

The Glory of Christ (3)

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[0 : 00] Philippians 2 from verse 5 to 11 contains some of the most powerful and passionate teaching anywhere in the Bible.

! It is often called the Carmen Christi, the Carmen Christi, which means the Song of Christ. It is thought that this is one of the earliest Christian hymns.

The early Roman historian Tacitus said of the early Christians that they sang hymns to Christ as a God.

They sang hymns to Christ as a God. And this may have been one of the hymns to which Tacitus, who himself was not a Christian, was referring.

It wouldn't be surprising given the awesomeness of its content. It is full of the glory of Christ. The Christ who went down deeper than any, and the Christ who was raised higher than any.

[1 : 03] The Christ who descended. The Christ who ascended. The Christ who was humiliated. The Christ who was exalted. Now, we have already considered in this series on the glory of Christ, the glory of Christ as the representative of God, and the glory of Christ in His mysterious person as both God and man.

But this evening, I wanted to consider from Philippians chapter 2 and from verse 5 to verse 8. The glory of Christ in His condescension.

In His condescension. The word condescend literally means to stoop down together. To stoop down together. And in these verses, we see Christ stooping down for us.

Stooping down from the highest place to the lowest place. Paradoxically, though, never is the glory of Christ more clearly seen than when He stoops down for us.

And for us, empties and humbles Himself. I want us to consider two brief things this evening. First, Christ's condescension for the church.

[2 : 30] And secondly, the church's condescension for Christ. Now, all of us have our favorite songs. But perhaps we should all consider the Carmen Christi.

Even though it's the earliest as the best. Because it teaches us most about our Lord and His glory. First of all then, Christ's condescension for the church. We cannot understand the depths to which Christ condescended unless we first appreciate the heights from which Christ condescended.

The apostle begins by describing Jesus in this way in verse 6. Who, though He was in the form of God.

Who, though He was in the form of God. Now, when I was a wee boy, children's TV was dominated by two programs. Blue Peter was one. And the other one was Tony Hart and Morph.

[3 : 38] Remember that? You Americans, zone out. Tony Hart was an artist. And the show was all about art. Morph was a wee plasticine man who could rearrange himself into any kind of shape.

We still use the word morph today to speak of something changing shape or someone who changes their personality. They've morphed from one to another.

The word morph is taken from the Greek language as used here in Philippians 2.6. And it means form, form. Christ was in the form of God.

To see Christ was to see God. He looked like God. Sounded like God. He did the things God did precisely because He was in the form of God.

Or to put it more plainly, He was God. He did not merely appear to be God. He was God. So our hymn then begins with Christ in the highest place.

[4 : 43] Christ as God. Therefore, it is impossible to overestimate or overstate, rather, the height from which Christ stooped down for us.

Infinitely blessed, eternally content, and unchangeably flourishing, flourishing, Christ Jesus was eternally worshipped and glorified by the angels.

Knowing no restriction, nor limitation, He was completely self-sufficient in the beauty of the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit. He never experienced hunger or thirst, sorrow or pain.

Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, Jesus asks us, to whom will you compare me that I should be like Him, says the Holy One.

Now, we could use images of worldly kings living in golden palaces and seated in thrones. That would fall infinitely far short of the height from which Christ stooped down for us.

[5 : 46] He was in the form of God. He was God. And at the voice of the worship of the angels, the whole earth shook. These are the heights from which Christ descended.

Not just any height, but the highest height. We might be self-deceived enough to consider ourselves to be something, to be great in status and dignity. We might be conceited to think of ourselves as being better than others.

But for Jesus Christ, it was no self-deception and no conceit. He really was infinitely great in status and dignity, infinitely better than any, for He was in the morph, the form of God.

But now begins the descent. He did not count equality with God something to be grasped. Verse 6. Now, that word grasp isn't to be understood in the sense that he wasn't already equal with God.

Rather, it's to be understood in the sense of holding on to something. He did not consider equality with God something to be held on to. When two teams are playing a tug of war, each team holds the rope tightly and will not let go.

[7 : 04] They tenaciously hold on to it and pull. In the same way, Christ did not count the heights of His dignity and status as something to be held on to.

He was willing to loosen His grasp of the tug-of-war rope and let it drop. He did not insist upon His right to the worship of the angels, to the divine blessedness of infinite contentment, joy, and blessedness.

He made a conscious decision to let go of these things. And that conscious decision was motivated by His love for us.

He began His descent into utter nothingness for us because He loved us. Behind the passion of this hymn in Philippians 2 is the love of Christ for you and for me.

love written in every word and every line, every downward movement of Christ prompted by His love. How do I know this evening that Christ loves me?

[8 : 16] Because this is how low He was willing to stoop for me. Now, there follows in the next verse. There might be an overhead for this if you can find it, Mark.

Two very important verbs which open up the depths of Christ's humiliation. He made Himself nothing and He humbled Himself. I just want to spend a wee bit of time on each.

He made Himself nothing. Every word Paul uses has been carefully chosen. He made Himself nothing. He emptied Himself.

The heart of this word is nothing. The Greek word ekenosen. Kenos in Greek means nothing. Empty. Void. The Christ who was God emptied Himself of all the privileges of His divinity.

It's an active verb in verse 7 which means no one did this to Him. Christ did it to Himself. He who was everything and through whom the universe was created and is sustained, He who is eternally worshipped by the angels made Himself nothing.

[9 : 30] And we read that He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant. He has now made Himself nothing by taking the morphe of a servant.

He who was eternally served now serves. And just like we say He was in the form of God because He was God so now He's in the form of a servant because He is a servant.

Not just any servant but more accurately a slave. He emptied Himself by becoming a slave. You'll know in the Roman world of the day slaves were the property of another.

They had no rights or status. They meant nothing. commodities to be traded, animals to be treated harshly. This is what Christ became. A slave.

Christ, God. Christ, now a slave. He's born in human likeness. Born a human being. Again, it's mysterious but the God of heaven has come to earth in the likeness of a human being.

[10 : 45] the Word made flesh, God and man forever united in the person of Jesus Christ. We looked at this last time. He's made Himself nothing by becoming a slave. So here then we have Him, the child, the man, the slave, Christ Jesus, washing His disciples' feet because He's their servant and He's their slave.

The God who made them stooping down beneath them. He made Himself nothing. And He humbled Himself.

He humbled Himself, verse 8. The central thought of this verse is that He humbled Himself. He had already made Himself nothing. He had already descended into slavery and emptiness but further down He went.

He humbled Himself. He became obedient to death. To speak of death and God in the same sentence makes no logical sense because God is the author of life and all life is in Him and yet Christ humbled Himself unto death.

Human death is the result of sin and Christ who knew no sin became obedient to the demands of human sin and for a death He died. Even death on a cross, the most brutal method of execution reserved for the vilest of criminals is your torture and pain and cruelty of crucifixion does not bear thinking about that He who was in the form of God became obedient even to that.

[12 : 22] Words on a page repeated by a preacher don't do sufficient justice to how far Jesus went down in making Himself nothing and in His self-humbling.

Never in the history of humankind has there been anything like this and never will there be anything like this again for no one ever started so high and ended so low.

But such is the glory of Christ and His condescension for us. I'm only too aware and I'm sure the pastors among us here will be only too aware of how little justice we feel that we do to this text. The greatest exponent of the self-emptying of Christ in Philippians 2 was my old mentor Principal Donald MacLeod and if you want a full explanation of what all this meant search out sermons and writings from him on this passage.

But then you may ask me the question where is the glory here? There is no glory in slavery and there certainly is no glory in crucifixion and on the surface of things you may be right there is no glory in the humanity of slavery or the disgustingness of crucifixion.

[13 : 39] But let me suggest just four very brief ways in which we see Christ's glory here. First, consider why Christ descended from the highest to the lowest.

Consider why He became nothing. Not for Himself. He did it for us. He loved us and gave Himself for us. To quote verse 3, in humility He counted others more significant than Himself.

It was for us He stooped down so low. Does this mean nothing to you? That from the highest pinnacle of infinite majesty Christ descended to the lowest pit of misery.

It was on our behalf because of His infinite and eternal love for us. We need never doubt that love. Not even in the hardest of times because Christ has gone down lower than we can ever imagine. The glory of His love drove all He did. We'll see that next Sunday night as well. Secondly, consider how Christ condescended willingly.

[14 : 53] Willingly. Not from any force of compulsion. He did not count equality with God something to be grasped. He made Himself nothing. He humbled Himself. It was a self-conscious self-emptying.

He was not compelled or forced to humble Himself. Nothing but His willing love for us drove Him to the cross. This was the price of our salvation. The greatest of all condescension.

But it was a price He was willing to pay. I may place no value on myself as a human being but this is how much Christ valued me.

He stooped down for me. Third, consider the result of Christ's condescension. Consider the result of Christ's condescension.

From verse 9 onwards, sorry, yeah, verse 9 onwards, we read that following His humiliation, Christ was exalted to the highest place. His ascent to the highest place followed His descent to the lowest place.

[16 : 01] He, the Lamb who was slain, is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and now He receives double praise from the holy angels and from His blood-bought church in heaven and on earth.

During His life, Jesus said, He who would be the greatest among you must become your slave. He became a slave in His self-emptying but He has now been exalted to the highest place so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Is that not our motive for mission? And then fourthly, consider that in the ugliness of suffering stands the nobility of glory.

In the ugliness of suffering stands the nobility of glory. I want to use an image every husband and father will identify with here. I've always loved my wife.

I admire her greatly. Don't tell her I've said that. But at what point of my life did I love her the most? Was it when she was wearing makeup dressed in an expensive frock at our son's wedding?

[17 : 23] Was it when she walked up the aisle 28 years ago, was it, to meet me on our wedding day? No, neither of these. I loved her the most when she was giving birth to our children.

Now there's no dignity in childbirth, as Mitchell will tell you from very recent experience. I don't need to expand on this for you to get the picture. There's no makeup.

There's no fine clothes. There's just the struggle, the pain, and the tears. But never did I love my wife as much as when for the sake of us and our children.

She exposed herself to that humiliating experience. Now there for me is the nobility of glory and suffering. The nobility and glory of Christ consists in that no one ever suffered like he, and yet in his suffering there was such nobility.

Never was my wife more glorious in my eyes than when I saw her suffering so much for the sake of our family. As the hymn says, I love thee because thou hast first loved me and purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.

[18 : 41] I love thee for waiting the thorns on thy brow. If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, it is now. No wonder this passage is one of the most passionate and powerful in the New Testament.

No wonder the early Christians sang it as a hymn to God. No wonder we love it so because it summarizes for us in such spirit-inspired terms the glory of Christ and his condescension.

Christ's condescension for his church. Well, secondly, and more briefly, the church's condescension for Christ. Now, we stand back at the passion of this hymn and we join in worship.

We may, we shouldn't, we will. For eternity, we shall praise King Jesus for all he did for us in his condescension. But the Apostle Paul never introduces a theological section into his writings without having a practical application in view.

Theology without practice is blunt, just as practice without theology is empty. The church in Philippi, you will know, was in a bad state. It was divided along many lines.

[19 : 55] Some preferred one preacher to another. There was disagreement among prominent members of the church and certain Christians were trying to manipulate the rest by use of power plays and control games.

Like the disciples of Jesus' day, the Christians in Philippi were jockeying for position in the church. Who's the greatest? Who's got the biggest say in how things are done?

Who's got the highest status? And for this reason, from verse 3 through 5 in Philippians 2, Paul writes, do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests but to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God and so on. The solution to the problem of disunity of the church in Philippi lies in having the mind of Christ. That mind which did not consider equality with God something to be fiercely held on to, that mind which humbled itself, that mind which made itself nothing.

[21 : 07] We worship and follow the Christ who willingly left the privileges of divinity behind and pursued the downward path to humiliation. As Christians, do we not say that we want to become more like Jesus?

Well, if so, we need to be willing to leave the status and privileges of our worldly positions behind and pursue the downward path to service and slavery.

If we are to be like Jesus, we are to put rivalry and conceit behind us and to consider in humility others more significant than ourselves. So, here's a question.

Who is the most significant person, the most important person in this church for the Christ-like person who is pursuing the downward path, our instant answer to that question will be, well, not me. Others are far more significant than I am. And this means at least there are no insignificant people in our congregation. No insignificant people.

[22 : 15] No one with whom we can dispense and it costs us nothing. And it also means we must never manipulate people to get them to do what we want them to.

It means we will not always get our way. We've got to be fine with that. You know, we tend to think that Presbyterian churches in Scotland are bad for splitting.

But independent charismatic churches are way worse than us. Nevertheless, they and we have one thing in common. the vast majority of churches split not over a primary theological matter, but

because one power group in the church does not feel it's getting its way.

They don't feel in control, so they leave the church and they set up a new church where they're in control. Like infants in a playground who have their toys taken from them, they say, I'm not playing anymore with you.

Doesn't this feel like the exact opposite of what Paul is teaching here in Philippians 2? There are many issues in every church where we will not get our way, but if the only recourse we have is to leave, there won't be a church in Scotland which numbers more than one person.

[23 : 34] Maybe some person doesn't agree with themselves and so they leave their own church. Isn't it better to follow the Christ-like route downward and rather than grasp power and status, willingly give it away?

Isn't it better to refuse the right to our status and position like our Lord did for the sake of the reputation of Christ? Talking about big things here.

There's a missing generation from the Free Church of Scotland. I'm talking about men and women in their 50s and 60s. We went through the troubles of the Free Church continuing split in the late 1990s.

So many of my contemporaries at the time left the Free Church of Scotland and left the faith because of the troubles. Was it really worth it?

Was it really worth the souls of so many people? We may insist, oh well we split over a matter of principle, but really? Was it so primary to the Christian faith that the cost outweighed the benefit?

[24 : 46] The same can be said of the 2010 split after the plenary assembly. Just because one group did not get their way, did they really have to split the church?

Was it really worth it? None of us will ever have to go down as low as Jesus did in the service of others. So what then on a practical level are we willing to sacrifice for the good of others?

To what extent are we willing to make ourselves nothing and humble ourselves for the Christian good of Crow Road, Partick, Thornwood, Glasgow, and beyond?

How low are we willing to stoop and condescend? We dare not sing the hymn of Christ unless we are willing to live like Christ. By contrast, we bring Christ great glory when for his name we humble ourselves and take the lowest place.

A minister I know well visited one of his older members. When he appeared at her door, she got such a shock that she let go of her bowels and made a mess.

[26 : 00] She was so very embarrassed but without any fuss, this minister got her to sit on her chair, cleaned her up, cleaned up the mess she had made, and continued with her as though nothing had happened.

Nevermore was he like his master when he was shoveling up her dirt and taking the lowest place. Many of you here, I'm sure will have stories like that from your own experience.

You see, far from being dry and abstract, the Christ hymn of Philippians 2 is the key to unity, service, mission, and worship in the church. It's a question we must all ask ourselves.

To what extent am I pursuing the downward movement of Christ into self-emptying? To what extent am I humbling myself to condescend to the level of the man on the street who struggles with addiction and loneliness so that I might reach him with the good news of Jesus Christ?

Jesus came down to our level, so for the sake of mission, can we not stoop down like he did? We see the glory of Christ in his condescension.

[27 : 19] Does this glorious self-sacrifice mean nothing to us? But motivated by his love for a sinful world, from the highest heights Christ descended to the lowest depths, surely it demands at least our faith, our worship, our devotion.

Surely if Christ loved me in this way, with the deep limitations of my sinful heart, I can love him in return.

groan Thank you.