. He wrote in 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." But to the apostles this was not to be just a matter of talk, but it was to be evident in their lives. When you and I were saved, we were brought into a special fellowship with every other believer on the face of the earth. You and I may never meet most of them, but when we meet a Christian, a true Christian, we immediately are aware of a special bond that binds us together in Christ.

Now if Paul had a special reason for writing to the church at Philippi besides the desire to let the believers in Philippi know how he was doing, it was on this very point. Follow in your Bible as I read the four verses that immediately precede my text for this Christmas series. (Read Phil. 2:1-4.) Note especially verses 3 and 4. Paul was not asking them to be busybodies in each other's affairs. Not at all! In fact in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 and 1 Timothy 5:13, he positively discourages busybodies. But what he was encouraging was that we look out for each other, and help each other in every way that we can – not only physically, and materially, but spiritually. And one of the first and best ways we can do the latter is by prayer.

Now let me ask you a question: Who is the greatest example that you can think of who put others ahead of himself? We all should answer immediately, the Lord Jesus Christ lived a life in which He showed that His greatest concern was for others – for God first, then for His own people, and beyond that for every person who came to Him, or who crossed His path. And we are to have the mind of Christ.

Have you seen that commercial on television which shows a man back in his youth in the sixties when he did what he wanted to do, and now that he is retired he wants to keep doing the same thing –what he wants to do. That is a miserable way of living. He thinks that is the good life, but that is actually a wasted life. A common question that some people always ask, is, “But what is there in that for me?” Sin has made us self-centered. We need to be Christ-centered and God-centered, and beyond that we need to be people-centered – not to be like them (unless they are godly people), but to help them, and especially to help the people of God in their walk with Him.

You and I have talked to each other this morning. Have we asked the Lord to make us sensitive to the needs of others? There is no one who is a greater example of one who lived for others than our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the Apostle Paul said, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Now I am going to deal with this text a little differently from the way we usually read or teach a text. I am beginning this morning with verses 6 through 8 which speak of the humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then next Sunday I plan to speak from verses 9 through 11 on the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then on the 20th, just before Christmas, I am going to speak on verse 5, what God wants us to do.

Now look at these three parts of this text in this way. In verses 6 through 8 we see what Christ did. In verses 9 through 11 we see what God did. And in verse 5 we see what you and I are to do.

Let me read the text that way:

- 1) What did Christ do? (Read vv. 6-8.)
- 2) What did God do? (Read vv. 9-11.)
- 3) What are we to do? (Read v. 5).

In your Bible reading do you ever re-read a chapter, or a few verses that the Lord has impressed upon your mind. I find as I get older that I do that more frequently. That is what I am asking you to do with these verses. I think that we will be better prepared to have the mind of Christ if we know what the mind of Christ was. And we will be more inclined to have the mind of Christ if we see how God rewarded Christ, and how we can expect to see the blessing of God in our lives if we live like Christ lived. Of course, we will never measure up completely to what Christ did, nor

can we expect to see God's blessing like it rested, and continues to rest upon the Lord Jesus. But it is God's purpose in saving us to make us like the Lord Jesus, and one way He is doing that is when we live like He lived. Or to state it another way, when we have the mind of Christ. If you have never memorized Philippians 2:5-11, I hope that you will.

Now let us turn to verses 6, 7, and 8, and concentrate on them in the time that remains. (Read them again.)

In my subject for my message I have used the word *humiliation* for the Lord when probably, in applying it to ourselves, it would be better to use the word *humbling*. And I say that because no child of God has come from the heights that our Lord came from, to the depths He experienced in this death. The whole earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in verses 6, 7, and 8. For Him Who eternally was in the form of God, that is, absolute Deity, to be obedience to God to the point of death, and such a death that was infinitely worse than a common criminal would die, marks a height to a depth that is not only far greater than we can ever experience, but infinitely greater.

“Who being in the form of God” is a statement of the absolute Deity of our Lord. This is what He always has been. In heaven before He came to earth no one, neither the Devil, nor the fallen angels, nor the righteous angels, ever questioned in the least, but that He was God the Son, perfect, the glorious Son of God, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal as the Father is eternal, and eternal as the Holy Spirit is eternal. He was a Member of the Triune God. He was ever the Object of the worship of all of the holy angels.

This glorious Person Whom the Apostle Paul called in our text, Christ Jesus, the anointed One Who became a Man, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” This means that He did not feel that He ought to maintain the manifestation of the glory that had always been seen in Him. But “made Himself of no reputation.” A familiar translation of these words is that *He emptied Himself*. Some who do not believe in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Man on earth, say that this means that He gave up His divine attributes, and so in His incarnation he ceased to be God. But we know that He exercised many of His attributes while He was here on earth. No one ever performed the number of miracles that our Lord did while He was here on earth. But there was not the constant manifestation of His glory while He was here. This is what Paul meant

when he said that the Lord did not think that His equality with God was something that had to be continually grasped, maintained, or expressed, but for the purpose of our redemption He became a Man because He was to die for human sinners. Paul said in Romans 8:3 that God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. He appeared as a mere man, but He was unlike us in that His flesh, His humanity, was not sinful.

He took upon Himself the form, the appearance, the same word that Paul used in verse 6 speaking of what the Lord was eternally. Jesus became a bondservant of God. He came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father Who had sent Him. See John 5:30; 6:38.

“And being found in fashion as a man,” here Paul used a word similar to the Greek word for “form,” but a different word, emphasizing His appearance, “He humbled Himself.” We see this when He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, but primarily we see this in the Garden of Gethsemane where He sweat great drops of blood and prayed, “O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but thine be done.” This is the account found in Luke 22:40-44:

40 And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Immediately after this was arrested, and the next day crucified. This marked the end of His humiliation

Many have seen in these verses various stages in the humiliation of our Lord on earth. In fact, knowing His Deity, His whole life on earth, especially the years of His public ministry, but all of His life, was one long time of humiliation for our Lord. “He was despised of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” See Isaiah 53:3. Notice how the Apostle Paul traced our Lord’s humiliation:

1) The height from which the Lord came, a position He had held eternally with His Father: “In the form of God.”

- 2) He emptied Himself, or as it is expressed in the KJV, “He made Himself of no reputation.”
- 3) Took the appearance of a bond slave.
- 4) Made in the likeness of men.
- 5) He humbled Himself.
- 6) Became obedient unto death.
- 7) But in His death He was humbled even more because it was death by crucifixion.

All of this our Lord did primarily in obedience to the Father’s will, and yet at the same time it was for us, unworthy sinners, who, if we deserve anything it was not eternal salvation, but to be banished forever in hell from the presence of God. So the Lord did not just give us what was better than we deserved, but the opposite.

As the Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon to rebuild the Temple of the Lord, shouted, “Grace, grace,” unto it. So as we contemplate the humiliation of our Lord in His death on the Cross, the response of our hearts should be, “Grace, grace” (Zech. 4:7).

Concl: Let me close with these words from Charles Simeon as he preached to the people in the church on the campus of Cambridge University over 200 years ago. And this has to do, not only with what the Lord was doing in His life, but on whether or not it actually is possible for us to have the mind of Christ:

His death is the greatest instance of unselfish, self-sacrifice, and the loftiest example of looking on the “things of others” that the world has ever seen. It dwindles in significance, in pathos, and in power to move us to imitation unless we clearly see the divine glory of the eternal Lord as the background of the gentle lowliness of the Man of Sorrows, and the Cross. No theory of Christ’s life and death but that He was born for us, and died for us, either explains the facts and the apostolic language concerning them, or leaves them invested with their full power to melt our hearts and mould our lives. There is the possibility of imitating Him in the most transcendent of His acts. The mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus. That it may, His death must first be the ground of our hope, and then we must make it the pattern of our lives, and draw from it the power to shape them after His blessed Example (Vol. 9, pp. 259, 260).