

"Christ's Humility, and Ours"

One of my fond memories from my youthful years at Ross Street Methodist Church in Lancaster was a duet often sung by a father and his daughter, usually at the Sunday night service. It was the old hymn, "Ivory Palaces". The chorus goes like this: "Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe, only His great eternal love, made my Savior go." Jesus left the ivory palaces of heaven to come into this broken world for our salvation.

This is what the Apostle Paul is saying in his letter to those in the Philippian church, "Have this mind among 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" (Philippians 2:5-8). This passage is one of the most eloquent statements about Christ's humility. Notice, "*he humbled himself*" (verse 8).

I want to talk about humility today, and the most powerful, perfect example of humility is Jesus. "*Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*" (verse 8). He was in the form of God. He was God; He preexisted with God. Yet He didn't count this equality with God as something to be grasped, or used to His advantage.

But He "*emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*" (verse 7). Jesus didn't enter this world as a powerful king, with an entourage of bodyguards and an army of thousands. He came as a vulnerable baby, grew up in a common home in a small insignificant village.

"*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" (verse 8). Not only did He empty Himself to become one of us, He humbly gave of Himself, even to the point of suffering for us and dying for us on a cross. *You can't show me a more stunning example of humility than that!*

Humility is a human virtue. Few of us are drawn to someone who's boastful, or arrogant, or full of themselves. They're a turnoff, aren't they! ***Humility is also something Christians (followers of Jesus) are to seek and strive for.*** A lot of Scriptures warn us of the dangers of pride, and the blessings of humility. Proverbs 29:23 says, "A person's pride will bring humiliation, but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." Psalm 138:6 tells us: "Even though the Lord is high, he can still see the lowly, but God keeps his distance from the arrogant." Pride always creates distance between us and God. We can't be close to God with a prideful attitude.

Pride can keep us from the kingdom of God. Jesus once said, "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes *humble* like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4). Jesus said we have to turn and become humble like children. In other words, to humbly recognize our dependence on God.

Not only does pride distance us from God, it creates strife and division in human relationships. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Pride only breeds quarrels." Human pride and self-seeking creates tension

and division in families, at work, in schools, in churches, in politics, in international relations.

Both the Old Testament and New Testament accent what it says in the Book of James: "God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble" (James 4:6). But what does humility look like? Some of what passes as humility is not really humility. Let's look at *Jesus' humility* to get some answers! That's what the Apostle Paul tells us to do: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

First of all, Jesus did not flaunt who or what He was. He didn't go around saying, "Look at me, I'm God! I'm God!" He didn't go around attracting attention to Himself and showing off with dazzling displays of His godly power. He "emptied Himself" (verse 7). I once had a neighbor who had a way of putting on airs. She wanted you to know she was rich, and came across as being rather "uppity". It made her rather unattractive, and in some ways a bit funny. Another neighbor once spoke of her and said, "She tries to make you think she's rich, but I could buy and sell her!" (So, I guess he was just as boastful as she was)! I've seen some pastors who make an effort to let you know how smart they are, or how clever they are. I've seen pastors get appointed to a large church or become a District Superintendent, and it goes to their head. They strut around like they're God's answer to all that's wrong with the church and the world. *Jesus did not flaunt who or what He was.*

Along, the same line, Jesus was truthful and realistic about Himself. The few times when He was asked, "Are you the Messiah?" He didn't deny it. There was no false humility in Him, pretending to be less divine or less powerful than He really was.

Sometimes we think being humble means putting ourselves down, denying the positives about ourselves: like a beautiful woman with a great figure saying, "Oh, I'm so fat and ugly" or a great artist or singer or musician muttering, "Oh, I don't really have any talent at all."

Romans 12:3, in the New Living Translation, says, "Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us." In other words, don't have an overinflated view of your importance or your abilities. But on the other hand, don't deny it if you're a great cook, or a skilled carpenter, or a talented seamstress or a wizard on the computer. If you're good at something don't pretend like you're not! Learn to accept a genuine compliment. But underneath it all, *humble people realize that everything we have comes from God.*

I appreciate our bishop's humility! Peggy Johnson. She signs her emails, "Peggy". I still have trouble addressing her as Peggy. She spoke at one of the churches I served, and afterwards we had a luncheon at the church. She sat across from Nancy and me, and at one point she was talking with Nancy and said she felt like going shopping. Going shopping! She likes to shop! The bishop! Bishop Johnson doesn't deny she's a bishop or say she doesn't deserve to be a bishop, but she doesn't come across like she's better than us!

My pastor when I went into the ministry was Warren Riedel, or "Rocky". I loved Rocky's

humility. When I first talked of becoming a pastor, he visited our home. My parents were there and met with him. I don't remember the context, but at one point he looked at our coffee table and said, "I don't see myself as any higher than this coffee table, just because I'm a pastor." There was a refreshing down-to-earthness about him, though he really did have a keen mind and some extraordinary skills and a previous life in show business. *Jesus was truthful and realistic about Himself.*

We're looking at Jesus as a prime example of a humble life. This too: ***Jesus' humility was embodied in humble service to others.*** Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a *servant*" (Philippians 2:7). Jesus had all the power of God at His fingertips. He could use it in any ways He wanted!

I've often thought, I can't imagine during His trial and crucifixion how He could resist not zapping His accusers! In the Roman Praetorium a whole company of soldiers take Jesus' clothes off, put a scarlet robe on Him, and a crown of thorns on His head, and mock Him: "Hail, king of the Jews". They spit on Him, and beat Him. He could have wiped them out – poof! He's hanging on the cross, and people passing by insult Him: "If you're the Son of God, come down from the cross." The religious leaders taunt Him: "Ha! He saved others, but He can't save Himself." Man, if I had His power I would have shown them a thing or two! I would have come down and blasted them. But He didn't.

A professional wrestler, Dave Schultz ("Dr. D") was once interviewed by John Stossel. Stossel asked him about the wrestlers: "Is it putting on an act, is it fake?" At that, Schultz slapped him on the ear twice, knocking him down, causing damage to Stossel's ear. Afterwards, Schultz was loud and boastful on the program. The announcer said, "You've got to be the most openly arrogant person I've ever seen." Schultz responded, "You probably never will see anyone either!" The announcer replied, "How about this man from 20/20. You knocked him down. Do you regret it?" Schultz answered back, "Why that TV announcer is just a kid if he can't take that. I just slapped him with my open hand." (Stossel later filed a lawsuit and won a settlement amount. Sadly, Dave Schultz, Dr. D, was shot to death, murdered, some 12 years later).

Jesus had all the power in the world to use as He wanted, and He used it to humbly serve others. I heard a story about a distinguished British author, Lord Bryce, who came to the U.S. to work with a professor at a university. During his stay in the U.S. Lord Bryce stayed at the home of this professor. Lord Bryce had a servant in his English country home, and he assumed there would be someone like that in the professor's home to shine his shoes each night if he left them outside his room. Each night the professor took Lord Bryce's shoes and shined them, never saying a word about it.

Jesus healed people. He taught them. He fed a hungry crowd. The last night of His life on earth, in the upper room, He washed the disciples feet – that's what the household servant would do. He said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). With Jesus' example in mind, Paul writes these words in Philippians 2: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others (or "count others") above yourselves" Philippians 2:3.

Think what a difference this would make if we regarded others as better than ourselves rather than assuming we're better than them, or know more than they do! Wouldn't that go a long way in Washington D.C. to help heal the ugly divide between Republicans and Democrats! Think what a difference that would make in our families, at our jobs, in our neighborhoods, schools, and churches, if we valued others above ourselves!

It's amazing what we can learn from others if we're humble enough to regard them as our superior in some aspects of life. I've never lived in a place yet nor served in a church yet where I didn't learn a lot from the people – in some cases from people who were simple and uneducated, but in some things knew a lot more than me.

So there we have it! Jesus' humility! And our need for humility! But Jesus wasn't just a humble, kind man who helped others. *Jesus was not just a humble servant, but a Savior!* "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Our salvation is possible because Jesus humbled Himself and obeyed His Father in heaven, even to the point of going to the cross for us.

But even that is not where the story ends! Philippians 2:9-11 proclaims, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Someday every knee will bow and every tongue confess that this humble servant Jesus is the Lord of all creation, to the glory of God the Father!

It's a fact of life, ultimately the proud will be humbled, and the humble exalted! Jesus said that plain and simple: "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

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