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## Philippians 2:5-11

### Intro

In last week's passage, we looked at Paul's exhortation that we live as a community transformed by the gospel of Christ, specifically by striving for unity together, having a unity of faith. But the last part of that passage, as we saw, made clear that true unity demands **dying to ourselves and humbly putting one another before ourselves**. However, we didn't exhaust the topic of humility by any means. Many questions remain: **What does it mean to be "humble"?** **What does humility mean? What does it look like? And how do we swallow our pride, die to ourselves, and humbly serve others *when it is just so difficult?***

In his book, *Humility: True Greatness*, C. J. Mahaney defines humility this way: **"Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness."** In other words, humility is having a right view of ourselves in light of the truest realities; it is not self-deprecation, always beating ourselves up, refusing to receive a compliment, or going out of our way to paint ourselves in the worst possible light. Instead, it is rightly putting ourselves in perspective: we are sinners, undeserving of anything good; God is completely Holy and worthy of all glory; we receive infinite goodness, which we don't deserve, by His grace in Christ. These realities shape who we are and how we are to live. True humility views ourselves, God, and others, in light of these realities. True humility lifts our eyes away from ourselves and to God; and therefore, to others.

And this is exactly what Phil. 2:5-11 helps us do. It gives us a right perspective.

### 2:5-11

This passage is an absolutely beautiful depiction of the gospel of Christ, the depths of his self-sacrificial love, the scandal of the cross, and His glorious majesty! If we rightly understand it, then it leaves us speechless! It puts forth the mysteries of God, Christ, and the Incarnation! It cuts straight to the heart of the gospel! It displays for us the glory of Christ, making it clear that He is worthy of all worship, honor and praise! It compels us to marvel at the gospel, to marvel Christ's majesty, and to worship and praise God! In fact, this passage is so incredible, so beautiful and captivating, that by the time we get to the end of it, we can *forget* why Paul is

writing this here in the first place. This passage does, indeed, contain many glorious truths about Christ, the fullness of both His Godhood and humanity, his life and death, and His universal majesty! But Paul doesn't bring these things up just to drive home a theological point; he is driving home the exhortation **to die to our selfishness and pride and to do all things in humility, seeking not our own interests, but the interests of others.** The previous passage, as we saw last week, calls us to strive for unity as believers, being united by our faith in Christ, and that **humility is required to live this out faithfully.** In verse 5, Paul tells us to “have this mind,” or “mindset” this humble, selfless, others-oriented way of thinking - by looking to the example of **Christ's humility.** The call for us to live humble lives is grounded in the fact that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who is **literally the center of the entire universe, humbly made himself a servant, a slave, for our sake.** So our aim today is to plumb the depths of this glorious passage, to bask in the light it reveals, and let it churn up our hearts in affection for Christ! But then to also bring us back and remind us of Paul's main point: that Christ's example is the model for how we, too, should live.

## **I. Jesus Humbled Himself for Our Sake (vv. 6-8)**

In verses 6-11, Paul tells us a brief summary of the narrative, or “storyline,” of Christ's life and work in accomplishing our salvation. It begins in the heavenly places, in eternity past; and so it ends back in the heavenly places, Jesus receiving all glory and praise, both as God and Man. And in the middle, we see this downward arc of the glorious Son of God making himself nothing, becoming like a slave, becoming a human man, because he was selflessly determined to save sinners, like you and me.

### **A. Fully God, always, even in eternity past (6)**

So the story begins in eternity past. Before Jesus Christ was a man, before he even had the name “Jesus,” he was, as he always had been, still is, and always will be, fully-God. He is the eternal Son of God, or “God the Son.” This is what Paul means when he says **“he was in the form of God.”**

These words, this verse, indeed much of this whole passage, has long been studied and debated; there are indeed complex truths and mysteries at play here, and the language can be very difficult to understand; the Greek is difficult and poetic. Some people throughout history have tried to point this verse and say, “Look! This is clearly saying Jesus was not God! He was

merely *like* God,” or some would say, “*a god*.” They would look to the rest of the verse as saying that he *did not have* equality with God, that he is praised *because he did not try to seize equality with God*. **We must emphatically and clearly recognize that that is exactly the opposite of what this verse is saying!** This passage is making very clear that Jesus, the Man, is and has *always been* the eternal God the Son, one with the Father.

When it says “form,” both here, speaking of him being “in the form of God,” and in verse 7, that he took on “the form of a servant,” the word word literally means that he *was*, that he *is*, that he *became* that thing: that he *was and always has been God*; that he became *a real man*. I think the NIV Bible translates this verse very accurately and helpfully: “**being in very nature God.**” In verse 7, likewise, the NIV says he took on “**the very nature of a servant,**” that is, a human nature. So in verse 6, this refers to **deity, his divine nature as God**; in verse 7, to **his humanity, his fully human nature as a man**.

Verse 6 is first and foremost **affirming that Jesus Christ is God; he is eternally God the Son**. This is also made clear at the end of the passage, in verse 11. God exalts the name of Jesus “*above every other name*,” so that all of creation praises His name, praising specifically that “Jesus Christ is **Lord!**” And at the same time, this is all done “*to the glory of God the Father*.” They are not competing; one is not being elevated over the other; they are both being glorified because they are both God, the same God. This point is made **explicitly clear** all throughout the Bible: there is only **one God**; God is one, and He shares His glory and status as God **with no one else**. In fact, Paul is here quoting **Isaiah 45**, a passage that is *making that exact point!* In Isa. 45:14-21, God is speaking and declaring that he alone is God, and there is none other; then, hear what He says in verses 22-23: “**Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance,**” or, that last part can be translated, as it was into the Greek, “**every tongue shall confess to God.**” Paul is drawing on the very language of a passage stating clearly that God is the only God, that there is no other God, and that He will share His glory with no one else! So if verse 6 here ever causes you trouble, and if you ever find yourself doubting whether Jesus is fully God, remember that this passage **makes explicitly clear that Jesus is God, equal in divinity with the Father; they are both glorified together, both being the One True God.**

This is called the **doctrine of the Trinity**. It is very complex; we cannot fully wrap our minds around it. This shouldn't surprise us though; why would we expect God to be like us? Why would we expect to be able to fully understand everything about God? But thankfully, we can truly know Him! He has revealed himself to us so that we can know Him, and know true, real things about Him! God revealed Himself to us, in His Word, as **One God, eternally existing in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are One God, and cannot be divided; yet they are also distinct Persons**. There is a lot of mystery here; I wish I could go into more detail today, but there will be time for that later, in other lessons. But this is a foundational truth for us to understand this passage, to know God, and to truly understand what's happening in the gospel.

Jesus Christ was “in the form of God,” by “nature” *was* and *is* God, being One with God for all eternity. **But what does the second half of verse 6 mean, that he did not consider this equality something “to be grasped” or to be “seized, to be held onto and taken advantage of?”**

#### **B. Fully Man; “Emptied Himself” by taking on flesh (v.7)**

This idea is fleshed out more fully in verse 7: it means that he willingly and selflessly “*emptied himself,*” humbly making himself nothing, *by becoming “a servant,” a “slave,” taking on a human nature and being born as a man!* Does this mean that Jesus gave up, or cast away his divine nature, exchanging it for a human one? No! This is not **subtraction**, this is **addition**; he does **not lose his Godhood, he takes on a new nature**. But it is **addition that look like subtraction**. He does not lose anything; he does not cease to be God, but *it did look like it, at least for a time, while he lived on Earth*. This is known as the **doctrine of the Incarnation: that Jesus is the God-Man, both fully and fully man**. The one Person, Jesus Christ, God the Son, has two natures: a **human nature** and a **divine nature**. This is the beautiful truth we celebrate every year at Christmas! God came down to earth!

And Paul emphasizes here that this is an **incredibly humbling, condescending act for Christ**. When Jesus became a man, he did not cease to be God, but **He really did become a real, actual human being!** He willingly *restricted himself*. He did not cease to be God; as God, he is unchanging, all-knowing, all-powerful, depending upon nothing or no one else. **But as a man, he became a helpless baby, utterly dependent on his mom and dad; he had to learn**

*and grow in wisdom and knowledge; he became weak and vulnerable, like us; he could hurt, feel pain, grieve, suffer, bleed, and die!*

### **C. Humbly obeyed the Father, even in dying (8)**

And of course, this was the point: the goal of Christ's incarnation, even before it happened, was **the Cross**. Jesus took on flesh to live a perfect life of obedience to God the Father; He was and is equal with the Father as God, but **as a Man**, He submitted to God, **showing us and fulfilling for us** what it means to **live a perfect, righteous life as a human being**; Jesus fulfilled what Adam was supposed to, what we are supposed to do, by perfectly submitting to and obeying God as a human man. And he obeyed perfectly even to the point of dying on the cross, bearing our sins in our place, bearing God's wrath against sin upon Himself, and dealing with it, once and for all, in His death.

And so this verse brings us **right to the heart of the gospel!** God, the Only, One, True God, eternal, all-powerful, perfectly Just, Holy, and Righteous, who stands as the Creator and Judge over all, **stepped down into this world and became a human being like us! Why? Because this is the only possible way you and I can be saved!** We are **helpless, rebellious sinners; every single one of us has turned away from God, we have turned to fake God, and God will judge every single person that has ever lived.** God would be perfectly right and just to cast us all into the **eternal fires of Hell. But listen to the incredible, glorious, even scandalous love and mercy of our great God! This same, Holy, perfectly Just God condescended to take on flesh and become like us to do what we could never hope to do! To do the impossible in our place!** No human being has ever lived up to God's standard of righteousness; *but Jesus, being fully God and full Man, has!* **Jesus lived a perfect life in our place; he suffered and died for our sins, as a sacrifice, in our place; he has been raised to life, ascended to heaven, and vindicated by God in our place!** And anyone that believes that this is true, repents and turns away from any other gods or forms of trying to be saved, and **trusts completely in Jesus, putting all of our hope in Him alone for salvation, confessing and worshipping Him as Lord and Savior** - anyone who does this **will be saved!** Not because our actions save us, but because we are trusting **that Jesus's actions save us! We trust and believe that Jesus really did live, die, and was raised in our place, as a sacrifice, once and for all, so that he takes our sin and we receive his glorious righteousness!** That is the gospel! That is why Jesus humbled himself and stooped so low - He condescended to become a human being and **do your work for you! To**

**take your place! To save you! *And if you trust in Him, if you are trusting in Christ this morning, He did this for you! You are forgiven and declared righteous, you have eternal life, you have salvation, because of the incredible, glorious, humble, selfless sacrifice of Jesus!***

[Transition]: If we truly understand this point, not only in our heads but also in our hearts, then the only right response is worship! This leads us to point 2:

## **II. Jesus is the Glorious Lord of All, Worthy of All Worship (vv. 9-11)**

After telling us of Christ's condescending descent from the heights of glory into the humble servitude of humanity, even into the abyss of death for our sakes, verse 9 takes us soaring back into grandeur of the glorious heavenly places: God raises Jesus, the God-Man, vindicating him before all! This has already happened in Jesus's resurrection and ascension, but verses 10 and 11 point us to the coming day, **the day that all of history is progressively moving towards: the universal exaltation and worship of Jesus Christ as Lord!** God the Father exalts Jesus's name above every name, displaying clearly, throughout the entire universe, that He is all-glorious God-Man, the true Lord and Savior, worthy of all worship, honor, glory, and praise!

And it will not just be the angels of heaven and the redeemed believers of humanity bowing and confessing His Lordship on that day, **but all of creation.** See verses 10-11: ***"...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."*** This passage makes clear that **all of creation** is present at this moment of universal worship; as the old hymn says, **"all creatures of our God and King."** Every single created being will one day bow before the Lord, acknowledging his Lordship and glory as the one, true, Creator God. Whether angel or demon, living or dead, those who refuse to repent and trust in Christ, and those confess His Lordship in life and are redeemed by Christ's blood - one day, **all of Creation** will have no choice but to recognize God's glory in Christ Jesus, bowing the knee in submission to Him and confessing His universal Lordship. ***That is where history is heading. The right side of history is the side that bows the knee to Jesus.***

But we need to make something very clear here: this passage **is not saying** that in the end every will repent, believe and be saved; this is not supporting universalism. Instead, what we see

is that in the end, even God's enemies, those who refuse to bow to Christ now and receive His just judgment, will one day no longer be able to refuse to acknowledge Him as God, as the rightful Lord and Ruler of the universe.

### **Application: Respond in Devotion and Worship**

**Jesus is the center of the universe; the entire universe revolves around Him.** His name is above every name; He is worthy of all honor, glory, and praise. And when His name is exalted and praised, this honors and glorifies God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Our purpose and end in life, and after this life, is to glorify God with our entire being; when we look and see who Jesus is and what He has done - indeed, what He has done to save sinners like us! - our only right response is to bow the knee and joyfully worship Him in all that we do! The truths we've talked about - the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the substitutionary life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - these are not merely academic theories for intellectuals to pontificate about; these are the bedrock foundations for our salvation in the gospel of Jesus Christ! They are the glorious, beautiful realities of the God who is incomprehensible, as God, and yet personally knowable, as Man, in the person of Jesus Christ! This is the good news that God became man, and that his path to glory was the road of the Cross, taking our place in death that we might live forever with Him!

So meditate deeply on these truths; let them marinate in your mind and seep down into your heart; soak them up into your soul, so that your entire being cries out the praises of God! Set your every affection on Christ, the God-Man, whom all of history and creation revolves around; He who became nothing, who took on the form of a servant, of a slave, to live and die to save you! **This is the glorious risen Lord, the Lord of glory, that we get to worship and praise!** So praise Him as we gather together to sing and pray to Him! Praise Him in your private times of Bible reading and prayer, by yourself or as a family! Praise Him in all that you do throughout the week! Do everything to His glory!

**[Transition]:** The right response to this passage is a spirit of worship. And this does not just include our hearts and attitudes towards God, or our songs and prayers; this includes the way we live our lives, our hearts and attitudes **towards one another.**

This brings us to our final point:

### III. Therefore, We Should Humbly Serve Others (v. 5)

After gazing at the glory revealed in verses 9-11, it feels like we should hang up the hat and call it a day, doesn't it? And yet, if we just stop there, we risk losing sight of the reason Paul wrote this passage in the first place: *to spur us on in humility towards one another by pointing us to the glorious example of Christ's own humility*. And this is not backpedaling to do so; following Jesus's example by humbly serving Him through humbly serving one another **is a part of our worshipping Him**. You've heard the expression, "*Imitation is the highest form of flattery*." So we could also say, "Imitation is a form of worship and praise." Part of the way we worship and glorify God is by obeying Him and following the example of Christ, aiming to look more and more like Jesus every day.

And so we return to the top of the passage, in verse 5. We are to have "this mind," this mindself of humility, of striving for unity and love together as we consider others more significant than ourselves, dying to our own selfish ambition and pride, and humbly serving one another (2:1-4). We are to do this in the same way that Christ has modeled for us. Indeed, we are to die to ourselves and embrace a life of humility *precisely because* Jesus Christ, *whose name is the most highly exalted name in all the universe*, did the exact same thing!

We might quickly affirm the value of humility with our lips, but it is a truly difficult thing to live out in our lives. *We all want other people* to be humble, at least in their interactions with us! When we consider what it means *to be humble servants ourselves* - well, that isn't as attractive, is it? We can easily fall into the trap of thinking that our interests are more significant than others' around us; our work is more important; our time more valuable; our schedules and agendas more worthy of consideration. We might even think to ourselves in secret, "*Is it really even worth it to be humble? Sure, that sounds nice, but we all know that the humble are just "weak" and never get ahead; it's the proud, the confident, the loud, and the assertive who get ahead and succeed in life! If I put others before myself, who will look out for number 1 - ME?"*

So what do you do when you find it difficult to kill your selfishness and pride; when you find it difficult to humbly serve and love others by putting them first, even when it is demeaning, costly, inconvenient, or seemingly "beneath" you?

**You thank God that Jesus Christ didn't think that way!** If anyone was ever entitled to think that way, it would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God! As we've seen, *all of Creation and*

*history literally revolves around Him! Everything works towards His own glory and praise!* He could have easily said He was too important to condescend and take on flesh, to suffer and die in the place of undeserving sinners like us; He could have easily said that such demeaning work was beneath Him, that He is far too significant to do such a thing - and He would be right! He would have been perfectly right and just to say just that! ***And yet, the glorious news of the gospel, is that He didn't! He condescended to stoop so low, even to suffer and die, to save wretched, undeserving sinners like you and me!*** If Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the ***true, legitimate center of the universe***, didn't consider himself too good to humbly serve others, then how dare we? If He considered it worthwhile to do so, even when it was costly, demeaning, and inconvenient, then so should we! Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve; He deserves all glory, and we do not! In Christ, we receive salvation **by grace** - we receive all these things *despite what we deserve!* So then, let us make it our mission not to be served, not to live for our own glory, but to die to our selfishness and pride, to live for the glory of Christ, and to humbly consider one another as more important than ourselves.

And as we do so, **let us always remember that the only true path to humility for us is grace.** I'm sure we all feel conviction when we think of our own selfishness and pride; when we feel the guilt upon us for not being humble as we ought, let it turn you straight to the cross of Christ! After all, what can be more humbling than the grace of Christ in the gospel? Truly believing in the gospel is declaring this: I am selfish, proud, rebellious sinner; I think far too highly of myself, and far too little of GOD and other people; I do not deserve anything good, but only death and damnation; and yet, I am trusting in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ's humble, selfless sacrifice is sufficient to save me! That by His grace, I receive the salvation I don't deserve!

So turn and rest in the grace of Jesus; trust in Him alone! And let His grace humble us and also encourage us to live humble lives in Him. Amen.