

Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus: The God Who Is Humble

Scripture Focus

Philippians 2:5-11

Key Verse

Philippians 2:8

TDM Competency

Live Biblically: Understand and apply biblical principles to all areas of life.

Overview

Paul pens what is one of the greatest statements on the person and work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. If one is looking for a great summary statement about the person and work of Jesus to share with others, Philippians 2:5-11 is it. Few verses of the New Testament have been more severely attacked throughout church history than these. The attacks have focused on Jesus as the Son of God being equal with God, the submission of the Son to the Father even though there is only one God, and the exclusivity of Christ as the only Lord to whom all will one day bow. Such are not popular issues, but are necessary for believers to understand in order to truly live godly in Christ. It should astound believers that in the midst of this incredible revelation of Jesus Christ is woven the command for us to live like Him.

Theme

Out of a heart of worship, imitating the submission, obedience and humility of Christ is the call of God on every believer.

Desired Learner Response [Aiming at the Heart for Life Transformation]

To understand the nature and work of Jesus Christ. To submit to Him as Lord out of a repentant heart. To obey Him out of a repentant heart. To worship Him as Lord.

Outline

- I. The Command (v. 5)**
- II. His Nature (vv. 6-7)**
- III. His Work (v. 8)**
- IV. His Wonder (vv. 9-11)**

Lesson

I. The Command (v. 5)

v. 5

Several years ago many high school ministries asked to consider the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” or “WWJD.” Bracelets with the acrostic were worn along with T-shirts by Christian students around the world. Often missing in this effort by ministers and youth leaders to engage students in godly living was discovering through Bible study the answer to the question, “What Did Jesus Do?” or “Who Is Jesus?” Because many students were not properly prepared to answer the WWJD question with the biblical revelation of the person and works of Jesus, they began to justify their desires by what they personally thought Jesus might do. In the end, many students concluded, “Jesus would do exactly what I want to do,” whether such a conclusion was commanded in Scripture or not.

Paul exhorted the believers in Philippi to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” He did not leave them to wonder what kind of mind Jesus had or what Jesus might have believed. Rather, Paul gave these believers specifics regarding the attitude, thoughts and disposition of Jesus, by which they could know exactly how to think and respond to all situations in life.

“Mind” includes not only that which a person thinks or dwells upon, but also the attitude by which that person conducts himself. Believers are free from the bondage of sin, which includes bad attitudes. We are not bound or in bondage to having a bad attitude, but rather because of the liberating work of Christ in our lives we can obey the command of this verse and have a Christ-like attitude.

“Which was also in Christ Jesus” establishes the sole source of our ability to obey this command as well as the sole example that believers have to imitate. Closely examining the Bible’s revelation of the life and works of Jesus in order to imitate Christ is the only way to do that which Jesus did. Not even the best spiritual speculation or inclinations are sufficient to direct the believer. The Word of God possesses all that is necessary for faithfulness to Christ.

Ask: Why is it dangerous for a person to speculate what Jesus might do in a certain situation? **Ask:** Why is it necessary to always examine our inclinations with the Bible?

II. His Nature (vv. 6-7)

V. 6

Daniel Akin notes that these verses are “Most likely an early Christian hymn sung about and to Jesus as God. The significance of this can hardly be overstated. Already by A.D.60 they worshipped Jesus as God, remarkable for Jewish persons. Two natural stanza: 1) 6-8 His humiliation, 2) 9-11 His exaltation. This is a text whose truth is inexhaustible and in many ways unfathomable. It calls for our most careful and worshipful study. It truly is Holy ground. Each word, each phrase is bursting with biblical, theological, and practical truth. For Paul the starting point of this hymn is the preexistence of Christ and His full deity. It would seem that the servant song of Isaiah 53 and the Lord’s “suffering servant” loom as the possible backdrop to what unfolds. Being in the form of God emphasizes Christ’s continuous and constant existence in the very nature or essence of God. Form affirms that the Son eternally exists in the very nature, essence, essential being and glory of God. Contrary to the ancient heretic Arius (condemned at the council of Nicea in A.D. 325) or modern day Deniers, there never was a time when He was not. He was not adopted as a God. He was not simply a God intoxicated man. In His person, His essence, His very beingness and glory He was and is God. Whatever it is that makes God God, Christ is all of God’s Glory!!! *Daniel Akin, Sermon, April 20, 2004 SEBTS Chapel.*

“Being” is more than a word that introduces Paul’s theme of Christ’s deity. Rather it is a word that carries the idea of one’s essential nature and essence. It carries the idea that the nature which He possessed on earth was the nature that He had always, eternally possessed. He did not cease being God when He became man but rather continued to be what He had been for all eternity, God.

“form” – Paul does not imply that Jesus was a representation of God, but rather was in His being and essence the very nature of God, being God Himself. Form emphasizes that what was seen on the outside was the perfect picture of God since that which was on the inside was God. He was fully God and fully man, thus the perfection of holy living that was evident on the outside simply mirrored the holy perfection of God that was His nature.

“did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” – Simply stated, Jesus did not have to steal deity for He was already and always fully God. All that were offended by His claims to deity believed that He was just a man. His persecutors accused Him of claiming to be equal with God, which was blasphemous if Jesus had only been a man. But Jesus did not consider it blasphemy since He was indeed God. Jesus did not become God at the resurrection or ascension any more than He stopped being God in the conception or birth. He has and always will be God; therefore, He did not have to reach or grasp for deity.

v. 7

“made Himself of no reputation” – Jesus is the only man ever to live that had every right to be exalted, glorified, revered, honored and praised, yet He willingly laid aside those rights. “Made himself” includes

the idea of emptying one's self. It is not an indication that Jesus emptied Himself of deity, but rather He emptied Himself of the prerogatives of deity.

MacArthur observes, "Jesus Christ emptied Himself completely of every vestige of advantage and privilege, refusing to assert any divine right on His own behalf. He who created and owned everything forsook everything. It must always be kept in mind that Jesus emptied Himself only of certain aspects of His prerogatives of deity, not of His deity itself. He was never anything, and never will be anything, but fully and eternally God, as Paul was careful to state in the previous verse. All four gospels make it clear that He did not forsake His divine power to perform miracles, to forgive sins, or to know the minds and hearts of people. Had He stopped being God (an impossibility), He could not have died for the sins of the world. He would have perished on the cross and remained in the grave, with no power to conquer sin or death. As R. C. H. Lenski comments, "Even in the midst of his death, he had to be the mighty God in order by his death to conquer death" (The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], 782) (from The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Copyright © Moody Press and John MacArthur, Jr., 1983-2007).

Jesus willingly made Himself a man that had no reputation to speak of. To see Him walking down the street or doing the work of a carpenter would not have in any way caused one to believe that He was God. He went from the highest throne that will ever exist to the confines of a virgin's womb, to a cradle, to a carpenter's shop, to a cross, to a grave after which came the glorious resurrection. He deserved the praise of all creation, yet He willingly set aside the praise in order to suffer the wrath of His Father in our place on the cross.

Paul describes the humility of Christ in two ways. First, he states that Jesus took the "form of a bondservant." Not only did God become man, but He became a man who was a servant. He did not just dress and live like a servant, He became a servant. Just as He was fully God, He was also fully man, but not just any man; He took the form (essence) of a man that was not royalty but rather a servant. He was the God who was also the humble servant. Second, He "came in the likeness of men." Likeness indicates that He was not just a phantom that looked like a man or a spirit being that appeared to be similar to a man, but rather that He, God, was flesh, blood, bones, just like all other men, yet without sin. That statement may seem common place to those who have been believers for a while. However, for a first century audience, the idea of the one true God becoming a man was astounding. He humbled Himself to be the God-bondservant-man.

Ask: Why do we seek to build our reputations? **Note** that it is often for no other reason but self-worship. We often concern ourselves with what others think because we think too highly of ourselves. Even the people that continuously convince themselves that no one else likes them are often guilty of self-worship. Putting self in the center of one's thoughts and concerns, whether that is having a high view of self or a low view of self, comes from the same heart that desires a better reputation for self. Jesus, the only man in world history who justifiably deserved to be worshipped by all others, emptied Himself of the privileges of being exalted.

Ask: A bondservant is one that has the single, consuming focus of pleasing his master in all things. When you look at your life and heart's desire, do you see the attitude and actions of a bondservant? What actions remind you of a bondservant? What attitudes do not remind you of a bondservant? Are you willing to repent of those actions and attitudes that do not clearly reflect the attitude and actions of Christ?

III. His Work (v. 8)

v. 8

"Found in appearance as a man" is a statement that refers back to verse 7. Since He had humbled Himself by becoming a man and bondservant, Paul wanted to specify the extent that Jesus went in His service.

“He became obedient” – Your class may wonder, “Since Jesus was God, to whom would He be obedient?” As the second person in the Triune God-head, Jesus functionally submitted Himself to the Father. The functions or actions that He carried out as the God-man on earth were in submission to the will of the Father. Never were the Father’s and the Son’s wills divided since there is one God, but in holy submission, Jesus submitted Himself to the Father.

“Even the death of the cross” – Notice the progression of Paul’s description of the humility of Christ. Not only did Jesus set aside His prerogatives of deity, He also became man, He also became a man that was a bond-servant, He also was a bond-servant that perfectly obeyed, He also obeyed to the point of death, and He also willingly died the most horrific death known to man in the first century. On the cross Jesus bore the horrifying wrath of His Father. The wrath of God is God’s righteous judgment against sinful man. People that confess and repent that they have broken God’s law, thus stand guilty before a holy God, are delivered by Christ’s substitution on the cross. Jesus took their place in death. People that refuse to repent will receive the horrifying and just wrath of God for all eternity in Hell. The horror of God’s wrath on the cross will be the reality of all in Hell for eternity. The Holy Son of God satisfied the wrath of God in one day on the cross. Sinful man cannot satisfy the wrath of God even for eternity in Hell.

“Death by execution on a stake as a criminal, literally, “the death of the cross.” This was the most humiliating possible death in two contexts. In the Roman setting, it was reserved for criminals who were not Roman citizens; citizenship entitled even capital criminals to better treatment when being executed. In the Jewish setting, the victim of crucifixion came under a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23, quoted at Ga 3:13 in connection with Yeshua [Jesus]); for Jews this was “an obstacle” (1 C 1:23) to regarding Yeshua [Jesus] as the Messiah. The curse of separation from God brought about by human sin (Isaiah 59:2) was endured by the sinless Savior (Mt 27:46) and thus removed as a barrier between human beings and God, as taught in Ro 5:9-11” (from Jewish New Testament Commentary Copyright © 1992 by David H. Stern. All rights reserved. Used by permission).

Ask: If we are called to have “this mind” (v. 5), what are ways that we can demonstrate humility? Remind your class that this text is not simply calling for us to act humbly, but rather for us to be humble. Humility contradicts man’s sin nature which is bent towards self-exaltation, not self-humiliation. We must repent of our sinful desire to exalt self and trust that the Spirit of God in our hearts will enable us to be humble so that we may live humbly. It is a worthy statement, “Humility comes when we truly realize who Christ is without us and who we are without Him.” He is exactly who He is without us, but we are destined for eternity in Hell without Him.

IV. His Wonder (vv. 9-11)

v. 9

“Therefore” – Because of all that was just stated, namely: Jesus was the eternal Son of God, being God Himself; He humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross; and His death satisfied the righteous requirements of God for man to be saved from the wrath that is to come. God “has highly exalted Him” meaning that Jesus returned to Heaven after His death, burial and resurrection, to resume the place that was His for all eternity. That He did not become God at this point is evident from verse 6. To “highly exalt” is to super exalt, referring to the certainty that no one is more exalted in Heaven than Jesus. In the Revelation we see that it is the glory of Jesus that illuminates all of Heaven. He has been super exalted to be forever worshipped on His throne in Heaven.

“Name above every name” – Of this statement MacArthur says, “This name was given Him to emphasize His rank above all other beings. It reflects not only His divine essence and nature but also the new and unique privileges mentioned above that the Father gave Him in response to His redemptive work. This name is incomparable, the superlative of superlatives” (from The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Copyright © Moody Press and John MacArthur, Jr., 1983-2007).

v. 10

The response of all creation to the exalted Christ is revealed in verse 10. The “name of Jesus” is not a mere name by which He is referred but is a reminder of the fulfillment of God’s decree in Christ. In Matthew 1, Jesus is a name that means, “The Lord Saves.” We will examine that name in the Matthew 1 lesson in this series. Jesus will be the name that for all eternity will cause men to kneel and confess that He is indeed Savior, Lord and Messiah. Kneeling represents outwardly that which the heart believes inwardly. To kneel at the name of Jesus is to believe that He is the Lord that saves. Your class will probably not struggle with believers in heaven bowing. But what about all, including non-believers on earth and those under the earth, which is a reference to Hell. Non-believers are people that will not repent, but will know that Jesus is Lord when they stand before Him as judge. Likewise, those in Hell will know that He is Lord for it is His law they broke and His just punishment of eternal wrath that they suffer forever. In the end, no one will doubt that Jesus is Lord. Most will not respond to Him in faith, but all will “bow” as an outward expression of what they know to be true.

v. 11

For the same purposes that all will bow, so too will all people confess “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Those under the wrath of God during the tribulation and then before Him at the Great White Throne Judgment will confess, which means to agree with God. All will have no other option but to agree that Jesus is Lord of all. All that are eternally in Hell will know for certain that the God whom they rejected is Jesus who is Lord. **Note** that the bowing of the knees and the confession of the mouth are “to the glory of God the Father.” Your class may ask, “How can someone going to Hell bring glory to the Father?” Hell is horrible. It is the place of eternal torment for those that rejected the gospel and all the evidence for God. Yet, even Hell is glorifying to God. It is the perfect punishment for those that reject a perfect, Holy God. Were Hell tolerable, mildly uncomfortable or even the party that some people erroneously perceive it to be, it would not glorify God. To glorify God is to testify of His nature and works. Hell testifies that God is a perfect God who perfectly judges people who do not repent of breaking His law. It’s a frightening and terrifying testimony, but nonetheless it is a testimony that God perfectly punishes sinners.

Ask: How do we see the name of Jesus wrongly used in our culture? **Ask:** Why is it important for the Christian to know the significance of the name of Jesus? **Ask:** What should be the response of every believer since we know that Jesus is the Lord who saves and is exalted?