

**The Christmas Story From Paul's Perspective
Philippians 2:5-11
Part Two**

This week we are continuing our series of Christmas messages based on **Philippians 2:5-11**. We are looking at the Christmas story from Paul's perspective. And we are presently looking at the early phase of the Christmas story in **Philippians 2:5-8**. Let us read these verses **“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men, (8) and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** This is the Christmas story. And hopefully by the time we have finished with our examination of this passage it will be your favorite Christmas passage.

This passage introduces to us the third element of what it means to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. The third element of conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ is having the attitude of Christ. If we claim to be conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ we not only need to be standing firm for the gospel which we have seen in Philippians 1:27-30, and striving for church unity which we have seen in Philippians 2:1-4 but we need to have the same attitude as Christ. What attitude? The humility of mind attitude. The lowliness of mind attitude. The mentality of a slave. Paul in Philippians 2:5-8 shares with us how Christ modeled this attitude as He descended from riches to rags.

We have now begun to explore the steps that Christ took to go from the penthouse to the basement. What was the first step that we looked at last week? The first step in Christ's descent from riches to rags was that He did not grasp His personal riches to tightly (Philippians 2:6). Look at **Philippians 2:6 “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** If we are going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we must be willing to give up our riches. We must be willing to give up those things in our lives which are near and dear to our hearts, whatever those things might be, even if we have a right to those things.

But even though this is true, it is still not enough. This leads us to Christ's second step in His descent from the penthouse to the basement, from riches to rags. The second step in Christ's descent from riches to rags was that He emptied Himself. It is one thing for Christ not to regard equality with God a thing to be grasped and quite another thing for Him to actually act on it. It is one thing for Him to not be holding on to His rights too tightly and quite another thing to relinquish those rights when the circumstances call for it.

Again my hope for these messages is not only that we might have the attitude of Christ, but that we might fall in love with Him all over again.

Let us look at **Philippians 2:6-7 “who, although He existed in the form of God He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (now listen to the next phrase!) (7) but**

emptied Himself.”

The word “emptied” (KENOO) in secular Greek can either mean “to empty, make empty” in its literal sense or “to make of no effect” when it is used in a metaphorical sense. If we take it in a literal sense what might this mean? Let me ask you this question: If I had a large bowl filled with precious stones and I poured out some of those stones, would you say that I emptied the bowl? No! Why? Because the bowl is not empty. It still contains precious stones. Those who view Paul’s phrase “but emptied Himself” in a literal sense invariably adhere to what theologians call the kenotic theory of the incarnation.

What is the kenotic theory of the incarnation? It is the belief that in order for Christ to become man he had to give up his relative attributes. The relative attributes of God are omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence while maintaining His immanent attributes of holiness, love, and truth. They embrace this position because they take the word “emptied” in its literal rather than metaphorical sense. They believe that in order to empty the bowl, that not only must Christ give up His external appearance (SCHEMA) as God, but He must give up His form or essence (MORPHE) as well. They believe that you cannot call the bowl empty unless everything that was in the bowl is gone, unless everything that identified Christ as being equal with God is gone.

If I were to ask you this morning, did Christ, in order to become man, give up His relative attributes? If you said Christ gave up his omniscience, His omnipotence, His omnipresence while maintaining his sinless state, you would be embracing kenotic theory of the incarnation. Hopefully this is not what you believe because this belief exalts the humanity of Christ over the deity of Christ.

It is best to understand “emptied Himself” in its metaphorical sense because it is totally consistent with the way the word is used in the New Testament (Romans 4:14; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:15; 2 Corinthians 9:3; and here). The Greek word (KENOO) appears in four other places in the New Testament and each time it is used in a metaphorical sense.

When Paul says in Philippians 2:7 that Christ “emptied Himself” he is not saying that He emptied Himself of some specific thing in a literal sense such as His relative attributes of deity. Rather he is saying that He has emptied Himself in a metaphorical sense. If we understand “emptied Himself” in a metaphorical sense, Paul is simply saying that Christ emptied Himself of Himself. He chose to give up His rights. He chose not to cling to His rights and privileges though He was exactly equal with God.

Though emptying Himself does not mean that He gave up some specific thing such as His relative attributes; His emptying Himself of Himself produced a dramatic change. What change was brought about when Christ emptied Himself? I have already partially introduced the answer to this question last week in the very broadest terms.

Last week I shared with you that the first step down was a willingness to relinquish His exact equality with God. Not willing to relinquish his “form” (MORPHE) which He could not do but rather His “likeness” (SCHEMA) which He could do. He could not cease being God but He

could cease looking like God. What change was brought about when Christ emptied Himself? As a result of Christ emptying Himself He chose to veil His glory, or in other words He chose to veil His intrinsic worth as God (John 17:4-5). Christ did not pour out all the precious stones from the bowl; He simply covered the bowl of precious stones with a veil so that He could not be seen in His glory. Though as God, Jesus had the right to display His glory, He relinquished that right when He emptied Himself.

We all believe that we have rights. There are people here this weekend who believe that you have the right not to be interfered with or annoyed when you are on the road. If you are going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, then you must acknowledge this weekend that you are willing to give up that right, and this afternoon when you are driving your car you might very well be called upon as a disciple of Christ to empty yourself and actually relinquish the right that you say this morning that you are willing to give up. Whenever you are having tension where you are angry, upset, peeved, invariably it is because you are not emptying yourself. You are not giving up your rights. You are not following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Although Christ was exactly equal with God, He was willing not to grasp equality with God too tightly and when called upon by His Father to relinquish His right to manifest His glory, He emptied Himself. He veiled His glory. Was His glory gone when it was veiled? No! It was still present, but it would only manifest itself when God the Father chose to reveal it at certain very special times during the earthly ministry of Christ to serve very specific purposes. This is why we see Christ praying to the Father to restore His glory as He had known it in the high priestly prayer in **John 17**, because the issue of His glory being manifested was completely in the hands of His Father. This was all a part of Christ's humiliation. It was all a part of His descent.

In what specific ways was Christ's glory veiled? In what specific ways was the intrinsic value of Christ hidden from view as a result of Christ emptying Himself?

Christ's glory was veiled by a changed appearance (Ezekiel 1:26-28; Matthew 17:2). Let us take a brief look at Christ's appearance with His glory unveiled prior to Him emptying Himself. Let me read for you a passage from Ezekiel 1:26-28, **"Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. (27) Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. (28) As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."** This brilliance, this splendor of Christ had always been powerfully put on display in heaven but as a result of Christ emptying himself of this aspect of His glory, the manifestation of His intrinsic value through the display of unimaginable splendor was veiled and He became quite ordinary.

Did God the Father ever lift Christ's veil so that the splendor of Christ's majesty could be personally seen while He was on earth? And the answer is yes. It happened on the Mount of Transfiguration where we are told according to **Matt. 17:2** that "Christ was transfigured before

them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.” Peter later testifying to this event in **1 Peter 1:16**, “**For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we are eyewitnesses of His majesty.**” Christ always possessed this majesty even during his incarnation but it was veiled and was only seen on this one occasion. How else do we see Christ’s glory veiled?

Christ’s glory was veiled by a changed entourage (Luke 2:8-11). In heaven we constantly see God being worshiped by the heavenly hosts. Certainly if Christ’s glory was going to be veiled He would need to leave behind this visible worshipping community. And this is exactly what happened. Certainly for the vast majority of His earthly life He exchanged the visible presence of His heavenly entourage for the visible presence of a rather common entourage.

Did the Father ever lift Christ’s veil so that the worship of Christ by the heavenly host was seen and the answer is yes. Listen to **Luke 2:8-11**, “**And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. (10) And the Lord said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people; (11) for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** And then a few verses later a multitude of the heavenly host appears to the shepherds praising God.

Christ always enjoyed the worship of the heavenly hosts, but after He emptied Himself and His glory was veiled, that worship was rarely seen and only seen when God the Father allowed His glory to be seen.

Christ’s glory was veiled by a change in the way his relative attributes operated. If Christ and others, from the moment of His birth, were fully conscious of attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence it certainly would have set him apart from the people around Him and identified Him as deity. Therefore when Christ veiled His glory He gave up the independent use of His attributes.

Was Christ omniscient? Yes! Was he always omniscient? And the answer would have to be yes. He did not surrender His omniscience when he chose to veil His glory. It was always present and could be expressed at any time depending upon the will of His Father. Jesus always knew much more than He was aware of. And He would become aware of what He knew at the bidding of His Father. This is why it says in **John 18:4** “**He knew all things that were coming upon Him**” and yet in **Matt. 24:36** He could say in light of His second coming “**of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, or the Son, but the Father alone.**”

Was Christ omnipresent? Yes! Was He always omnipresent? And the answer would have to be yes. He did not surrender His omnipresence when He chose to veil His glory. It was always present and could be expressed at any time depending upon the will of His Father. This is why Jesus needed to hear that John the Baptist had been arrested in **Matt. 4:12** before He withdrew in

Galilee, but yet at a different time was able to say to Nathaniel in response to his question of how he knew him, Jesus responds **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”**

Was Christ omnipotent? Yes! Was He always omnipotent? And the answer would have to be yes. He did not surrender His omnipotence when He chose to veil His glory. It was always present and could be expressed at any time depending upon the will of His Father. This is why sometimes we see him exhausted, physically spent from ministry and then at another time feed over 5000 people from 5 loaves and two fishes with 12 baskets of food left over.

Christ emptied himself by not demanding that He be seen as God. This led Him to veil His glory. Christ’s glory was veiled by a changed appearance, a changed entourage, and by a change in the way His relative attributes operated.

CONCLUSION

We must not only be willing to give up our rights but our willingness must be turned into action when the Lord speaks to our hearts through His word. We must be willing to actually empty ourselves.