

Philippians 2:5-9 Early Morning

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[0 : 00] Dear God, speak to us today. Thank you for coming to us, and we remember you at the start of Advent. We pray that you may strengthen our hearts as we hear your word. Amen. Please take a seat.

So, hi everyone. My name is Shua Ting. I'm an artisan apprentice from St. Peter's Fireside, and I'm currently studying at Regent College. So, this is actually the second sermon that I'll be preaching, and I'm glad to spend it with you all here at St. John's, and wish everyone a Happy New Year at the start of Advent.

Through history, sailors and explorers have used the stars to find their way across oceans in the darkest times. Right now, we also find ourselves in a physically dark time of the year as we transition from fall to winter.

And unfortunately, we also don't have to look far to know that there are also metaphorically dark things happening in our world today. In the midst of all this, the book of Philippians, written by Paul when he was in prison, shines like a bright star that orients us.

It has a far more personal and intimate tone than his other letters. And as we await the coming of Christ, we get a glimpse of who he is in Philippians.

[1 : 26] Christ coming into our human family, being made incarnate with us. The passage we'll look at today is one of the most joyful and intimate portions of Scripture.

Today, we'll be looking at Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 11. This is part of a passage that Christian scholars often call the Christ hymn. Some scholars believe that it was an actual hymn that was sung by the early church.

The Christ hymn is central to the book of Philippians, and it shows us the movement of Christ's incarnation, humiliation, and exaltation. It shows us Jesus' very nature of humanness and humility. And as a hymn does, it moves us towards worship. Our message for today centers around the humility of Christ.

We'll look firstly at how the Christ hymn shows us the humility of Christ, which is an essential part of his nature. And then we'll look at how we, as his people, are called to imitate that humility.

[2 : 34] So if you've ever tried to paint a portrait, which is something that I've done when I was back in art school, you'll realize that the more intently you look at the subject being painted, the better you'll be able to capture it in an imitation.

So if Christ is the subject that we are trying to capture, we must first learn how to behold him. So let's start by looking at verses 6 to 7.

Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

So it can be difficult for us to grasp the extent to which Christ made himself nothing if we don't first understand the weight of what it means that he was, in very nature, God.

So try to imagine with me for a moment being anything other than a human. Imagine being a dog or even an ant. It's impossible, isn't it?

[3 : 49] It's impossible for us to grasp what it means to be anything other than human, but Jesus, though he was in very nature God, he took on humanness.

And not just that, but the nature of a servant. As we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus, we also remember that he didn't just assume human likeness as a man, but as an infant.

He cried. He needed to be swaddled and fed. He was born into poverty as a refugee, surrounded by donkeys and horses.

John MacArthur put it like this, A man born into the world by means of an earthly mother? So was he. Did men start out as babies, then become toddlers, then become little boys, and then grow to teenagers, and then become adults?

So did he. Do men born in this world find some path of employment, learn a trade? So did he. Are men hungry and thirsty and weary and sleepy?

[5 : 02] So was he. Are men grieved and sometimes angry? Do they weep at times? So did he. Do they sometimes rejoice?

So did he. Are men destined to die? So was he. In this, we see the great condescension of Christ. The original word in Greek for the phrase, made himself nothing, captures the image of something being poured out, like a jug of water being emptied.

But because Jesus is fully man and fully God, it didn't mean that he emptied out his divine nature. Rather, he limited himself and poured out his privileges.

Remember what Jesus said when the chief priest arrested him for trial? Do you think that I cannot call on my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels?

[6 : 04] But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? Though Jesus was still the divine Son of God, he took on humanness in every way in obedience to the Father.

Verses 8 to 9 continues, Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

That obedience went all the way to death. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Can we even grasp that level of humility before the Father that helped Jesus to pray, your will be done? Because we are human, affected by sin, we know that we will one day die.

But only Jesus was predestined to die. Not just a natural death, but the most painful form of dying that one could undergo. Death by Roman crucifixion, reserved for the worst kind of criminal.

[7 : 13] Through his humility and obedience, verse 9 tells us that God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

Isn't that amazing? Because Jesus willingly submitted to the Father, it was the Father who raised him up and exalted him on high. It wasn't by his own self-exaltation, but through his humility.

So now, what does that mean for us? We started looking at the passage from verse 6, but our passage today actually begins from verse 5. It says, In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

So this is actually shocking. As Christians, we talk about loving one another all the time. But how often does our love for one another resemble the mindset of Christ?

Do we have the spirit of pouring ourselves out? What do we really think of the kind of humility that Christ embodied in a world of self-promotion?

[8 : 26] To the Romans back then, humility wasn't a virtue either. It was something that was associated with failure and shame. And yet, Paul's call is clear.

Whether we may like it or not, humility is lived out in relationship, deeply intertwined with one another. I know that for some of us, this can be anything but easy.

So if you've ever struggled with the bruises of living in community like I have, this may be even one of the hardest things to do in our Christian lives. Sometimes we may find it easier to try and imitate Christ's knowledge or his intellect.

But his humility? That one is a lot tougher. Our human tendency can lean towards self-exaltation and self-preservation.

I know I was right, so I'm not going to forgive them. Why is she getting the credit for what I did?

What he did really hurt me, so I'm not obligated to be the bigger person here.

[9 : 37] Does any of that sound familiar to us? It may be so easy for us to hold back from being humble. We don't want to be vulnerable.

We don't want to put ourselves out on a limb. We don't want to be overlooked or have people walk over us. We don't want to be in a position of lack.

But today, as we look at the downward trajectory that Christ took in his humility, we need to press into prayer and ask for God's help for us to do so too.

The picture of Christ on the cross is not just a call for us to imitate him, but on a deeper level, it's a reminder of God's love for us.

Romans 8.32 says, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

[10 : 38] We may fear lack, but the Father promises to provide for us. He has already provided his very son. So as we meditate on Christ's incarnation, death, and exaltation today, it's possible that God may be highlighting areas of our lives where we are being invited to adopt a posture of humility with someone else or in a situation that we are facing.

In Philippians 2.14-15, Paul writes about the power of humility to a watching world, that we may be children of God in a warped and crooked generation, shining like stars in the night sky.

So just as Jesus came to be the light of the world, we, his followers, show his nature through the lives that we lead. When we don't know how, or maybe when we don't want to be humble in our dark seasons, the Christ hymn orients us to the right path.

In those dark seasons, we look to Christ's humility as our guiding light. So let us pray. Dear God, I lift up everyone in this congregation to you.

Jesus, help us see more clearly the beauty of your humility and your great love for us, through which we are already abundantly provided for. Soften our hearts and give us the strength to live in the same way.

[12 : 10] We ask this in your name. Amen.