

He Emptied Himself

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 September 2010

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let me turn with me to Philippians chapter 2 and verse 4.

Philippians 2 verse 4 page 1180. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also 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 did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Christ Jesus Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

A window is something which you can see out of or see into.

[1 : 33] I guess that's a very obvious and a simple statement. Normally the use of a window is to see out of especially when it comes to us being in the house for example we have windows in order to let the light in but so that we can see out of.

And it would be quite rude and nosy for anyone to try to see into a house through a window that was open. But that's exactly what the church is meant to be.

A window through which the outside world are able to see the gospel. If the window is clean then you can see clearly through the window into what's going on in the house.

And if the window of the church is clean then the outside world can see clearly what the gospel is all about. But if the window is clouded over or it's become dirty then there is no chance or less and less chance of that happening.

The church's window can become dirty in several ways. First of all there is the quality of our Christian lives. You can't expect anyone to discover the gospel if the quality of your Christian life is not what it should be.

[3 : 02] How then is anyone going to believe the gospel if they can't see it in practice by the way in which you live your life? If we're two-faced, if we're hypocritical, if we live a lie, if we're one thing on a Sunday and another thing during the week, then people will see through that very, very quickly.

Another kind of dirty window is when relationships within the church break down. It's not just as individual Christians that we are to be the light of the world, or rather in this case the window through which the world can see the gospel.

It is also our lives in relationship with one another. What it was that Jesus said, By this they will know that you are my disciples if you have love one toward another.

And the idea there is that people were to see the way in which Christians interacted with one another. They were to see the extraordinary and unique love that they had for one another.

And it would be an example to all of them. And it would be a signpost of the truth, a testimony to the truth of the gospel.

[4 : 21] But the window becomes dirty when there are disagreements and we don't know how to manage those disagreements. Because disagreement will always happen. We live in a sinful world.

I suppose if we lived in a sinless world, there would be no disagreement at all. So I'm not talking about when we disagree one with another. We always do that or regularly do that.

But what I'm talking about is how we manage those conflicts and disagreements. What kind of attitude we are going to adopt when we find we're in conflict with one another.

However, in most instances when there is conflict, the issue itself is not important. Not saying there aren't important issues, but most of the time the issue is not a really important one.

But what is important is the way, the manner, the attitude in which we go about resolving whatever is between us. Now the church at Philippi was beginning to cloud over.

[5 : 21] The window was becoming clouded and shaded and dirty. Dirt was beginning to appear. And the danger was that it would become so dirty that no one would be able to see through to the truth of the gospel.

And the issue simply was this. We're not told what the disagreements were. It's like Paul is saying, it doesn't matter what they are. But what really matters is the way that you're handling it, which is all wrong.

They were beginning to allow their pride to get in the way. There were conflicts which should have been easily worked out between one another had their attitudes been right.

The real issue, the issue that lay behind the problem in Philippi, was their own absence of humility towards one another. There was grumbling and complaining.

He tells us that in verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or questioning. That means that there was grumbling and complaining within the church. And I guess that each one had their own reason.

[6 : 33] If you had asked the various members of the church, what's your argument or what's your impression of what's going on? Every one of them would have a reasonable argument to say. And yet, it was beginning to slide.

Things were beginning to slide into real mayhem and a lack of humility and Christ-likeness. They were, each one of them, refusing to back down from their own argument.

In verse 3, it tells us, Do nothing from rivalry or conceit. Well, obviously, there was rivalry and conceit. These two things frequently go together.

Conceit is when you think of yourself as higher than you ought to be. More important than you ought to think of yourself. When you think of yourself in relation to someone else.

And without even saying it, even in your own mind, you just think of yourself as being better. You act as if you're more important. Or as if you're cleverer or more gifted.

[7 : 35] Perhaps you are cleverer or more gifted. But that doesn't mean you're better or more important or more significant in the eyes of the Lord. Each one of us in the church are on the same level in the eyes of the Lord.

We are one in Jesus Christ. And, of course, rivalry arises out of this. You see other people as in competition with yourself.

The answer was very simple. Each one should count others, says Paul. That's what he goes on to say. Count others more significant than yourselves.

That's the principle. And that's always what lies at the very root of the remedy of the problem. So, in verse 4, then Paul goes further.

And he suggests that they were looking to their own interests. And not to the interests of others. And this was, of course, presenting itself as a real danger for the future of the church.

[8 : 38] You see, our concern as God's people is not simply for what the church is today. We have to be concerned about the church for tomorrow.

Because if through the church we have heard the gospel, and if we have grown in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through what the church means to us, we must never put the future of that church in jeopardy.

Because if we do, then there won't be a church for our children to grow up in, and for our children to be nourished in the way that we have as well. Paul was always concerned for the future, for the ongoing well-being of the church, as a place where God's word is preached, and where people come into contact with the gospel.

So he's not saying just for the time being. He's saying make sure your eye is towards the future. Make sure that you do nothing to jeopardize that future.

And it's the same today. It would horrify us, I hope, to think that in Stornoway, in 50 years' time, that everything had become so disintegrated by our own folly that there was no church, or the church had become so weak that it was reaching a very, very small number of people and that things had diminished to that extent.

[9 : 57] So then the answer to all of this problem, this whole problem, lies with in going back, says Paul, and going up. And here is the great example.

Here is the great picture that Paul brings before the church at Philippi as the remedy, as a picture that ought always to be at the forefront of their minds every day.

And if they get this picture right and model themselves on this vision, then all the... It's not that the disagreements would stop. They won't stop.

But the conflicts and the danger and the rivalry and the pride would all fall away if only they keep this picture in the forefront of their minds.

Well, what is he doing? Well, first of all, he's going all the way back in time, but he's also going up to heaven. He's doing two things. He's going all the way back in time and he's going up to heaven. Now, you would think that if somebody was wanting to give an example of somebody, you might go back into the Old Testament to choose someone who was humble, like Moses.

[11 : 11] Moses was a particularly humble example of someone who lived in the Old Testament. But that's not what Paul does. You might think he might choose some other great Christian in the Old Testament that they were acquainted with, but he doesn't do that.

He doesn't stop short of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. But not even when he was in this world. He wants to go before he ever came into this world and present the picture of Jesus in heaven and his decision, his act of will, by which he came into this world, putting his own heavenly glory to one side for the sake of saving others, for the sake of the interests of his people who were lost in sin and guilty in sin.

So that's the picture that he wants. So I want us this morning, in the time that's left, to go all the way back with Paul and to go all the way up with Paul and to have a glimpse through the window of heaven into the life and the decision and the will of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I want us to look very briefly. We don't have time to go into any detail, but I want us to very briefly look at one of the most profound statements in the Bible, one of the greatest theological statements in the Bible.

And he makes that statement not primarily in order to increase our theological intelligence, but in order to stop the arguments in the church.

[12 : 50] That's why it's given. And I hope that never, that we will never become so wrapped up with our theological knowledge that it will fail to have an impact on the manner in which we live our lives.

That's what God expects of us. God is not going to ask us, how much of Charles Hodge do you know? Or how much of Professor John Murray do you know? How much of the nuances of the great theological tomes do you know?

He's going to ask us, to what extent was your life conformed to the image of Jesus? To what extent were you obedient to Jesus? And did you have the mind of Christ?

Because that's exactly what Paul says. He says, have this mind, verse 5, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. And if theological knowledge works correctly within us, then the more we know, the more we grasp what took place in this passage, then the more impact it will have on the way in which we live our lives humbly for the sake of other people.

Putting others before ourselves and esteeming others. Considering other people as better than ourselves. But what's happened all too often within our tradition is that we elevate the theological knowledge and we just, we despise the practice.

[14 : 15] We don't think it's important. That's not the case. The whole point of knowing is being. Being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Imitating Jesus Christ.

That's the bottom line. That we imitate the character and the nature and the manner of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just in his life on earth, but in his heavenly life and in the manner in which he came into this world.

That is what this passage is all about. It's all about that moment in time and space-time history when the second person of the Godhead himself chose to come all the way down into this world as one of us and be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and be born of her.

What a moment that was. Let's just not jump the gun. Let's try and take the statement in its sections. First of all, he says in verse 6, he was in the form of God.

Let's just look at what he says carefully in verse 6. He was, first of all, in the form of God and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

[15 : 29] Let's just stop at that before we go any further. We're going all the way up to heaven and we're asking ourselves what we can see in heaven at this very moment when Jesus, when the second person, well, we remind ourselves first of all that God is one God but that God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And these three persons are one God, none of them is less than the other in substance. they are the same in substance and equal in power and glory.

So the Father doesn't reign over the Son and the Spirit. The Father is not elevated above them. Each one, Father, Son, and Spirit is our one God, same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Father, Son, and Spirit. Now we have to try and grasp this. None of us will ever grasp it but that's the truth of God. Now we're focusing upon the second of these persons.

the Son of God. That does not mean He is the Son in that there was a time when He wasn't the Son. There was never a time when He wasn't the Son. He didn't, He never came into being.

[16 : 41] He always was from all eternity without beginning and without end. He always was the Son. And everything that is true about God is true about the Son of God.

We're focusing this morning on the second person of the Trinity. and it tells us that He was in the form of God. Now we have to be very, very careful with this expression in the form of God because if we misunderstand it, we end up with the understanding or the impression that He only looked like God.

That's what we typically would say if something was in the form of something else. That it simply looked like something. But that's not what He's talking about at all. What Paul means there is that He was in every respect God.

And if it was possible for us to go into heaven or to go into heaven at that particular moment in history and see, now we can't see anything, we cannot, it's impossible, God is invisible.

So, there's a sense in which God doesn't have a form at all. what Paul is saying that if it was possible for us to see through the window into heaven and see the second person of the Godhead, we would see God.

[18 : 00] In every respect, no less God than the Father, in every respect we would see Him. That's what it means that He is the form, He was the form of God.

But let's take the other statement. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Now this is a very complicated statement, I'm not going to over-complicate it. I want us, in order to try and understand it, to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

Cast your mind back to the Garden of Eden and the conversation that took place between the serpent and Eve in which God has said to her, you can eat any tree you want except one, the tree of the knowledge and the good and evil.

You must not eat of that tree because in the day you eat thereof you will surely die. So the serpent comes along and he begins to try and persuade her that this is not the case, that she will not surely die, the reverse.

You will be as God, knowing good and evil. In other words, the serpent is saying the reason that God doesn't want you to touch that tree is because he knows that if you touch it, if you eat it, you will be promoted.

[19 : 04] You will ascend to his level and you will be like God, equal to him. now don't you want that? After all, here you are in space time here, you're confined to this garden, you think you've got enough but in actual fact it could be better than that.

You could be up where God is, you could have his power and his glory, don't you want that? And so she reached out, she listened to him, she made the biggest mistake that anyone has made in the whole history of the universe and she reached out her hand and she took the fruit and she ate it.

Now, why did she eat it? Because she wanted, she believed that equality with God was something to be grasped. It's the same with Adam, he did the same thing, reached out his hand, took the fruit.

Why? Because he believed that equality with God was something to be grasped. Now, when it came to the second person of the Godhead, Paul says, he didn't need to do that because he was there already, he was God already, he was fully, in other words, what Paul is saying, this is just another way of Paul saying that the second person was God, he was fully God.

Make no mistake about the person of Jesus Christ because in the early church, as I guess at other times in the church, there was always that danger of believing less about Jesus than they should have, thinking he was some kind of lesser being or that he only appeared to be God.

[20 : 29] No, says Paul, he truly, absolutely, totally was God in every respect, and these two statements simply tell us what that means, they're simply ways of describing that Jesus was God himself as the second person of the Trinity.

But let's move on. He was in the form of God and did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but verse seven, but this is what happened in that split second in history.

He made himself nothing. Let's move on. taking the form of a servant. Let's keep going. Being born in the likeness of men.

Let's stop at that and just look at these three statements that took place in that space-time moment in time.

First of all, he made himself nothing. If you read the Greek language, if you know anything about it, the word translates simply that, that he emptied himself.

[21 : 35] The authorized version says that he made himself of no reputation. That's not going far enough. He emptied himself, and the reason that I guess that it's not translated in the ESV Bible or the NIV Bible as he emptied himself is because we feel that it just gives the wrong impression.

but that's what it says in the original language. He emptied himself. Now, again, we have to be careful.

What do we mean by he emptied himself? Did he somehow become no longer God? Did he empty himself of his Godness so that as soon as he was conceived in the womb of Mary, he was no longer God?

No, that is not what it means. The very reverse, he continued always to be God, even in the womb of the Virgin Mary, even as a helpless baby lying in the arms of his mother, this is God, needing his nappies changed, needing to be fed and crying when something sore happened to him, when he had a sore stomach or whatever else.

You think of, you know, I'm sure I've told you this before, this is the one aspect of the Bible that always strikes with me, I suppose every aspect should really hit me in a particular way, but I suppose we all have something that grabs us, and this is what grabs me, it just beggars belief, doesn't it, that you go back just a few moments before Jesus' conception, now he's conceived by the Holy Spirit, the miraculous, the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in the womb of the virgin man, now you go back just a few moments and you look into heaven and you see Jesus surrounded by myriads of angels in all his heavenly majesty and glory, something like what Isaiah saw, when he saw the Lord, I saw the Lord high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple and the angels cried holy, holy, holy is the

[23 : 56] Lord of what magnificent, that was as much as he could take, he saw any more than that and he couldn't live, that was as much of the majesty of the glory of God that he could, it's just breathtaking to think, we can't imagine what it's like to see into heaven, but that's what it was five minutes before he was conceived, he's the maker of heaven and earth, we're only beginning to understand the size of the universe and the size just goes beyond our wildest imagination and he's made it, he's spoken it into existence and then that split second occurs when he is conceived, that very same eternal being is now human, he has taken upon himself our nature, five minutes before he was

God and nothing else, now he is still God and now he is a fetus, no, after conception it was like a few split cells, you couldn't see them, they're invisible to the naked eye and he's there, hidden in his mother's womb, when in the secret place my frame, verse 15, Psalm 139, we think of that psalm as referring to ourselves when we were in the secret frame, the secret place in the mother's womb, when in the secret place my frame was made before my birth, you saw my body yet unformed within the depths of earth, that was said about Jesus, us, a tiny little cluster of cells and this is God and he grows within his mother's womb with all the natural processes that took place, there was nothing unnatural by the way about the birth, there was something unnatural about the conception, conceived by the

Holy Spirit, but there on in everything else was normal, the growth, the development, Mary was by the way a normal person, she was not immaculately conceived, she was not taken up to heaven at the end of her days, she was a normal, young girl.

Doesn't it really, doesn't it really, not intrigue you, it's more than that, it's more than fascination, it's a sheer sense of wonder when I think of, of the baby in the arms of his mother Mary and he's crying, he's helpless, he's totally dependent upon her and Joseph for everything that he has and this is God, God, the eternal God and he hasn't, he hasn't, so what does it mean then that he emptied himself, it means simply this, that he set aside his heavenly glory, now I didn't say he set aside his glory, because his glory was seen from time to time in the world, that's why John said we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, and we don't exactly know what he meant by that, he probably meant when he was on the mount of transfiguration, and when the heavenly glory burst through the earthly frame, the earthly form, just for a few moments, but there were other times when the disciples saw his glory as well, like for example, when he changed the water into wine, we're specifically told that they saw his glory and put their trust in him,

I don't want to go down that road, we don't have time, but what I believe it means that he humbled himself, or he made himself nothing, is that, it's just what I've just described, that he took the majesty that he had in heaven, and put it to one side, and became veiled, his majesty became veiled by human, within his human nature, it's not possible for us to understand that, but what it is possible is for us to remember that he put aside his own what belonged to himself and what he had a right to, the people in Philippi were refusing to do that, they were saying, I've got a right to say what I have to say, I've got a right to win this argument, I'm right all the time, I'm right, that person doesn't know what he's talking about, I know more than he does, I'm more able than he is able, and I want to win this conflict because, and inside he's saying to himself, because I just want to win the conflict, well says

[29 : 02] Paul, if Jesus had done that, and he is the one who really did have the right to keep what was his, but he set it aside for the sake of salvation, the salvation of the lost, because he was so consumed by the love that he had for his father, so consumed by the love that he had for a lost world, for God so loved the world that he gave.

If you love, you'll give, loving is giving, loving is emptying yourself, it is seeking the interests of other people, other brothers and sisters in Christ, and seeking the well-being of the kingdom of God, but he didn't even stop there, he went on, he took the form of a servant, he took the likeness of men, now again, third time, be careful, because when Paul talks about Jesus being in the likeness of men, it doesn't mean that he wasn't truly a man, some people believe that, and some people actually use this passage as a reason to believe that he wasn't truly human, he was truly human, in every respect, the Bible tells us, he was like we are, except that we accept that he did not sin, now for the son of God to live, to grow up, and to minister, and to work amongst human beings, meant that he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he was born in a low position, he wasn't born in a palace, he grew up in a family that lived hand to mouth, they were in a rich family, they were an ordinary, common, poor family in Nazareth, he had to work for his earthly father, he had to grow up, and you know, it just struck me recently, how difficult it must have been, how sorrowful it must have been for

Jesus to grow up, what kind of childhood did Jesus have? Well, I'm quite sure that his earthly father and his mother gave him as much as they were able to give it, both in terms of what they could materially, but also what they could emotionally, they were a good family, and yet even there, what must it have been like to go to school and was sinless?

Can you imagine, if you go to school, can you imagine if there was someone in your class who wasn't, who was completely sinless, who never, ever put his foot wrong?

can you imagine the grief that that person would have? He would not be the life and soul of the party at all. You would feel uncomfortable in his presence, wouldn't you?

[32 : 06] You would feel guilty every time you spoke to him because you knew that everything he said was perfect. That means everything that you say is less than perfect, so he would make you feel in some way, not in an unhealthy way, but you would never be allowed to forget that this person, this boy, was different and that was part of his sorrow.

That he was in the middle of a dark and a sinful world as someone who was so as different as it was possible to be in this world.

It's no wonder that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That's why, by the way, if you and I seek to imitate Jesus today and we go out into our classrooms and our places of work, then it's likely that people will talk about us and that we might be singled out and ostracized and marginalized because we are trying to be like him.

He took the form of a servant. He did everything in obedience to his father in heaven who sent him into this world as a sacrifice to save us from our sins.

He humbled himself. He placed himself in the hands of God his father and became humble and obedient even to the point of death itself.

[33 : 33] And that death, we know, was necessary as the payment and the penalty for our sin. His death was as our substitution, but you notice how Paul puts it, even verse 8, he became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And Paul absolutely has to put that in because it wasn't just any death. His death was unique and singular. His death was a one-off, but his death was also, it doesn't, it simply didn't get worse than dying on a cross.

You wouldn't wish death on a cross upon your worst enemy if you lived in those days. It was the worst experience that could ever, ever happen to you. If you were to choose to die, you would choose any other form of death rather than dying on a cross.

Such was the pain and the misery and the agony of the suffering that you would have to suffer. Jesus throughout his whole life knew that that lay ahead of him, not only so, but he knew that on that cross he would suffer the father's wrath, this father turning his face for the first and only time in all of the history of the universe, the father turned his face from the son that he loved eternally with a perfect and a glorious love, turned his face and distanced himself from him.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That was the height or rather the depths, I should say, of his suffering. But there was no other way by which you and I could be rescued from sin and forgiven and cleansed and given a new heart and a new life.

[35 : 31] And if his death had not been accepted by God as that perfect sacrifice for our sin, there would be no verse 9. In fact, there would be no New Testament.

But it doesn't stop there. God highly exalted him. Three days after he died on the cross, he raised him from the dead gloriously as God's stamp of approval, as his confirmation that Jesus' death was indeed the once and for all payment for our sin.

God also exalted him. He lifted him up to be where he was. The Bible tells us that he sits today at the right hand of the Father. But more than that, it tells us here that he bestowed upon him, verse 9, and with this I'm going to finish, he bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

What is that name? What name did the Father give to his son after he had finished the work that God gave him to do? And after he rose from the dead and he ascended to heaven once again, what was that name?

Well, there are all kinds of debates and arguments and you may want to take this home and you may want to discuss this among yourselves. What was the name? But I'm going to say this, I'm just going to suggest, I'm not saying that I am definitely right in this, but I think that there is good and ample evidence in this passage alone for what I'm going to say, and that is that the name that God gave to his son when he sat down at his right hand in heaven was the name Jesus.

[37 : 11] Now you say, well he already had that name, didn't he? Yes. Remember back to when he was given that name, way back before he was born. The angel went to Mary and she said, you're going to have a son who's going to be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and you shall call his name Jesus.

You shall call his name Jesus. That was the name that he had given to him by his mother. And remember what the angel said, for he will save his people from their sins.

The salvation that he came to achieve was a future event. He will save his people from his sins. But now that Jesus has already died on the cross and risen again and is going to be with the Father, he's accomplished it all.

It's finished. His work of salvation is finished. And now it's a past event. He has done it. He's accomplished it. He has earned, if I can use a human term, he has now earned the name Jesus by his work on the cross.

And therefore God turns to him, as it were, I'm not being facetious in any way, I'm not trying to trivialize, but God in a sense turns to him and he places the name upon him as the name that he has accomplished.

[38 : 25] He is the savior. He has saved. And right now, he bears that name in order to save people like you and me from our sin.

And this passage forces us today to ask that question that is asked so many times.

and the question I'm sure you've put to yourself, do you recognize and believe and trust and follow this Jesus? Because it tells us that one day every tongue, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That tells us that a day will come when those who were in the graves maybe for thousands of years, as I said to the children this morning, they will rise from the dead and we will all stand before the judgment seat of Jesus and every single person, whether or not in this world we have praised and worshipped him.

And those who have, for you it will be an experience of great joy and a great wonder. For those who have refused, it will be an experience of great fear and horror and dread.

[39 : 57] The thing today is to make sure that we bow before his name while we still have time in this world, to experience him, to have our eyes open, to follow him, to trust in him as our saviour, as the Jesus who saves from sin.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we ask that you will bless your word to us now and take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. moment. Thank you God.