Part 8: The Glory of God in the Humility of Christ
Philippians 2:1-11

The ethics of humble love flow from the nature and character of God in Christ. God's glory in our crucified Christ is the balm our hearts need to move towards joyful obedience.

I. Glory that Stuns Us

Q – Have you ever had a moment when you were so overwhelmed by beauty that you were stunned into silence? The first glimpse of your Bride as she walks towards you in her wedding dress… the birth of your first child … standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon… watching the sun rise or set over the horizon … snow covered peaks of the Rockies …

There are rare moments in our lives when we witness something that so overwhelms us we are left speechless in silence.

"But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." Habakkuk 2:20

Loved ones we are at the threshold of such a beautiful truth that it should so overwhelm us that we are stunned into silence. The truths expressed by Paul in our Scripture today are truly breathtaking!

I want to offer you help you see beautiful Truth that will satisfy your mind and your heart and melt your will to joyfully humble yourself in the way of Jesus.

II. Context

Paul has turned from speaking about his own situation to their situation as they face external pressures of persecution and internal conflict that has the potential to destroy their witness.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ…stand firm in one Spirit, contending as one community for the faith of the gospel…” Philippians 1:27

“I plead with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel…whose names are written in the book of life.” Philippians 4:2-3

So now, as we move into chapter 2, Paul is going to try to pastor them into the gospel remedy for disunity.

The gospel remedy to disunity is the model of Christ and the grace of humility.

Last week we looked closely at 2:1-4 and the question of what humility is and how do we grow in the grace of humility.

“…then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:2-4

Paul encourages them to be “like-minded” or “have the same mindset.” Think together about the way to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

“Your mindset should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5

The ethics of humble love flow from the nature and character of God in Christ.

Note: I’m adding another sermon to our study of this Scripture.

III. Mind-Satisfying Truth

A. Jesus is Fully God and Fully Man

“Who, being in very nature [*morphe]* God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage [grasped]…”

The Greek *morphe* can mean “form” or “shape,” in terms of external features, but it also expresses what truly characterizes a given reality. Therefore, the NIV “very nature” is a good translation.

This is supported by Paul’s language that Christ was “equal with God” before he became the man Jesus of Nazareth.

It’s also supported by the fact that Paul attributes to Jesus the title of “Lord,” which is an allusion to Isaiah 45:23-24.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Christ, the Eternal Son, was there with the Father before he was a human baby in Bethlehem (John 1:1-2, 14, 18; 17:5, 24).

Jesus made claims to be equal with God. His bodily resurrection from the dead vindicated him and his claims to divinity. We can trust that the divinity of Jesus was a bedrock belief of the early Church and not a later add on to hold onto power later in the 4th Century.

" rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature [*morphe*] of a slave,
being made in human likeness [*homoiomati]*."

Paul uses *morphe* to express Christ's full humanity as well. His very nature was that of a man, who was a slave.

The Greek *homoiomati* translated "likeness" also means that Christ shared the essential identity with humanity. Christ became human in every sense that makes one truly human.

"And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself"

The expression "being found in human appearance as a man" is parallelism to "being made in human likeness." In every way recognizable, he was a man, i.e. he was tired, he ate & drank, he had emotions etc.

From the earliest days in the church, they were professing the mystery that Jesus is the God-Man. This belief would later be formally expressed in the Creeds of the Church.

B. The Scandal of the Cross is Reason to Believe the Gospel

"rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a slave…
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!"

Notice that Paul says, "even death on a cross!" Paul is expressing the scandal of crucifixion in Roman culture. People scoffed at the idea of a crucified god.

Ex. Early graffiti in Rome

"To the humanism of antiquity, the crucified Christ was an embarrassment. Crucifixion… was regarded as the most degrading kind of punishment. Thus, Roman humanism always felt 'the religion of the cross' to be unaesthetic, unrespectable, and perverse. … It was regarded as an offense against good manners to speak of this hideous death for slaves in the presence of respectable people." – Jurgen Moltmann, quoted by Fleming Rutledge*, Crucifixion*

Moreover, humility was not considered a virtue in this culture.

“Humility in Greek and Roman ethics would be a degrading thing. To put yourself down to a level that you were not born to, or that your standing in life did not require you to be in, was disgraceful and debasing. There was no virtue in it at all.” – Edwin Judge, Roman historian

This is the cultural backdrop for Paul’s exclamation that Jesus death was by crucifixion. It’s why he wrote the Romans that he was not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16). It’s why he wrote the Corinthians that the crucifixion of Jesus was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23).

All of this makes the point that no one in the first century – not the Apostles or anyone else - would have used the idea of a crucified god to start a new religion. The scandal of the cross is one of the great apologetics for the Christian faith.

IV. The Heart-Satisfying Glory of God in Christ

“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage [grasped]”

There was a time when the Eternal Son “considered” what “equality with God” meant. The Greek that is translated as “used for his own advantage” or “grasped” refers to a robbery or taking, but it has a synonym in Greek that means “an advantage” (NIV).

He considered what it means to be “Son of God.” He concluded:

- It’s not defending his rights as God or using his rights and privileges for his own advantage;
- It’s not “selfish ambition” = his own ambition at the expense of others;
- It’s the opposite of “vain conceit” = desire for personal prestige and honor or fame.
- It is giving himself away in selfless love!

Paul is saying that Christ’s divinity led him to the conclusion that his divinity was less a matter of status or privilege and more a matter of unselfish giving!

Contrary to the so-called pagan gods, who used their status for their own benefit, the divinity for Christ found its truest expression in him humbling himself to love and serve sinners!

“rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a slave,

he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!”

And all of this, Paul says, is to the glory of God the Father (v.11). The glory of God the Father is revealed in the selfless giving of the Son for rebellious sinners!

The glory of God is expressed in a manger, a towel, and a cross! The humble actions of Jesus Christ are not at odds with his divinity; they are true expressions of his divinity!

This is why Jesus said that true greatness in the Kingdom comes from humble service of others (Mark 10:43-44). This is why humility leads to exaltation (Luke 14:11).

V. Christian Ethics Flow from God's Nature and Character

The ethics of Christianity flow from the nature and character of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The ethics of humble love flow from the nature and character of God in Christ. God's glory in our crucified Christ is the balm our hearts need to move towards joyful obedience.

There are rare moments in our lives when we witness something that so overwhelms us, we are left speechless in silence.

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Discussion Questions:

<u>The Rhythm of Worship</u>

1. How does this passage reveal God to you? Is there anything new?
2. What response does this revelation of God evoke in you?
3. Is there a way you could incorporate this Scripture in your worship this week?

<u>The Rhythm of Community</u>

4. How does this revelation of God in Christ inform the way you see your role in community?
5. What specific attitudes and actions does Paul call us to take?
6. Is there a relationship in your life that you think the Lord is calling you to take a different attitude towards and possibly a different action? If so, how can the group encourage you and pray for you?

<u>The Rhythm of Mission</u>

7. How does this Scripture offer support for the credibility of the gospel?
8. Is there anyone you know that could be helped towards faith by this Scripture?