

The Humility of God - 2

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I have some vague memories as a very small child of going up to the top of the Hillbrow Tower, now the Telkom tower. Before it was closed because of the bombings that began in that time, you could go to the top, where there was a restaurant, and several coin-operated lookout telescopes. From that height you could see pretty much most of Johannesburg. The tower is 270 metres tall or ninety stories high. There was more than one restaurant, one of which was revolving. The patrons in that restaurant didn't notice that the tower sways by about 45 centimetres. And that was actually quite a feat, because buildings as tall as that usually sway several metres. The way they achieved such stability lay in the foundations. They sunk the foundations 42 metres down – which is a 14 storey block of flats that could fit in that hole.

To go that high, they needed to go that low. To have such an exalted and yet stable tower, they needed a hidden and very deep foundation. That physical principle pictures the deeper, and ultimate spiritual principle: the greater the exaltation, the deeper the humility that goes before it. The more one will be praised, admired, and glorified as supreme, the lower and deeper the humility will have been. The reverse is also true: the more a person has tried to exalt himself and reach up into the heights of self-glory, the deeper and lower will be his shame and humiliation.

The staggering truth of the Incarnation is that the one who was already the highest and supreme one, was willing to go low, very low. Here in Philippians 2, Paul is taking the whole event of the Incarnation, from the Son of God's pre-existence to His birth, to His death, to His resurrection and ascension to the very end of history. And the principle is: this one, who was always in the form of God, came down, and went low.

How low did He go, and how high will He ascend is the question this passage answers. How deep did that foundation go, and how high will that tower be on top of that? Let's hear Paul give us three steps down that the Lord took. We have already seen from last week that Jesus relinquished His royal rights even though He had the right to hang on to all the status and badges of Deity. Instead, He received a servant's role. He disrobed, He emptied Himself, so as to fulfil His mission. Let's look at three more steps he took down the ladder of humility.

I. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to Be a Man

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself

When you hear humbled, think lower, to descend, to abase. It carries the negative connotation of being demoted, defeated, even shamed and dishonoured. It is no surprise then, that our English word *humility* is directly related to the word *humiliate*.

In fact, for the ancient Greeks and Romans, humility was not something to be admired or sought after. *Pietas*, yes, *Gravitas*, yes, *Dignitas*, yes – but not *humilitas*. And when you define humility as we just have, I think we have an aversion to it as well. Who wants to seek their own humiliation,

demotion, abasement?

Why did He humble Himself? “Being found in appearance as man”

Here we have the reason for Jesus humbling Himself. This is part of why He humbled Himself. He was found in appearance as a man. That doesn't mean He found Himself in a situation He was unprepared for. It means once He was in this situation, He humbled Himself. He responded to and adapted Himself to this new situation.

The word for appearance is the Greek word *schema*. You might remember from verse 6 that when Paul says Jesus was in the form of God, the Greek word is *morphe*. And the difference between the two is that *morphe* has to do with what is part of the inward nature and structure and essence, while *schema* is more the outward form, the appearance. It doesn't mean He was a fake man, or just projecting an image of being a man to people; it means that He was more than just a man. He was fully human, but more than fully human. On the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples got to see that He was more than fully human.

Once he found Himself as Jesus of Nazareth, He humbled Himself, He stooped to adapt to that position.

Have you ever been with someone who kept sneering at his circumstances? I've worked with people who felt their current job was so below their station. They scorned it, and said things like, “Just wait. I'm not going to be feeding at the bottom with you guys forever.” I live

What do you think the Lord's attitude was to being a man?

Did He scoff and scorn at human nature with its limitations? Did He say, I used to see all things without so much as moving my eyes, now I have to stare out of these two squishy eyeballs that need to blink every few seconds? Did He say, I have never needed anything, but been the supplier, the fountain for everything, and now I have this ridiculous body that needs to be fed and watered and rested and washed? Did He walk through those dusty streets of Nazareth, and compare it to the glories of Heaven, and feel continual disgust? Did He despise these needy, ignorant, aging, weak people around Him? Or was the Incarnation a humble embracing of human nature?

No, the text says, being found in fashion as a man, that is being found in human form, He humbled Himself. He embraced it. He did what He did that night when He washed the disciples' feet. He disrobed, accepted a role He needed to play, and did it without grudge.

And can I say, there was never a more dignifying event for the human race than when God the Son took humanity up into himself and added to Himself a true human nature. For God the Son to unite Himself with our race is the greatest and most elevating thing that could have happened to our race.

We love the rags to riches stories, but some of the most touching are actually the riches to rags stories: the stories in which someone, for some or another reason, loses the great wealth and luxury he had and is reduced to very modest means. The touching thing in those stories is when the person embraces a new circumstance, without being bitter, resentful and permanently disdainful of the world. The Lord Jesus is the ultimate riches to rags story – from glory to being a man.

But He stooped lower.

II. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to be a Mortal

"and became obedient to the point of death"

We saw last week what it meant that the Son became a slave. He had always existed with complete independent authority, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. He had never been in a place where He only acted because of an order from someone else. We saw last week that He became a slave to His Father and to the Spirit.

So the question becomes: how far was He willing to obey? Ask yourself, how far would you obey one of the authorities in your life? The Government, your boss, your pastor, your parents, your boss. Leaving aside sinful commands, which we cannot obey, how far would we be willing to go? We all have limits.

When Alexander the Great once approached a city with a small army and demanded its surrender, they laughed at him from their high walls. He then ordered his men to throw themselves off a nearby cliff. As the men began doing that, one by one, the people in the city watched amazed from the walls. Alexander told his men to stop, and turned back to the city. The city, once they saw the unquestioning obedience of Alexander's men, voluntarily surrendered the city.

History has enough examples of people willing to obey unto death. Brave soldiers accept that risk. Firefighters, rescue workers are willing to obey to death. Kamikazes and suicide bombers obey unto death. But the difference between those people and the Lord Jesus is this: those people, like us are all already under the curse of death. As part of Adam's race, death is inevitable at some point. Those people are simply bringing the date forward, or being willing to face it earlier than natural causes would bring.

But the Lord Jesus was not under the curse of death. He was the Second Adam. Born of a virgin and without a sin nature, He was not going to die of natural causes. He was immortal. He was what Adam and Eve were before the fall. For Him to obey unto death was to take something that was not His natural fate, and swallow it, drink the poison of the cross.

Think moreover that not only was He the Second Adam, but as God, He was immortal. You and I have life, He is life.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (Joh 1:4)

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (Joh 10:10)

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (Joh 11:25)

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Joh 14:6)

If I may say it, death is something foreign to the person of God. Death is what creatures face when they turn away from the life that is God. But how does the Life face death? How does the fountain of Life experience the drought of death?

Was it forced? Did he have to?

18 "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take

it again. This command I have received from My Father." (Joh 10:18)

He told Peter He could have called on legions of angels to deliver Him. Here was the Lord of life, willing to die. Here was God the Son, submitting to the curse for sin. Here was the Judge, voluntarily coming under His own judgement.

How low did He go? He became a man. He submitted to death. But he went even lower.

III. The Lord Jesus Humbled Himself to Be a Mocked and Marked

"even the death of the cross."

Paul takes it further and says "even the death of the cross"

Jesus did not die in a bed. He did not die gloriously in battle. He died hanging on a cross, a punishment reserved for the dregs of society.

Crucifixion was not simply a form of execution in Roman times. When someone was executed, most often he was beheaded, or even given poison to drink. Beheading is quick and without much pain or humiliation. Crucifixion, on the other hand, was a form of death by torture and humiliation. Crucifixion would result in agonising pain, that could last for hours or even days. Crucified persons were usually stripped naked, and often placed along highways for people to see. Very often, crucified men were not buried, but left on the cross to decompose and be destroyed by birds, animals and insects. One of the ancient Romans named Quintillian wrote, "whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect." Sometimes, the body would be thrown on the city's garbage heap.

Thieves were not crucified, unless some kind of rape or murder had accompanied their theft. Roman citizens could not be crucified. Middle and upper class people could not be crucified.

Crucifixion was so humiliating, so distasteful, so obnoxious, that only the poor, the slaves, the rebellious from other nations could be crucified. The Roman statesman Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty" (Verrem 2:5.165), The Bible knows that death by crucifixion was no normal death, it was the most humiliating of deaths.

To see a crucified man was to see someone who had offended the world in the deepest way, and had been condemned to the lowest, most obscene and painful death man could invent. A man condemned to crucifixion would be, in our day, the serial child rapist and murderer, the Nazi torturer, the genocidal maniac.

The kamikaze, the suicide bomber, the soldier, the rescuer all go that far because theirs is a noble death. They at least know they will be heroes. Jesus humbled Himself and embraced a death of shame, ridicule and scorn. In fact, had his friends not requested His body and given Him a tomb, His body would no doubt have been thrown on a waste heap and burned.

We all remember the words of Neil Armstrong as he came down that ladder – "that's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind." The very last step down was the worst of all. But I don't think in the Garden of Gethsemane He sweat drops of blood simply because he was facing death. I don't think the last huge step was merely the immortal now facing death, now facing the physical torture and shame of the cross. A brave man could steel Himself to do that.

He sweat drops of blood as He contemplated the last step down. In the last step down, Jesus stepped

into the shoes of every Sinner. Jesus became the representative of the first Adam and His race, and all the sin of all the world was poured onto Him. All sin, concentrated on one man, one spot. Jesus was not only mocked, He was marked. He was a marked man – the target, the bullseye for God's anger. What do you think the righteous God is going to do to the one Man where all sin that has ever offended God is now focused and concentrated? How will God treat that man?

The answer is, we don't know what Jesus faced in those three hours of darkness on the cross. We know the truths behind it. We know He was facing the hurricane of God's anger crash into His person on the cross. We know He was becoming a lightning rod for the wrath of God. We know that Jesus, as it were, went to the power station of sin and death, and held both ends of the power cable, and causing a massive short circuit that blew up the station. He allowed the full wrath of God at sin to course through His Person, facing the very essence of hell on the cross.

But what that was, the terror of it, the horror of it, the loneliness, the unaccompanied solitary facing of God's unrestrained judgement, we do not know, we cannot know, and I don't know if it will ever be possible in all of eternity to know.

It was that thought that made Him pray, “if it be possible, take this cup away from, Me Father.” But here was the humility: “Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done.”

And when the Father answered His Son with a silence that meant, “No, My Son, it is not possible”, what did God the Son do? He took that last step down, and drank the cup.

How low did He go? From royal privileges, down, down to being a slave to his Father and the Spirit, down to being a man with the limitations and finiteness, down to being a mortal, embracing the very opposite of His own life-giving nature, down to the death of the cross a place of shame, and worst of all, the place of separation from His Father.

That's how low He went.

And now consider what happens in verses 9 through 11. The subject changes from God the Son to God the Father.

⁹ *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,* ¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

William MacDonald: “If the Savior humbled Himself, **God also has highly exalted Him**. If He did not seek a name for Himself, **God has given Him the name which is above every name**. If He bent His knees in service to others, God has decreed that **every knee shall bow to Him**.”

The word for *highly exalted* is a word found only here in the New Testament. It means to exalt to highest rank supreme position (Ambrose translated it into Latin as *superexalto*) – supreme majesty & position. This is not to say that God the Son now occupied a place He had not enjoyed before. It means that in taking on a true human nature, He was bringing back to heaven something that hadn't been there before - a true human nature. God was now exalting the God-Man to the supreme position, and it is now His earthly name – Jesus – Yeshua – that is now the name which is above every name. There is now a man – the God-Man, in the position of supremacy.

The result is that God has declared that every knee will bow before Him in worship, every tongue will confess Him as Lord, whether voluntarily or by the sword of an angel before final judgement.

This doesn't mean that everyone will be saved in the end. It means God has decreed that every living moral being will confess the identity and Lordship of His Son.

John 5:23 "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

The ultimate humiliation was the Incarnation. That's why it leads to the ultimate exaltation.

"In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the whole mass before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders. Or one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too.