

Side By Side: Gospel Partnership in Philippians

Humbled and Exalted

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Philippians 2:5-11

Now if you would take your Bibles and turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians. We return to the extraordinary treatment of Christ's person and work we began to consider last Lord's Day in Philippians chapter 2. You will find that on page 980 and we're going to read from verse 5. Before we do, let's bow our heads together as we pray. Let's pray.

O Lord, show us the radiance of Christ's glory and grace that in His light we might see light, that the beauty and excellency and sufficiency of Jesus might melt our hearts, might smite our rebellious consciences, might bring us to repentance, might help us to trust Him, might move us to worship. Do all this we pray as Your Spirit takes up the Word and works by it, driving it home in power. Would you do that please for the honor of Jesus' name, in whose name we now pray? Amen.

Philippians chapter 2 reading from the fifth verse. This is the Word of Almighty God:

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 Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen. The grass withers and the flowers fade but the Word of our God endures forever.

The Hymn of Christ

Last week we began to consider the extraordinary hymn to Christ that the apostle quotes here in verses 5 to 11 of Philippians chapter 2. Today we come back to it to look at it again in a little more detail. Last time if you'll recall we noticed that there is a pattern to follow here. Christ models, doesn't He, extraordinary self-sacrifice, humility, selflessness? There's a pattern to follow; a mindset that we are to have among ourselves that we see in Jesus. There's also a promise to embrace. This mindset, Paul says, is ours in union with Christ. We said when you come to live in a new country your new country changes you. If you've come into union with Christ He is your new environment and in union with Him you are changed. You will begin, by God's grace, to reflect the pattern we see modeled by our Savior here. This is who He will make you by the power of the Holy Spirit. There's a pattern, there's a promise; there's also praise to offer. This is a song, after all, and it climaxes as we'll see in verse 11 with every knee bending and every tongue confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. A pattern, a promise, and praise.

This time we're coming back to the passage and I want you to notice three pairs here. If Jesus is to be the great object of our devotion and delight forever, if He will hold our hearts in rapt attention and adoration, never exhausting our wonder and fueling our praise, surely it will be a delight to our hearts and food to our souls to spend time together this morning once again meditating on the glories of our Savior's person and work. And we're going to do that by looking at these three pairs. First there are two natures; Christ has two natures here. Then there are two states; Christ's two states here. And then there are two Adams here. Two natures, two states, and two Adams.

I. Two Natures

Let's think first of all about Christ's two natures. Verse 6 - He is the one who "though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." When Paul says He was "in the form of God" he uses an important word. The Greek word is "*morphe*." We talk about the morphology of a word - the particular linguistic shape that it takes. In computer graphics you can morph one image into another. "Morphe" means form or shape. But more than just outward appearance, form and shape and nature; Jesus is in form God, shape and nature God. Notice Paul doesn't actually say He's in the form of God as though God were a template to which He has been conformed. Rather he says He is "in form God" - the form that belongs to Him is the form that is God's.

Maybe an illustration will help us if I might put it this way reverently. It's as though we were looking through a backlit window at a silhouette. The silhouette bears the unmistakable contours of deity; it could be no other - recognizably, uniquely God's own silhouette. And then Paul turns the light on and the silhouette is

illuminated and we see the one whose form had been outlined that is identical to the form that is God's that is unmistakably the form of deity. And the lights go on and the one whose form it is we have seen silhouetted. This form of Godhead is the one who comes to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so here's a statement, a clear statement, telling us not that Jesus was like God or appeared to be God but that everything about Him fits the silhouette that belongs uniquely to God. Jesus is the God who is there. There's a complete correspondence between all that God is and all that Jesus Christ is. William Temple said, "In God there is no un-Christlikeness at all." In God there is nothing un-Christlike at all. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father. I and My Father are one."

The Eternal God become Man

And notice what we're told about Jesus here. We're taken back, aren't we, before history, before creation, into the counsels of the three persons of the ever-blessed Trinity in the unity of deity and we're told in those counsels the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, did not consider equality with the Father and with the Spirit something to be grasped at, clung to. The Son, we might say, knew no anxiety regarding His essential unity in the Godhead. In fact Paul shows us the attitude and heart response of God the Son as the Father appoints Him to be our Savior in the eternal covenant of redemption. The Father elected His Son to come and enter the scene of human history with all that we know that will entail for Jesus, all the emotional and psychological and physical and spiritual suffering that will be integral to His work among us as our sin bearer and our Savior. The Father appoints Him to this dreadful task and the Son does not clutch at deity as though afraid that He might somehow lose His essential unity and identity with the Father and the Son but rather, verse 7, "he made himself nothing." Literally, "he emptied himself." How did He empty Himself? Paul says He did it, again very literally, "the form of a slave-taking." He did it "in likeness a man becoming." He doesn't divest Himself of deity but He adds slavery, slavery. He does not subtract divine nature. He adds human nature. The glory of the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God. Think of this - that the glory of the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God should be united in the person of Jesus Christ to flesh and bones with a human soul, a reasonable soul, the mind of a man with all the limitations common to our humanity though without sin. That's what was involved in the first coming of our Savior at Bethlehem. Think about the little babies we saw being set apart unto God in baptism a few moments ago. Think of Mary holding just such a child in her arms, helpless, dependent, vulnerable. The eternal God, who in the same moment that He nurses at His mother's breast, upholds the universe by the Word of His power. It's staggering. Here is the uncreated Lord of heaven and earth and He walks the dusty streets of Jerusalem and into His flesh nails would be pounded as He bears our sin in His humanity, in His person.

The God-Man: Redeemer of God's Elect

The shorter catechism asks the question, "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?" and answers, "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ who, being the eternal Son of God, became man and so was and continues to be both God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever." Both God and Man. At the right hand of God the Father Almighty, presiding over all things, sits a man to whom you can turn, one who, because He took flesh and dwelt among us, has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The God who reigns knows in Jesus Christ, in His humanity, what it is to be tempted, that you in your temptations might find a sympathetic High Priest in Him. He knows what it is to bleed, to weep, to grow weary, to be hungry. He knows what it is to die and to triumph over the grave, that in our every trial and in our every circumstance, as we descend into the valley of the shadow of death, we may know one has preceded us and won the victory. Humanity has an anchor in eternity in the Lord Jesus Christ and all who trust in Him find their home there to be with Him where He is, forever with the Lord. Christ's two natures.

II. Two States

Then look at the passage - there are two states through which our Savior passes. You see them? Verses 5 to 8 - His state of humiliation. Nine to 11 - His state of glorification or exaltation. He enters the state of humiliation; He became a man. More than that He was found in the "morphe" - there's that word again - the form of, not a servant, a "doulos," a slave; in form a slave. Just as He bears all the contours of the silhouette of deity, so He embraces all the contours of slavery for us. He becomes the servant of the Lord, the Redeemer of God's elect by whose stripes we are healed. In verse 8, "being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross." Even the death of the cross - there should be an exclamation point there! We ought all to put our hands over our mouths and sit in stunned amazement. God the eternal Son dies and He dies the shameful, horrific death of a cross. "Even the death of a cross" - nothing more scandalous in the days in which Paul lived than the death of a cross. Any other death, any other death might retain some semblance of dignity and worthiness in the eyes of the world; never crucifixion. In Roman law, remember, only slaves and criminals, the scum we might say, are crucified; it's reserved for the worst. To Jewish eyes especially, a clearer emblem of an accursed and despised soul could not be imagined than the sight of a wretch, emulated and hung upon a cross. "Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree." Every shred, every last shred of dignity was torn from Him, "even the death of a cross." Down comes deity into humanity. Not just into humanity, down comes deity into slavery, into servitude for us. And not just into slavery, down comes deity into death, even the unspeakably shameful death, the accursed death, the death that proclaims, "This one bears the condemnation and wrath both of God and man." Down comes deity into the death of the cross.

Staggering Humiliation

You know what that means? It means that there are no depths deeper than the abyss of the cross. Enduring unimaginable agony of body, the rejection of His own people, the silence of the Father, the full weight of our sin on His shoulders, the white-hot fury of heaven's justice due our rebellion, pressing down on Him, there the Son plumbs the gutter most. He goes all the way down, doesn't He? There may be regions of, realms of, suffering and sorrow and grief and pain in your heart so profound you can barely acknowledge them to yourself as you seek to remain functional day by day - regions of darkness that you cannot articulate, that no one will ever understand, except the Son, except the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no darkness so black that the light of His countenance cannot find you. There are no depths into which you may ever descend that you will not find Him there able to comfort you in your sorrows. He knows; He knows. The state of humiliation.

Glorious Exaltation

But then verses 9 to 11, humiliation gives way to exaltation. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name that at the name, 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." God has highly exalted Him. He was exalted when the stone rolled away and unbelieving guards fell to the ground as though dead. He was exalted when Mary's tears in the garden turned from grief to joy as she hears her Master's greeting and she bends her knee and kisses His feet in adoration. God exalted Him, remember, when doubting Thomas, in the Upper Room seeing the nail marks in His hands and feet and the wound in His side, bowed low his knees, bent and his tongue confessed, "My Lord and my God!" God highly exalted Him when He sent the church in mission to the world declaring to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples." God highly exalted Him when, before the eyes of the disciples, He ascended into glory. And there He sits now, exalted above every other name, enthroned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and there He will remain, reigning. "Of the increase of His government there shall be no end until, in the fulfillment of the promise of the Father." Psalm 110 and verse 1 - "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet," until every knee bows and every tongue confesses.

Picture the scene on the last great day when all of humanity from Adam until that day finally dawned is assembled around the throne of God and of the Lamb - a vast multitude filling the whole limits of our horizon, and a great division is made. There are two who refused to bend the knee in life to Jesus Christ who rebelled and lived as though they were king and God in their own world and would not trust His Gospel of grace. They will hear the sentence, "Depart from me you workers of iniquity," and they will be sentenced to the outer darkness where there

is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And then there will be others who clung to Christ and received His mercy, who believed the Gospel, who in life gladly bent the knee and confessed Him "Lord" and they are bidden enter in the joy of their Lord forever. And before this great division is made, permanent and complete, and the two divisions of humanity are separated forever and sent to their destinies, from the throne comes one name. The Father speaks the name of His Son, Jesus, and from the epicenter of the throne a mighty tidal wave sweeps ever outward until every single knee buckles under the weight of the glory of the name of Jesus Christ. And every tongue, every tongue, acknowledges, whether with joy and gladness in the final victory of our Savior or in utter shame and grief and horror at how wrong we had been all our lives to reject Him. But every tongue will acknowledge His reign and rite and Lordship. He is and He will be highly exalted.

A Lordship that Demands a Response

That means, do you see, that His Lordship demands a response from you. He is Lord; He is your Lord whether you acknowledge it or not, one day you will. My prayer for you is that you will hear with joy as you receive His grace. You see what He has done in His self-humiliation, His sin-bearing, His cross-work to save sinners like you? Why would you refuse Him when He offers love and grace and mercy and cleansing and pardon? Bend you knee here and now and confess with your tongue His Lordship! But if you will not, you will hereafter and His Lordship will be demonstrated as you are cast into the outer darkness forever. Christ is Lord and you must respond to Him and you must bend your knee to Him and you must do it now.

III. Two Adams

Christ's two natures, His two states, and then finally there are two Adams here. You remember the story of the first Adam? He was in form a man but he counted equality with God something to be grasped, didn't he? Didn't he? You remember the temptation of the serpent in the garden? "Take the forbidden fruit, Adam. You will be like God." He broke God's Law, he rebelled, and in his sin we sinned and in his fall we fell. His rebellion brought a curse upon us all. That is the tragic tale of our first father, the first Adam. Here Paul tells us the story of the second Adam - the father of a new humanity, the author of a new creation. Where the first disobeyed the second gladly obeyed, became obedient even to the death of the cross. Where the first in insecurity sought to be what he was not, sought to be like God, the second, in the perfect security of His identity with the Father embraced humanity and bore our sin in His body on the tree. "By his stripes we are healed." Because of Jesus, because He did was Adam, the first Adam could not, for Him, for Jesus, instead of a curse His glory is the name above every name. Instead of death's definite end, for Jesus, is life's unending joy. And for everyone in Him, in the second Adam, His destiny will be ours. His joy will be

ours.

Which Adam?

Paul, when he says in verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus" he's really saying, "Bear the resemblance of the second Adam." Which Adam do you look like? Whose likeness do you bear? Is your mindset the mindset of the first, who plunged us all into sin and misery? Or are you in the second Adam and in Him are you being made like Him? The two great destinies we were speaking of earlier belong to those two groups under the first or under the second Adam. The first obtained the curse and the second one the bliss and glories of heaven. Are you in the first - earth, earthly, facing death and judgment? Or do you bear the likeness of the second - trusting in Jesus who works to save sinners, who has done all to purchase pardon and cleansing and mercy and grace? Will you bend your knee to Him? Will you turn to Him with your griefs and your sorrows knowing He is one who is able to sympathize with you in your weaknesses? Will you flee into the second Adam that He might be your perfect Savior?

Will you pray with me?

Our Father, we praise You that Jesus is God and Man. He has two natures - deity, infinitely worthy of glory and praise; humanity, one to whom we can turn knowing that He understands. There are two states - that He has descended all the way down, into the full panoply of human struggle and suffering and loss and has risen all the way up to heaven's highest heights, there to secure a place for us that where He is we may be also. And we thank You for our second Adam who undoes the curse, who obeys where the first did not, who dies to pay the penalty our first father's sin incurred. O grant to us to bend our knee here and confess Him our Lord. Grant to us the joy of life in union with Him for the glory of His name. Amen.

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