

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

When you came to Christ what was your expectation? Did you expect that the good times would roll? Did you expect that your wife or husband would suddenly love you in a way that you had always hoped? Did you expect that your overly active children would no longer test your patience? Did you expect that you would begin to get raises at work? Did you expect that your business would suddenly prosper? What was your expectation?

There are many Christians who tell us that we should expect all these things. But I believe that today we will get a much better understanding of what we as the disciples of Christ should expect as we follow Him. This is not my opinion, this is the teaching of Christ Himself. In **Matthew 10:24-25** Jesus said, **“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above His master. (25) It is enough for the disciple to become as His teacher, and the slave, his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of His household!”** Those who have become disciples of Osama Bin Laden should look at His life and they will know what awaits them. The same thing is true of Christ. And this weekend we will have the opportunity to get a glimpse of what that might be for us in this life.

This week we are continuing a 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 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. And what was that attitude? It was the humility of mind attitude. It was the lowliness of mind attitude. It was 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? The first step Christ took in going from riches to rags was He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Let us read **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.”** Though Christ was God and exactly

equal with God both in “form” (MORPHE) and in “appearance” (SCHEMA), He was willing to let His “appearance” be veiled.

He could not change who He was, He could not change His essence. But He could change how He was viewed and He was willing to be viewed differently. This leads us to the second step.

What was the second step? The second step Christ took in going from riches to rags was that Christ emptied (KENOO) Himself. It was not enough simply to be willing. At the appointed time, which had been established in eternity past, Christ acted on His willingness, not to be viewed as God and He emptied Himself. Let us read **Philippians 2:6-7a**, **“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.”** Paul always uses the verb “to empty” (KENOO) in a metaphorical sense. Christ did not empty Himself of deity but rather He emptied Himself of Himself, giving up his right to be seen as God. He chose to veil His glory. In veiling His glory he veiled the visible manifestation of His intrinsic worth as God.

He had the right to be displayed as God but in emptying Himself He gave up that right. The only way for Christ to be displayed as God was totally at the discretion of His Father. Giving up the right to be displayed as God had a tremendous impact on Christ.

It impacted His appearance. Before Christ emptied Himself, those who viewed Him would see Him clothed in the unimaginable splendor of deity. They would see Him clothed in the robes of the Godhead. After Christ emptied Himself, His splendor was veiled and He appeared quite ordinary. Christ emptying Himself impacted His appearance.

It also impacted His entourage. Before Christ emptied Himself, the worship of Christ by the heavenly hosts was visible. After Christ emptied Himself, this outward, visible, manifested worship by the heavenly hosts was veiled. Christ’s emptying Himself impacted His entourage.

It also impacted the independent expression of the attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. When Christ emptied Himself, these attributes could only be displayed as God the father chose to display them. Did the Father choose at various times to display these attributes which had been veiled and the answer is yes. It was not frequent but it was done.

Christ emptying Himself impacted His appearance, His entourage, and the free expression of His attributes of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. This is where we left off last week but we are not nearly finished.

My hope again for these messages is that we would not only be able to follow in the footsteps of Jesus but that we would fall in love with Christ all over again. So again, what were the footsteps of Jesus that led Him from the riches of heaven to His earthly poverty? The first step was that He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. This led to the second step which was Christ emptying Himself, which involved Christ giving up His right to be displayed as God. But emptying Himself involved more than giving something up, it also involved taking

something on.

What did Christ take on when He emptied Himself? When Christ emptied Himself of His right to be displayed as God, He took on the form of a bondservant. Let us read again **Philippians 2:6-7, “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 on the form of a bondservant.”** When Jesus chose to give up His rights, He was choosing the life of a servant or the life of a slave. Let us take a look at the phrase, “the form of a bondservant.”

The word “form” (MORPHE) refers to the essential character of something. What is the essential character of a bondservant? The essential character of a bondservant is that they have no rights. Bondservants do not need a union to fight for them because they have no rights to fight for. When Paul says that Jesus took on the form of a servant he is saying that Jesus so completely stripped Himself of His rights that He took on the essential character of a slave (Mark 10:45).

He did not simply appear to be a servant; He was a servant. He demanded nothing for Himself. What does the Scriptures tell us? **Mark 10:45** says, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** He certainly was not in this world to promote His own interests. He was born in a manger, which was not His. He had no place to lay His head. He borrowed a boat to speak to the multitudes, he borrowed an animal to use in His triumphal entry, and he borrowed the upper room to minister to His disciples the night before His passion. Even the tomb in which He was buried was not His. If He had come into this world in order to be served, this would not have been true but He came into this world to serve. He came into this world to be a slave.

Are we willing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Are we willing, as we empty ourselves of any rights or privileges that we hold near and dear to ourselves, to choose the life of a servant? I would hope that the answer would be yes. But before we glibly say yes, we need to count the cost. And there is a cost.

When Christ emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant, it led Him to do something that is very difficult to understand. Where did it lead Him?

The third step that Christ took in going from riches to rags was that He was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). Let us again read **Philippians 2:6-7, “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 on the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men.”** In order for Christ to serve us, He had to become one of us. Christ emptying Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, resulted in Him becoming human. This is what theologians call the incarnation. And it is the incarnation of God the Son that we celebrate each year at this time. Does this passage actually tell us that God became a man?

I believe that it does. Let us look at the phrase “being made in the likeness of men.” The word “made” is an aorist tense which communicates to us that something happened at a specific point in time. What happened? Jesus, who existed in the form of God and who was exactly equal with

God and had always been exactly equal with God, **“was made in the likeness of men.”**

The word “likeness” is a very interesting word. Paul could have said that He was made a man which in fact was true, but this is not what Paul says, rather he says He was **“made in the likeness of men.”** The word “likeness” (HOMOIOMA) denotes that which is like something, a resemblance. Why did Paul choose this word? Was He trying to say that Jesus was not really a man? And the answer would be, absolutely not! What do the Scriptures tell us? Listen to **Romans 5:12-15**, **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned- (13) for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.”** When Paul says that Jesus was made in the “likeness of men” he is not saying that Jesus was not a man, rather he was saying to us that He was not just a man. He was saying to us that Jesus was 100% God and 100% man. (Romans 5:12-15). Theologians call this the Hypostatic union.

Did Christ, serving us by becoming human, pay a price? And the answer would have to be, yes! Beyond what He gave up when He veiled His glory, when He put on humanity He became vulnerable to human suffering. He put Himself under the curse of Genesis 3. The world was no longer the paradise that it once was.

Did the world in some way try to mitigate the suffering that Christ suffered? Did the world attempt to in some way lessen the suffering that Christ suffered? And the answer would have to be no. They did not see Him as anybody special. Look at the very next phrase at the beginning of **Philippians 2:8**, **“and being found in appearance as a man.”** When people looked at Christ’s appearance (SCHEMA), what they could perceive through their five senses, all they saw was His humanity (Philippians 2:8). This was not just the multitudes, this was even His family.

Are we willing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Are we willing to take on the form of servant? Are we willing to be “servant Dale,” “servant Mark,” servant Paul, etc. Hopefully our answer is yes. But in declaring this to be our intent we need to understand that this will come at a price because as with Christ it will put us in a position to suffer.

I must as a husband be willing to put myself in a position to suffer in my service to my wife if I am going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. I must as a father be willing to put myself in a position to suffer in my service to my children if I am going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. I must as a grandfather be willing to put myself in a position to suffer for my grandchildren if I am going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. I must as a pastor be willing to put myself in a position to suffer for you if I am going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above His master. (25) It is enough for the disciple to become as His teacher.” Those who choose to walk in the footsteps of Christ will become servants and that service at times will be costly.