

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
January 13, 2013

Jesus' Humility and Exaltation

Read Philippians 2:5-11

Key verse: "Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Pastor and author Leith Anderson wrote: "Several years ago I was visiting Manila and was taken, of all places, to the Manila garbage dump and saw something beyond belief. Tens of thousands of people make their homes on that dump site. They've constructed shacks out of the things other people have thrown away. And they send their children out early every morning to scavenge for food out of other people's garbage, so they can have family meals. People have been born and grown up there on the garbage dump. They have had their families, their children, their shacks, their garbage to eat, finished out their lives, and died there without ever going anywhere else, even in the city of Manila. It is an astonishing thing.

"But Americans also live on that garbage dump. They are missionaries, Christians who have chosen to leave their own country and communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it. That is amazing to me. People would leave what we have to go and live on a garbage dump. Amazing, but not as amazing as the journey from heaven to earth.

"The Son of God made that journey, and he knew what he was doing. He knew where he was going. He knew what the sacrifice would be. He journeyed from heaven to earth on a mission to save the human race" ("A God's-eye View of Christmas," *Preaching Today* #208).

Philippians 2:5-11 offers some of the greatest, most significant, words about Jesus that have ever been written. They tell us, in verse 6, that Jesus was and is God: "*Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.*" "Though he was in the form of God" might better be—and often is—translated, "though he was in very nature God." These words affirm that Jesus Christ is fully God.

Yet, Christ "*did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings*" (vv. 6b-7).

The famous statement of faith, the Westminster Catechism, echoes this truth about Jesus. It describes what happened when Jesus came to us as one

of us: “the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what He is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess—that is, a human nature” [and so Christ] “was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.”

As amazing as it was for the Son of God to become one of us, he did more. Verse 7 says, “*He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” In its time, Roman crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that a person could endure. All this Jesus did for you and for me!

Eugene Peterson describes the humbling life of Christ from birth to death: “The birth of Jesus itself was of the humblest peasant parentage, in an unimportant town, and in the roughest of buildings. He made a career of rejecting marks of status or privilege: He loved lepers, washed the feet of his disciples, befriended little children, encouraged women to join his entourage, and, finally, submitted to crucifixion by a foreign power” (from Peterson’s book, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*).

But after the cross comes the crown! “*Therefore, God highly honored him and gave him a name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (vv. 9-11).

Philippians 2:5-11 not only offers some of the greatest, most significant, words ever written about Jesus. This passage is also a call to each one of us who name the name of Christ. It is a call to consider Jesus’ lifestyle of humility and *servant-hood* as an example that we are to follow. The passage begins, “*Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus*” (v. 5).

Verses 5-11, in fact, are prefaced immediately by this call to Christ-like living: “*Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself*” (Philippians 2:2-5, *The Message paraphrase*).

As important as Philippians 2:5-11 is as a statement of Jesus’ divinity, his incarnation, his atoning death, resurrection, and exaltation, this passage is also a call to action! It calls us to follow Jesus’ example of humility and *servant-hood* in mission to a lost and dying world.

Thomas Langford said it this way: “In Jesus, we find embodied the self-giving of a person to other persons. Jesus is the Lord who is servant, and Jesus is the servant who is Lord. As the Lord who is servant, Jesus identifies

with human life so as to establish a redemptive relationship. As servant who is Lord, Jesus calls us to acknowledge his lordship through our servant-hood. The grace of God in Jesus Christ calls us to a graciousness which is a self-abandonment to the love of God and the love of the neighbor.”

Thanks be to God.

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