

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

Let us read Philippians 2:5-8, **“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) 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.”** Paul is telling the Philippian church to have the same attitude as Christ. What was that attitude? It was the humility of mind attitude, the lowliness of mind attitude that was introduced to us in **Philippians 2:3**. Paul, after exhorting the Philippians to have this attitude, goes on to detail for them how Christ manifested this attitude. He does this by telling them the Christmas story from His perspective.

The Christmas story from Paul's perspective is a riches to rags story and in these few verses he details for us a number of steps that Christ took in order to descend from the riches of heaven to the poverty of earth. What were those steps?

The first step was that although Christ existed in the form of God (had the very essence of God) He did not regard equality with God (exact equality with God) a thing to be grasped. He was willing to give up His appearance as God. He was willing to veil His glory. This led to the second step.

The second step was that He emptied Himself. Christ was not only willing to veil His glory; He in fact veiled His glory at the appointed time. He gave up His rights as God and in doing this He took on the form of a bondservant. This led to the third step down from riches to rags. He was made in the likeness of men and was found in appearance as a man. In other words he became a man. But He was not just a man; He was also God. Jesus was 100% God and 100% man.

Certainly I believe that it should be very clear to us by now how much Christ has given up in His descent from heaven to earth, but we still have not yet hit bottom. We still have not seen the full extent of that poverty. This weekend we will. This weekend we will be considering the fourth step that Jesus took in going from riches to rags.

Again I would hope that in examining the descent of Christ, we would not only be better able to walk in His steps but that we would fall in love with Him more deeply than we have ever loved Him before.

We are now looking at the fourth step down. What is the fourth and final step down? The fourth step that Jesus took in going from riches to rags was He became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Let us take a look at **Philippians 2:8**, **“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

Paul begins by saying that Christ “humbled himself.” Does this mean that Christ had not humbled Himself prior to His death? And, of course, the answer would have to be, no! The word “to humble” (TAPEINOO) means to “make low.” Christ made Himself low when He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Christ made Himself low when He emptied Himself, veiling His glory, taking on the form of a bondservant. Christ made Himself low when He was made in the likeness of men and was found in appearance as a man. But all of these very humbling steps that Christ took in order to descend from the riches of heaven to the poverty of earth could not compare to the step He took in humbling Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Christ could not go any further down. He had reached the proverbial bottom. Christ dying on the cross was the ultimate expression of humility because He could not make Himself any lower. The attitude of Christ, the lowliness of mind attitude, the humility of mind attitude which Paul is exhorting us to have in Philippians 2:5, was present all the way through Christ’s earthly life but it culminated in His death.

Not only did Christ humble Himself, but Paul also says that He became obedient. What does he mean by this? Was this the first time that Christ had been obedient to the Father? And the answer is, “of course not! He had been obedient to the Father in all that He had experienced while here on earth. Listen to **John 14:10, “Do you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.”** Christ was not doing His thing, He was doing what the Father wanted Him to do.

From the first day that Christ came into this world until the day of His death, He was continually submitting Himself to the will of the Father. And Christ’s submission to the Father was extraordinary in light of all that He suffered. He never said to His Father, “Father this is just too painful, I won’t do it,” even when it involved His death; even when it involved death on a cross. The verse tells us, **“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

Christ dying on the cross was the most costly act of obedience. In the history of the world there has never been nor ever will be an act of obedience so costly (Heb. 10:5-10). But how costly was it for Christ to humble Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross?

Let us look at the suffering of Christ on the cross first of all from the physical standpoint. Crucifixion was developed by the Persians and perfected by the Romans and from a physical standpoint was the most cruel and painful death ever devised by man.

What happened when a man was crucified? I would like to read for you a description of what this entailed. “The victim was first scourged. The whip was made of leather thongs with bits of metal and splintered bone. After tying the victim’s hands to a pole, two men whipped the victim’s back, buttocks, and legs. Scourging lacerated the skin and muscle tissue, producing quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. The victim was then made to carry the crossbeam to the execution site outside the city. After being publicly humiliated by being stripped naked, he was then held down by soldiers while another soldier hammered 5-7 inch spikes through the hands and wrists. The spikes were placed strategically between bones so that they could support the victim’s weight

and prevent it from being torn loose. Then the cross was hoisted up and slammed into place in a pre-dug hole with such force that it tore the victim's ligaments and seared their nerves with burning agony. The soldiers then nailed the victim's overlapped feet into the upright, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is now crucified.

"As the victim slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating fiery pain shot along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain - the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them with deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen. Hours of relentless pain, cycles of twisting, joint wrenching cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against rough timber. Then another agony begins: a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level-the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues and the tortured lungs are making frantic efforts to gasp in small gulps of air. The victim can now feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues...."

Did Christ feel all of this? And the answer is, absolutely. How do we know this? We know this because of what we have already learned from this passage. Yes, Christ was God. Yes, Christ was 100% God, but He was also 100% man. He was not a phantom or ghost. Though He was God, He had the very same kind of fleshly body that we have, and would feel the very same things that we would feel if we were crucified.

This is amazing. Though Christ was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Hopefully, we now better understand the true nature of His physical pain.

Some of us may die a physically painful death, but none of us I am sure will die a death nearly as painful as Christ's. And neither will we be displayed in our suffering in such a humiliating and shameful way as Christ was displayed when He was crucified. Not only in the sight of men but also in the sight of God, according to **Deut. 21:23**.

I have shared with you that in the history of the world there has never been or ever will be an act of obedience so costly as the obedience of Christ when He submitted Himself to the will of His Father and was crucified. I would hope in light of what I have shared with you that you can, from a physical standpoint, begin to understand what I am saying. But Christ's physical suffering on the cross pales in comparison to what He suffered on a spiritual level (Mark 15:33-34).

Let me ask you this question, “As you reflect on the crucifixion of Christ as it is recorded for us in the gospels, at what point do we see Christ visibly expressing anguish?” Was it when He was scourged, was it when He was nailed to the cross, was it when He was spit upon, taunted, and reviled? No! But there was a time when He expressed anguish from the cross. And when was that? Let me read for you **Mark 15:33-34**, “**And when the sixth hour had come, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. (34) And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi. Lama Sabachthani?” which is translated “My God, My God, Why hast Thou Forsaken Me.”** How strange! For us if we had to endure crucifixion I would think that we would find it very difficult to get beyond our physical pain. But here was Christ apparently not nearly as concerned about what was happening with His body as much as what was happening with His relationship with His Father.

What was happening? In what sense did the Father forsake the Son? The answer would have to be, we do not really know. But there is no question that during Christ’s crucifixion He not only felt forsaken but was forsaken. Though we will not ever know I believe, it is my opinion that Christ in a sense during His crucifixion experienced in His humanness what we would define as spiritual death, which is the separation of the human spirit from God.

In Himself, as God the Son, Jesus was still well-pleasing to His Father, in voluntarily laying down his life, and certainly God could not forsake God, but as our human substitute He experienced a level of separation from God that He had never experienced prior to or subsequent to His incarnation which all was a result of Him being our substitute.

What do I mean when I say that Christ was our substitute? Christ during His crucifixion willingly took upon Himself our sin and suffered the judgment that was rightfully ours (Isaiah 53:5-6). Let me read for you **Is. 53:5-6**, “**But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. (6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.**” It was our sin being placed on Him that resulted in Him feeling and being separated from God; which led Him to cry out “**My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me.**” For us to listen to the details of what Christ suffered physically can be difficult to hear. But it was not the physical pain that concerned Christ nearly as much as His spiritual pain He suffered when being crucified.

There has never been or ever will be a more costly act of obedience than when Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. And I do not believe that we will ever be able to fully understand or appreciate that cost. It is simply too far beyond us.

CONCLUSION

We have been examining the Christmas story from Paul’s perspective. And we have begun to look first of all at the early phase of the Christmas story which describes how Christ descended from the riches of heaven to the poverty of the earth.

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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. The second step Christ took in going from riches to rags was that Christ emptied Himself, giving up His rights taking on the form of a bondservant. The third step that Christ took in going from riches to rags was He was made in the likeness of men and was found in appearance as a man. And finally as the infinite God-Man, Christ took His fourth and final step down when He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He could go no lower. He gave up everything that He could give up.

Why did He do this? Remember the verse that I shared with you at the beginning of this series? **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, that you through His poverty might become rich.**” Christ humbled Himself in this way in order to serve us.

Will everyone become rich? No! Only those that choose to put their faith in Jesus. Only those who choose to put their faith in the person and work of Christ alone for their salvation. What does **Eph. 2:8-9** say? “**For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, (9) it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast.**” Hopefully this is exactly what you have done. If it is something that you haven’t done, I would encourage you to do this at this very moment. The benefit of Christ paying our debt will be applied to our account when we want to be set free from our sin and are willing to trust in Christ alone for our salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).

Hopefully every person in this room this weekend, because of Christ, can count themselves rich. Because of the Christmas story from Paul’s perspective. Because Christ, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.