

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. – 2 Cor 8:9

25 Phil Have the Attitude of Christ the Servant 2

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (or, as we saw yesterday, something to be taken advantage of) ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul sets forth the greatest example of humility – Jesus Christ. Before he was born he lived, not as angel, but as God himself, as the creator of all and that makes the passage and its ethical point that much sharper. Paul is providing the first of four examples of humility and he begins with the greatest – the creator of the universe showed what he is really like by not taking advantage of and holding on to his privileges.

Today we will discover what he did instead. Paul uses two words to describe his actions. First, in 2:7 he says Christ emptied himself and in 2:8 he says Christ humbled himself.

Christ emptied himself. Different translations provide rich insights to this phrase. The NKJV says he made himself of no reputation. The NLT says he gave up his divine privileges and the NIV says he made himself nothing. Probably the best translation is the one I read that simply says “he emptied himself.”

Let me share what this does *not* mean. It does not mean He gave up His deity. He did not cease to be God. God cannot cease to be God. But what He gave up was the outward form of deity, the glory of deity, and the privileges that go with being deity. God said, “I will live as a human. I will live as a servant.”

From time to time I hear stories of celebrities or researchers who disguise themselves as poor people for a day or two to see what it feels like to be treated as a poor person. They may spend the night on the street or walk about the city as a poor person to see how the poor are really treated. Noble idea! But God did not do this for a day or two and then enter back into heaven. He entered the world the normal way – through birth and grew up the normal way as an infant to a toddler to a child to an adolescent to an adult. He came and lived it for a lifetime. In another passage, Paul said this:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. – 2 Cor 8:9

Paul specifically tells us what this empty-ing meant. He says Christ took the form of a servant, i.e., he was made in the likeness of men and found in the appearance of a man.

Now, I have to pause here and make sure all listeners understand this. When Paul says he had the *form* of a servant and the *likeness* of a man and the *appearance* of a man, he is not saying that his humanity was unreal. That was a heresy in the first century. In our previous broadcast, I mentioned two heresies about the divine nature of Christ that we are faced with today about his deity, that he was only an angel or that he is a divine offspring of some heavenly union. But in the first century, the heresy was not about his deity, it was about his humanity and some people taught that he was not fully human. And they might point to this passage and say, “Look he only had the appearance or likeness of a man and wasn’t really a human.” But Paul does not mean that. In Galatians 4:4 he said he was born of a woman and in 1 Timothy 2:5 he calls him *the man*, Christ Jesus.

What Paul is saying is that when you looked at Jesus in his outward form, you would not have automatically guessed that you were looking at God in human form. He had the appearance of every other man, the likeness of every other person. Imagine going into a synagogue and worshipping with Jesus when he was, say, 25 years old. You wouldn’t know he was different from anyone else.

Maybe another way we can say this is for 30 years, God was in disguise! He lived among us as one of us and he ate and drank, and worked and slept and laughed and cried. How amazing!

Paul said, “have this attitude that was in Christ Jesus. He emptied himself and became one of us. You think you’re somebody and you are above others and everyone needs to follow you? Don’t. Be like Christ who was God and who did not use his deity to his advantage but emptied himself and became one of us. Be a servant. If you really are a somebody, then it won’t matter what others think – you will be happy being a servant.”

Let me pause just for a moment to point out something to you. As Paul writes these verses, he as a good Jewish man would have a story in the back of his mind. As He tells the story of the God of Israel coming as a man, the story of another man undoubtedly is racing through his thoughts.

It is the story of the first man, Adam whom God created in an exalted way – made in the image of God, given the task of ruling the world, set in a garden, given powers that we only dream of, and having every need met. An eternal paradise was laid out before him; the only requirement is that he had to remain in a humble position before God.

And the tempter comes to him and says, “You know ... God is holding something back from you but if you reach out and eat this fruit you can be equal with God.” And we know he did and the human

race has paid for that arrogance ever since. Adam tried to fulfill himself. Christ Jesus emptied himself.

Paul, then, goes one step further. Christ not only emptied himself but he also humbled himself by obeying his father all the way to that Roman cross upon which he was crucified.

He obeyed His Father every step of the way even though He knew it would cost His life. Again, what a contrast between the man Adam who wanted to be a god and Christ who was God and became a man.

The tempter, the same tempter who led Adam to sin, comes to this new sinless Man on the planet and tries to steer him off the path. “Fall down before me Jesus and I will give you everything your Father has promised, but I will give it to you without the pain of suffering and death.” And Jesus said “No. You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”

Throughout His ministry, His brothers, the disciples, the crowds, the Pharisees, try to steer Him off the path of obedience but He continues to refuse and He continues to walk the path His Father set out for Him.

He’s in the Garden and the pressure of what is about to happen is pushing Him into the darkness of despair. Blood is seeping out of the pores of His skin and He cries out to His Father, “if there is any other way – is there any other way” – but the silence speaks to Him and He knows the answer. There is no other way.

And so He gets up and allows Himself to be arrested, paraded from trial to trial, slapped, spit upon, beaten, scourged, ridiculed, and nailed to a Roman cross.

The Romans crucified not just to get rid of criminals. Crucifixion was not very efficient. Decapitation is efficient. One stroke, the head comes off, the person is dead and the deed is done. Crucifixion was devised as a means of creating intimidation and horror among rebels.

Cicero, the great Roman statesman said, “Let the word crucifixion be far from the ears of every Roman citizen.” The word for cross in Latin is written with four letters and it became what we call today a “four-letter word” and they would use another word for cross because the regular word became an obscenity. That’s how awful crucifixion was.

And our God submitted himself to it – for our sakes – that we might have life. And so Paul says...

Have this attitude that was in Christ Jesus – humility, obedience, and doing the Father’s will no matter what the personal cost.

Thankfully, that was not the end of the story for Jesus. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place.

Why the highest place? Because he went to the lowest place.

And thankfully that is not the end of the story for us when we humble ourselves. James 4:10 says “humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up just as He lifted up Jesus.” That is the promise!

The choice is ours. Will we humble ourselves? Will we check our spiritual ambition and guard against it becoming selfish ambition? Will we look out for the interests of others? Will we pursue unity in our marriages, all our relationships, and in our church? Will we believe the best about one another? Will we trust one another? Will we make up for the shortfalls of others?

Will we follow Adam who tried to seize greatness or will we follow Jesus who gave it up to serve us? Who do you want to be like?

Have this attitude that was in Christ Jesus.