

He Emptied Himself

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[0:00] Read with me in Philippians chapter 2 beginning in verse 5. Paul writes, 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 made himself nothing, 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. 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.

Father, I pray that you would take your word, and that your spirit would open our hearts and open our minds to see wonderful things in this morning. It's in Jesus' name that I ask this.

Amen. Amen. We all know, even though, if you're like me, you enjoy the lights, and you enjoy the festivities, and you enjoy getting together with family, and you like a lot of the things that surround Christmas, we all know, and it's even become a bit of a cliché, that Christmas is not about all those things.

It's not about the lights. It's not about trees. It's certainly not about giving and receiving gifts. It's not even about family traditions and family gatherings. We know all that.

[1:33] Like I said, that has become almost cliché. We say that. You don't have to be a believer in Christ to say, Oh, I admit that Christmas is not about all the external things. It's about something else.

And last week, as we looked at Paul's letter to the Romans, and we looked at what it means for Christ to come in the flesh, in the likeness of central flesh, Paul says in Romans chapter 8, we said that not only is it not about all of those things, but all the other things that surround the biblical story of Christmas are not essential to the message about Christmas.

So that when we read of the wise men, or we read of the shepherds, or when we read of lowly Joseph and Mary, and Jesus laid in a manger, all of those things, true and important, are not the core of the message of Christmas.

Because what Christmas is ultimately about is the supremacy of Jesus and His willing condescension to meet with us and become one of us and walk upon the earth and die ultimately in our place and rise to give us the hope of eternal life.

That's the meaning of Christmas. That's the essence of Christmas. And all those other details in the biblical Christmas story are meant to point us to the supremacy of Jesus and His willingness to humble Himself and come as one of us.

[2:57] Let me show you that just from a couple of details of the Christmas story, some that you're very familiar with. So if you'll turn over to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 2. We have the story of the wise men.

And we are told that the wise men, in Matthew chapter 2 verse 10, that when they saw the star, it says that they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and they went into the house, and they saw the child with Mary his mother.

And then notice what these wise men do. It says they fell down and worshipped Him, then opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

So here are these wise men who have traveled from a great distance, who are of note, they're important enough that when they arrive in the capital city of Jerusalem, they gain an immediate

audience with Herod the king.

And not only an audience with him, but he begins to question them. And he wants to know information from them. He wants to share in their wisdom. So we may not know very much about these magi, or these wise men as they're often called, but we know that they're somebody.

[4:06] They're important enough to get the king's attention when they come into town. And here are these wise men, these magi, and when they approach Jesus as an infant, they fall down and worship Him.

This is about the supremacy of Jesus. But not only His supremacy, but there's a juxtaposition of the glory of Christ and His great supremacy over all things, and the fact that they come to a small city called Bethlehem, and they find Him in a house, just a regular house there in Bethlehem.

He's worthy of worship, but He's just a baby in a house, in a little town outside of Jerusalem. There is indescribable glory, and yet infinite condescension.

We see the same thing in the story of the shepherds, but almost in reverse order. Because the shepherds are of no importance to anyone else in the world beyond their family and their sheep. They're no one. We don't know their names. We don't know how many shepherds there were. We don't know exactly where they were. We don't know how many sheep they had. We don't know how successful they were. We don't know anything about them.

[5:21] We know that in their culture, they would not have been considered the ideal dinner guest. We know that much. And yet, it's to these shepherds that the angels appear in Luke chapter 2.

And the angels appear and announce the coming of Christ, And then we're told that the angels themselves begin to sing, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.

So that these lowly shepherds become witnesses of the angelic worship of Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews says, The writer of Hebrews says that God the Father commands the angels.

It says, Let all God's angels worship Him, the Son, Jesus. And these lowly shepherds are allowed to get a glimpse of the unending angelic worship of God the Son.

So that there is a humble, stage-set lowly shepherds who get a view of infinite, supreme glory.

[6:23] And all of the details of the Christmas story are aimed to point us in the direction of seeing that contrast, that contrast between infinite glory and unfathomable condescension to meet with us and become one of us.

And so I want to show you from Philippians chapter 2, I want to help you to see and to delve a little bit more deeply into this contrast between the glory of Jesus and His humility and willingness to become one of us.

So take a look in Philippians chapter 2. It begins in verse 5, where Paul tells us that we need to imitate Christ. It says, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ.

So it begins in the context of saying, Imitate Christ. And then immediately, beginning in verse 6, he launches out into this sort of hymn, this poem or song about who Jesus is.

And I want you to listen carefully to the way that he describes Jesus. He says that, Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

[7:33] He says that Jesus was in the form of God. Now that can be a confusing term because when we hear the word form, we usually think of just outward appearance.

So He was outwardly something like God is what we might think. But that's not what this word indicates. This word indicates that there's something deeper than that. There's something more essential to who Jesus is that is divine, that is God.

And you can gain a better understanding if you pay attention to what's around that statement. Now my translation says that, puts it this way, it says, Though He was in the form of God. But in the original language it says, Though in the form of God, being.

Though being in the form of God. And that word translated being is not the most common term for the to be verb in the New Testament. In fact, that word usually indicates someone's essential nature, the essential nature of a thing.

Something's actual being and nature. And so what Paul is saying here is that if you want to know what the being of Christ is, the very nature of who He is, it is God Himself.

[8:46] He is the form of God in His very being and nature. That's who He is. And then He adds to that in the next verse, He speaks of Christ possessing equality with God.

Jesus is not merely a great prophet. He is not merely a great teacher. Nor is He merely a great divine like being. He is God in the flesh.

That's who He is. And Paul wants us to see that prior to even coming in the flesh, Jesus existed as God. His being, His nature is characterized as being God.

The form of God. Possessing equality with the Father. And if that's not enough to convince you, I want you to look down just a couple of verses where Paul describes what's going to happen to Christ in the future because of His death.

He says that 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.

[10:01] Now Paul didn't make that up. Paul didn't make up all the words in those phrases there. In fact, he's borrowing them from the Old Testament prophets.

So I want you to keep your finger in Philippians chapter 2. And I want you to turn all the way back to the Old Testament because this is important. This is essential for us to understand how Paul views Jesus.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 45, God is addressing the false prophets of the nations around Israel that Israel has been tempted to bow down before.

and God has been chiding these false prophets saying they are nothing but pieces of wood and metal and stone. They can't speak. They can't do anything.

And then God begins to say, if you'll just jump in in the middle of chapter 45 in verse 22, He speaks to His people and He says, Turn to Me and be saved.

[11:00] All the ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other. I am God. There is no other God. By Myself I have sworn from My mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return.

And here is the word that God, Yahweh, Jehovah, speaks. To Me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance.

So that in the prophets, God Himself says, Every knee will bow to Me. Every tongue will swear allegiance to Me. And Paul borrows those words in Philippians chapter 2 and he says that those words apply to Jesus Himself.

Jesus is the God of Isaiah 45 who deserves and is worthy of everyone's worship so that everyone will bow to Him.

Everyone will confess allegiance to Him. He is the sovereign Lord of all creation. This is how the Apostle Paul sees Jesus.

[12:13] He is God Himself. And the Apostle is, he's almost grasping for language and grasping for words when he describes Jesus as being in the form of God and having equality with God.

because he's trying to help us understand that while Jesus is fully God, He is absolute divine being, that He is not the only person within the Godhead.

Because He is God Himself who will give Him the name that is above every name. It is the Father who will give to the Son the name that is above every name. So Paul is reaching for language to help us understand what we call the doctrine of the Trinity.

And most essential in this passage is to see and understand that Jesus is far more than a man. He is far more than a mere divine being.

He is the divine being. He is God Himself. So that He is supreme in His divinity. He is supreme because He has existed throughout all time.

[13:19] There never was a time when Jesus began to exist. He is supreme because His character and His moral fiber never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He is supreme because He is the one in who and through who all things that exist have come into being. He is supreme in every way imaginable.

And listen to what He says about Him. That this God did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Now if you are reading from the King James Version or the New King James Version, you will see that He did not count equality with God. He did not try to rob us a thing to be robbed. But I do not think that is quite right.

Because what Paul is saying here is not that Jesus is resisting the temptation to take equality from God. That doesn't make sense. That's not possible. What Paul is saying is that Jesus did not see His equality with the Father as a thing to be exploited, as a thing to be cloned to.

[14:30] Rather, instead, He saw His own divine nature not as that which excused Him from a life of suffering and ultimately death, but as something that uniquely qualified Him to suffer and die in our place.

Jesus is not like you and I. When we have authority and we have a sense of power, we usually want people to know it. We want to take full advantage of whatever power we have in whatever areas of life we might have that kind of power.

But Jesus, who has infinite power and all authority, did not count it as something to be taken advantage of. Did not count it as an advantage to push.

But rather, instead, it says that He made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Literally, verse 7 says that He emptied Himself. Now, that phrase has caused biblical scholars and theologians all kinds of problems because they've tried to figure out if Jesus, if God the Son, emptied Himself, then of what did He empty?

[15:44] What did He pour out? Did He give up His divinity? Did He give up His glory? What did He pour out of Himself? What did He empty? What did He give up?

But if you notice, what the text says is not that He gave up something, not that He emptied something out of Himself. It says that He emptied Himself.

He poured Himself out. And that's explained in the next couple of phrases. It says that He did that by taking the form of a servant and by being born in the likeness or the form of men.

Then, Jesus who possesses infinite divine glory and is supreme over all things, became one of us. Not merely became one of us, but became a servant. What does Jesus say in Mark chapter 10? He says that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

[16:48] so that the infinitely glorious Son of God condescends to serve us. He humbles Himself all the way to the point of becoming one of us.

Consider for a moment that just the fact that Jesus came to the earth, just in the instant of becoming a baby in the womb of Mary, in that instance, He endured more humiliation than you and I could ever imagine.

He's infinite, and now He's unable to speak, unable to do anything for Himself. Luke says that He grew in wisdom and stature.

In other words, He grew like all of us grew. He was a toddler bumping into things. He had to learn how to walk. He had to be taught how to speak by Mary and Joseph. He was fully human.

Yes, He's God. No, He does not give up His divinity to become a man, but He is fully human. And all the things that we experience in the course of growing and becoming adults, He experienced.

[18:08] In all of the pain and all of the heart that comes along with being a human being in a fallen world, He experienced and He was well acquainted with. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and being born in the likeness of men.

And then it moves beyond and says that being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

there is an unbreakable connection between Christmas and Easter. Because Christmas doesn't matter and Christmas doesn't have any real meaning if there is no Easter.

If there's no Good Friday and there's no Easter Sunday, then there's no reason to celebrate Christmas. Because Jesus came into the world and was born into the world so that He might be obedient all the way to the point of death.

Even, Paul says, death on a cross. That's why He came. That's the point of it all. So that the supreme ruler of the universe could be spit upon and beat and flogged and mocked and nailed to a cross and die a criminal's death.

[19:31] death. That's why He came. And every time that we read the Christmas story, every time we reflect on the wise men or the shepherds or Jesus lying in a manger or lowly Joseph and Mary chosen out of all the people in Israel to become the human parents of God in the flesh.

Every time we read about all of those things, we are meant to see what Paul describes here in the form of God and in the form of man.

Obedient all the way to the point of death. And because of that, because Jesus was willing to be obedient all the way to the point of death, the Apostle Paul says that therefore, in verse 9, 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 Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

There's a pattern in all of this. There is supreme glory, infinite condescension and then glory again. So that Jesus, when He prays to His Father in John chapter 17, He begins His prayer and He says, Father, restore to me the glory that I had with you before the world began.

Jesus had a glory that He possessed with the Father before the world ever began and He shed that glory so that He might walk among us and He says in His prayer before He goes to the cross, give me the glory back after the cross, Father.

[21:16] I want to share with you again an infinite glory. There's a pattern. You see a pattern in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is first hailed as Emmanuel, God with us and then He endures a lifetime of pain and heartache and then death and then at the end of it, you see His disciples after He's raised from the dead, His disciples come and they fall before Him and they begin to worship Him and Jesus says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

In other words, I have my glory restored, I have all sovereignty and all power. There is a pattern. Infinite, eternal glory, infinite condescension and then glory again.

And you get to participate in that restored glory if you participate in the condescension of His death. Paul says that if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him. So that the Christmas story is about Jesus, yes, coming in our place, living an obedient life in our place, dying in our place, Christ. But it's also a story that says if you trust in Him, then His death becomes your death. And His life becomes your life.

[22:51] So that when we come to think upon the baby in a manger, what we need to be reminded of is that that's temporary. It was a temporary thing for the Son of God to lay in a manger wrapped in a swaddling clothes.

It was a temporary thing for the Son of God to endure pain and heartache. It was a temporary thing for Him to hang up on the cross and endure His Father's wrath because now He has eternal glory again.

And you can participate in that eternal glory. Let me read you one more passage from Romans chapter 8. I want you to hear this as Paul reflects upon the eternal glory that we get to be a part of. He says this in verse 18 of Romans chapter 8. He says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. The whole creation waits for that day. He says, and then He says, and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[24:15] For in this hope we were saved. we are saved by Christ in hope of participating in the glory of Jesus revealed on the last day.

And so the only question is, will you participate in that glory? You will if you trust in Him now. You will if you follow Him now.

You will participate in it if you believe in Him now. But you will not if you put Him on. You will not if you see Him merely as a great teacher or even an unparalleled prophet.

You will not participate in glory on that day. Let's pray. Let's pray.