

The Humility of Jesus Christ

Intro

- The Bible, our faith, our namesake, the Spirit’s primary task, the songs of heaven – all point to the centrality of Jesus.

The Jesus question

- The biblical story of the Old Testament is, at essence, an unfolding picture of the coming Messiah. The New Testament marks the ‘unveiling’.

In the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the biggest questions in people’s minds had to be –

1)

2)

The apostolic answer (preeminence & humility)

Col 1.15-20

Why does Christ enjoy the place of absolute preeminence?

Vs 19 **“For** in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him...”

Three steps downward

Phil 2.5-7 “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.

Is 53.2b-3 “... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Phil 2. 8-11 “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.”

Humility in birth: dependent God

“being *born* in the likeness of men...”

- The day of Jesus’ birth signaled a dramatic theater-change - from the theater of glory to the theater of redemption.

“He was, in the words of Frank Houghton’s hymn ‘rich beyond all splendor (2 Cor 8.9). he possessed all the majesty of deity, performed all its functions and enjoyed all its prerogatives. He was adored by his Father and worshipped by the angels. He was invulnerable to pain, frustration and embarrassment. He existed in unclouded serenity. His supremacy was total, his satisfaction complete, his blessedness perfect. Such a condition was not something he had secured by effort. It was the way things were, and had always been; and there was no reason why they should change. But change they did, and they changed because ... Christ did not insist on his rights. He had rights: to be recognized; to be revered; to be served by angels; to be immune from poverty, pain and humiliation.” -Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, p.213-14

- Without humility, Christ would never have come *here*, much less, to *us*.
- **Christ’s mode of presence** in heaven was different than here. He wasn’t cooing and accidentally poking himself in the eye in heaven.

Humility in life: rejected God

Is 53.3b “as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

“They looked, and saw nothing but a man. There was nothing in his appearance to distinguish him from anyone else.... Not a head would have turned as he walked. He looked utterly ordinary.”

-Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, p.216

- We have no frame of reference for how humble it is for God to be regarded as ordinary (Is 53.2b), much less despicable (Is 53.3b).

Luke 4.18

- They rejected Him because of the conspicuous absence of GLORY in *the man*.

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son? He makes a decent table but, save Israel from Roman rule? I doubt it.”

What did it mean for Christ to empty himself, not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped?

“Hugh Martin ... described Christ as ‘not drawing on his divine might and energies, but denying himself their exercise and ... withdrawing from the field of action those prerogatives and powers of Deity, which in the twinkling of an eye might have scattered ten thousand worlds and hells of enemies.’ -Donald MacLeod, The Person of Christ, p.220

- As he reaches toward people, - blessing their children, restocking the wine cellar at their weddings, raising their dead, he continues to experience cynical reviews and is ultimately rejected completely.

“Never once does he in his own interest or in his own defense break beyond the parameters of humanity. He had no place to lay his head; but he never built himself a house. He was thirsty; but he provided himself no drink. He was assaulted by all the powers of hell; but he did not call on his legions of angels. Even when he saw the full cost of *kenosis*, he asked for no rewriting of the script. He bore the sin in his human body, endured the sorrow in his human soul and redeemed the church with his human blood. The power which carried the world, stilled the tempest and raised the dead was never used to make his own conditions of service easier. Neither was the prestige he enjoyed in heaven exploited to relax the rules of engagement.” -Donald MacLeod, The Person of Christ, p.220

The Father didn’t ‘throw him a bone’

- No gimme’s, breaks, or head starts.
- Underneath all of this engagement with a hostile and stiff-necked people was his tenacious motivation to redeem them.

Humility in death: naked God

Phil 2.8 “... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

“In becoming incarnate, God not only accommodates himself to human weakness: he buries his glory under veil after veil so that it is impossible for flesh and blood to recognize him. As he hangs on the cross, bleeding, battered, powerless and forsaken, the last thing he looks like is God. Indeed, he scarcely looks human. He looks like nothing but a hell-bound, hell-deserving derelict.”

-Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, p.218

- Humility kept his mouth shut, especially when taunts came.

▶ Taunting the Greek scholar

Case in point: Who struck You?

- Jesus in becoming man did not simply remove his robe of glory. He became the naked God.

**“He who hung the earth is hanging;
He who fixed the heavens has been fixed;
He who fastened the universe has been fastened to a tree...
O unprecedented murder! Unprecedented crime!
The Sovereign has been made unrecognizable by his naked body,
And is not even allowed a garment to keep him from view.
That is why the lights of heaven turned away,
And the day was darkened.”** -Melito, Bishop of Sardis (2nd century)

The Great Exchange

- Our sin – His righteousness
- Forsaken - Accepted.
- Condemned – Justified
- Bruised - Healed
- Disrobed in shame - Robed in righteousness.

“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling, naked come to Thee for dress... “

Question to contemplate :

Why, when we cling to the cross, do we come away ‘dressed’?

“Every moment in that journey from Bethlehem to Calvary was chosen; and every moment on the cross, from the third to the ninth hour, was chosen. Every day of the Lord’s life he re-enacted the *kenosis*, renewing the decision which had made him nothing and choosing to move further and further into the shame and pain it involved. He loved his own, and when eventually it became clear what that love would cost he went forward, trembling, to be what his people’s sin deserved.”

-Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, p.218-19

- ▶ **Birth:** as the omnipotent God, Jesus chose to become a real baby, absolutely dependent, helpless, and vulnerable.
- ▶ **Life:** as the God who was worshipped by angels and enjoyed perfect fellowship with His Father within the Trinity, Jesus chose to subject himself to the insults of men and the abandonment of his friends.
- ▶ **Death:** as the God who stands in perfect purity and righteousness, clothed with honor and dignity, Jesus chose to be tortured, spit upon and then hung naked and exposed for all to see.

So, what now?

2 Cor 8.9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

- What we do with the portrait of Jesus’ humility is precisely what we do with any other portrait of Jesus from Scripture – we see and we savor. We wonder. We worship.