

## Philippians | Our Life in Christ

Jesus – God, Man, Lord: See Him High, Lowest, Highest

Philippians 2:5-11

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*<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)*

### Introduction

Our passage for today is one of the most significant and delightful sections in the entire Bible. There are not enough superlatives to describe the value of this section. Tim Keller, in a sermon on this text, said it was the greatest passage in the Bible. He then commented that he says that about many passages, but this one really is the best. As I have meditated on this familiar passage, I see the value of this more than ever. It describes in the clearest fashion the wonder and beauty of the supreme treasure of our faith—the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is our treasure. As I think of treasure I remember treasures in my life, most of which are gone now—a glove, bike, etc. My current treasures are my wife and family, books, and facsimiles of ancient manuscripts (nerdy for sure). This text shows us the treasure above all else and that is Jesus.

The early church realized the value of Jesus and spent a couple of centuries discussing the person of Jesus. Who is this Jesus? One of the great early church fathers was Athanasius<sup>1</sup>. He was a bishop in Alexandria, Egypt. He was called the black dwarf by his opponents as he was probably small, he was African and he was a lover of Jesus. He argued that Jesus was indeed God of very God. His opponents, notably Arius, said that Jesus was not fully

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<sup>1</sup> Athanasius, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/131christians/theologians/athanasius.html>

God (rather he was important, but not eternal). The debate raged until Constantine called a church council in AD 325 inviting about 1800 church leaders to attend (only about 300 came) to resolve the debate. Athanasius was not in attendance, but his position was preserved by God's grace. One outcome of this council was the Nicene Creed, which affirms in no uncertain terms the reality of the triune God and the deity of Jesus. Here is a portion of that creed that well summarizes our text this week:

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made.*

*Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end*

There is no treasure that is of greater value than the treasure of the Lord Jesus Christ

### **Philippians 2:5-11 spotlights three glories of Jesus that changes everything in our lives**

Our passage begins with an imperative (command) in verse 5. The readers are told to "have this mind in you." We are to have a perspective of life that is different because we have come into contact with the reality of Jesus. The verse goes on to say "which is yours in Christ Jesus." There are two possible ways to understand this clause. It could mean that we are to be like Jesus and to some extent that is true (but obviously we cannot be God like Jesus). We also have the ability to live in light of who Jesus is. Knowing him and being in Him and with Him will change our lives. As we look at the picture of Jesus, we should thank God that we are His. We are associated with Him and that makes all the difference. We can also see areas where we can live as he desires us to live by looking at his life. Let's look at the areas of Jesus that are spotlighted by Paul.

#### **I. Spotlight #1 High—Jesus is God of very God, vv 5-6**

Verse 6 has two important clauses that show and spotlight a very important reality of Jesus. Paul says "**being in the form of God.**" The crucial word in this text is the word "form." It can refer to something that is "like" something but not the same as it. In this context, that is not Paul's intent. Clearly from the context he is using the word (morphe in

Greek) to refer to essence or substance<sup>2</sup>. Jesus is of the same substance as God. It is a wonderful way to affirm the deity of Jesus. He is nothing less than God.

The second clause is **“did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** This amplifies the previous clause. Jesus was not going after deity. It was not something for which he aspired. He already had it. He was God. Satan, Eve, Adam, people of Babel, humans in general, all strive to be supreme and God, but Jesus was God indeed.

This one short verse spotlights the beauty of Jesus who is God of very God. I was caused to ask the question as to the relevance of this truth. If Arius had won the day and the church believed that Jesus was good but not God, would that shake anything up. Here are some beautiful values of Jesus deity:

- a. Since he is God we can believe and trust that our Savior is able to do exceeding, abundantly above all we ask or think. He is able to defend his own, to save to the uttermost, to know the best ends and means to those ends—HE is GOD!!! You can trust Jesus.
- b. He is love—This text goes further than merely telling us that Jesus is GOD (which is huge in itself). It also helps us to see that there is more to God than Jesus. He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. He is equal with the Father and Son. That statement of equality suggests many, many realities. One of the greatest realities of the Godhead is that they love. The Father loves the Son, loves the Spirit and so on. He did not learn to love as he “loved the world.” God already mastered love in the Godhead. His love for others was an overflow of his Trinitarian, interpersonal love. Our love for others is an overflow of his love for us. We will only love others as we recognize the relationship we have with God and his love.

## **II. Spotlight #2 Lowest—Jesus takes on human flesh in lowliness, vv 7-8**

Verse 7 begins with one of my favorite Bible words, **“BUT.”** I am really glad for this but. It brings the God of heaven to the lives of human creatures. He was totally complete in heaven and his love is what made verses 7-8 reality. Paul describes the humanity of Jesus with one main thought and three modifying statements.

The main thought is **“made himself nothing.”** This concept has challenged the church for centuries. What does it mean that Jesus (who is God), made himself nothing? How can that be? The word translated “made himself nothing” is a challenging word. It has led to

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<sup>2</sup> Theilman, Frank, *NIV Application Commentary, Philipians*, 115.

discussions around the Greek word, “kenosis.” It could mean “emptied himself,” but Jesus could not empty himself of being God. He did do something radical that is stated in this word. It is better to let the rest of the text explain what Paul meant by “made himself nothing.” In short, the text argues that Jesus made himself nothing by addition not subtraction. He did not cease being God, but he added being man. Three ideas follow this statement (all three beginning with “ing” words that are called participles (adjectives that describe a noun—in this case they describe Jesus):

1. **“taking on the form of a servant”** He came as a lowly human. He did not come as a normal king. The word “form” is used again (as in verse 6) and asserts that Jesus was really a servant and a human. He was in essence God (6) and servant human (7).
2. **“Being born in the likeness of men”** Paul adds another “ing” word to tell us that Jesus was really human (a man). He was born which is what happens to humans. He was really man!!
3. **Being found in human form—he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”** The first two clauses were mind boggling enough. How could the infinite God become flesh? Most Jews would struggle with this concept. The eternal God, taking on human limitations does not fit. Adding this third clause would blow all the categories from any normal observer. Jesus did not merely take on human flesh, but he was humiliated to the lowest, death on a cross. In that culture it does not get any lower.

Martin Hengel<sup>3</sup>, a German theologian has some profound thoughts to consider. He concludes his research on the ancient act of crucifixion by saying that (1) It was designed to be a deterrent to crime and treason. It was public and humiliating such that no one would want to be crucified. (2) Crucifixion became an outlet for the worst of human lusts in sadistic cruelty. The men who carried out the sentence were skilled at torture and inflicting pain. It was unquestionably “inhuman.” (3) The executed person was put in a public place and stripped naked to bring about the greatest of humiliation and shame. The norm was also to never bury the corpses but to let birds and animals eat the flesh.

Paul’s description of Jesus in the flesh is graphic and beautiful. We know from Paul that this crucifixion was not merely an act of kindness or a model of sacrifice. It was necessary to satisfy the Father’s wrath; the price was paid for our sin; the act defeated evil and crushed death in the resurrection and will bring about the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Hengel, Martin, *Crucifixion*, Fortress Press, 86ff.

Here is one brief thought that should come to us as we see Jesus in his humanity. He can relate to humans in our suffering. Isaiah 53:3 tells us that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The hymn writer says it well—Man of Sorrow, what a name for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim, HALLELUJAH, WHAT A SAVIOR!!! Can you see the picture Paul is painting in words? Jesus is fully God and is fully man and there is not any reality that is more important and glorious than that in all creation!

### **Spotlight #3 Highest—He is exalted as the Lord Jesus Christ, vv. 9-11**

The final spotlight is the magnificent exaltation of Jesus. In verses 9-11 Paul completes the picture of Jesus with a brief description of his right to be the Lord and the fact that all of creation will be in submission to him as the rightfully exalted king of all.

Two major facts are discussed in this section. First, Jesus is exalted to the highest and given the supreme name above all others. This exaltation is connected to his humility. He was lowest so that he could be declared highest. There is nothing magic in his name, but his name is the indicator of his person and character. He could not be made higher than God, but as the God Man, he embodies all the perfection of the Godhead and of humanity and stands as the one who is above all creation. Secondly, the result is that everyone will bow their knee and confess with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord. That was an early church confession that all of humanity will confess in the end. Jesus is God, man and Lord. All of that is to the glory of the Father who is one with the Son.

These are huge and heavy words. They were fighting words in the first century when Rome allowed no Lord but Caesar. To say these kinds of words was treason. They are also beautiful and hopeful words. Who would you rather be in the position of Lord of all. Would you like chance to be Lord, or another human, or us? No “No, No—a thousand times No.” We need Jesus to be Lord and he will be that visibly to the glory of the Father. The church needs people that live under the Lordship of Jesus by our own desire. The God Man will eventually reveal his exalted position to the whole world who will acknowledge him as Lord whether by desire or compulsion. He is Lord of all and his Lordship will be complete as the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11).

## Conclusion

### What are some takeaways from this powerful picture of Jesus?

1. **Savor and enjoy Jesus** for who he is! We often look for application and think it needs to bring works on our part. What work do I need to do? I believe with a text like this, we need to merely gaze at Jesus and enjoy him. When Cathy and I went to Scotland we visited the Isle of Skye. It was incredibly beautiful. They had daily rainbows and it felt like we were at the edge of the world. We just gloried in the majestic beauty of the countryside. That was enough to lift our hearts. When you see a beautiful painting or countryside or hear beautiful music, your heart is lifted up and you glory in it. We need to take time to glory in Jesus just for who he is. Take time daily to meditate on Jesus. Memorize this text and glory in the person who is fully God, fully man, and rightfully Lord. What better thought to have in our minds and hearts? That is true worship.

2. **Know Jesus so well that he affects every part of life.** Here are a few examples:

- a. When you are experiencing trials in life. See Jesus!!! He is God and knows all, and has all power, and knows you intimately. He has at his disposal all the reality of his Godhead and is totally able to do all it takes to care for you. He is also fully man. He can relate to your pain and suffering. He is the great high priest, because he has endured the greatest of suffering. He is also Lord. We bow before him and trust him to rule in our lives. It may be hard, but this three-fold picture of Jesus is the only way to deal with trials of life.
- b. When tempted to sin. See Jesus who is holy God, who is man and knows the temptation of man, and who rightly demands our obedience. Look to Jesus when tempted.
- c. For all kids, singles, married people, older people, and any other demographic of humans. Jesus is God, he is man and he is Lord. Think about that as you relate to others.

3. **We need to master the virtue of humility.** The text started with “have this mind in you which is yours in Christ Jesus.” We will never be God or Lord, but we are humans. In Philippians 2:1-4 we are called to humility and other centeredness. This text is telling the church to be made up of humble people. We need husbands, wives, single church members, children, etc. to learn humility. We need to see that in Christ we can be people that God desires—those who submit to his Lordship and are humble to him and to others.

May God grant College Park to be people who have our hearts and affections so on Jesus the God, Man, Lord that we live out in humility all that God desires of his people who reflect his glory.

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