

**The Christmas Story from Paul's Perspective**  
**Philippians 2:5-8**  
**Part One**

Within a matter of just a few days most of us here will be gathering together with family and friends to celebrate the birth of Christ. This obviously for most of us will be a time of celebration. But hopefully, it would not simply be a time of celebration, but also a time of reflection. And it is with that end in mind that I, this morning, will begin a series of messages based on my very favorite Christmas passage.

And you might ask, well, what passage is that? We will not find it in the Gospel of Matthew, or the Gospel of Mark, or the Gospel of Luke, or the Gospel of John. Rather my very favorite Christmas passage is actually found in **Philippians 2:5-8**.

I would like to now read this passage for you and this is what it says. **“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 bond-servant, 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.”**

Notice that this section of verses began with a challenge. And what was that challenge? Paul challenged the Church at Philippi in **Philippians 2:5** to **“have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”** So what was that specific attitude? Based on **Philippians 2:1-4** the specific attitude that Paul challenged the church at Philippi to have was the attitude of a servant. This is what Paul meant when he challenged the Church at Philippi to **“have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”** This was the challenge that he put before them in **Philippians 2:5**.

But Paul was not satisfied with simply challenging the church at Philippi to have the same attitude in themselves, which was also in Christ Jesus. He went on to describe that attitude as it had been manifested in Christ.

And this led Paul to provide us his version of the Christmas story in **Philippians 2:6-8**; or in other words, this is what led Paul to record for us

the descent of Christ from what He knew in heaven to what He came to know and experience on earth in His incarnation. This descent is not a rag to riches story but rather riches to rag story.

And this is the story that I would like, over the next several weeks, to highlight for you as we trace the steps Christ took as He very methodically and with purpose descended from what He knew in heaven to what He came to know on earth.

So what steps did Christ have to take in order to descend from riches to rags? This morning we will consider only the very first step.

The first step in Christ's descent from riches to rags was His willingness to give up His rights (Philippians 2:6).

The concept of rights should not be unfamiliar to us as Americans. We, under the protection of the constitution of the United States of America, enjoy many rights or entitlements that are defensible in our courts: "inalienable rights", "civil rights," "human rights," etc. The protection of our rights as Americans is very important to us and rightfully so.

But we are not the only ones that have rights. Christ, the very one whose birth we are now about to celebrate, also had rights. But as we will see this morning, even though He had rights, and even though those rights were important to Him, He was willing to give up those rights. And this willingness to give up those rights was the first step in His descent from riches to rags.

So where do we see this willingness on the part of Christ to give up His rights? Let me read for you **Philippians 2:6**. **"Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."** Did Christ, based on this verse, have rights? Yes! But Christ, also based on this verse, was willing to give up those rights and this is what we will see this morning. Let us now look more closely at this verse and see if this was not so.

How does this verse begin? It begins with these words, **"Who, although He existed in the form of God."** What does Paul mean by the word "form?" The word "form" (MORPHE) refers to the essential character of something.

We perhaps can understand this word better if we compare it to another Greek word, SCHEMA, translated “likeness” in **Philippians 2:7**. What is the distinction between these two words? “Form” (MORPHE) is the essential character of something. “Likeness” (SCHEMA) is the outward form that it takes. MORPHE never changes but the SCHEMA can.

I am a male. I have possessed maleness since I was conceived and I will possess maleness until I die. This is my MORPHE. But my maleness or my MORPHE has many SCHEMA. I was an embryo, a fetus, a baby, a toddler, a child, a youth, a young man, and an adult and now I am a senior. Though my appearance or my SCHEMA has been continually changing I have always been a male, which is in fact my MORPHE.

So what again based on **Philippians 2:6** was Christ’s form or MORPHE? Christ’s form or MORPHE, His essential character, was that of deity. How do we know this? We know this because the Apostle Paul stated this as a fact at the very beginning of **Philippians 2:6** when he told His readers that Christ had existed in the form or MORPHE of God.

Therefore, when Paul speaks of Christ as having existed in the form (MORPHE) of God, he was in essence declaring Him prior to His incarnation to be God.

So if Christ’s form or MORPHE was in fact that of deity prior to His incarnation, how likely would His form or MORPHE remain that of deity after His incarnation? Based on our word study, contrasting the words “MORPHE” and “SCHEMA,” we would have to conclude that it would be an absolute certainty that His “form” or “MORPHE” would not in fact change.

And this absolute certainty is reinforced when we take a closer look at the word “existed.” So how would this word as Paul used it, in speaking of His form or His MORPHE in the very first phrase of **Philippians 2:6**, reinforce the certainty that His form or MORPHE would not change even after His incarnation?

The word “existed” is a present participle followed by aorist participles implying that Christ existed in the form of God in the past and is still existing in the form of God in the present.

So what can we conclude? We can conclude this. Paul in this initial phrase in **Philippians 2:6**, when He told the church at Philippi that Christ had existed in the form of God, was leaving no doubt as to how he viewed Christ. And how did he view Him? He viewed Him as God, who was and is and always will be God.

Any so-called Christian religion that does not teach this is not Christian. How in the world could any so-called Christian religion be considered Christian when they have in fact rejected Christ as He has been revealed in the Scriptures, in passages such as in **Philippians 2:6**, which so clearly reveal Him as such?

So now let me ask you a question. If we as American citizens have certain rights guaranteed to us by the constitution, what about Christ? Do we believe that Christ as God also has certain rights? And of course the answer to this question would have to be yes!

Christ as God not only had the right to be loved, honored, cherished, worshipped, served and obeyed, but He also had the right to equality (Philippians 2:6).

So what do I mean by this? What do I mean when I say that Christ had the right to equality? The right to equality simply means that Christ in the form (MORPHE) of God had every right as God to be equal with every other member of the godhead in terms of how His deity was displayed (SCHEMA). This is what I mean.

Prior to Christ's incarnation His deity was on full display just as every other member of the Godhead's deity was on display. And did He as a member of the Godhead have a right for His deity to be on display? Absolutely!

But Christ did not insist upon this right; or in other words, He did not hold it tightly within His grasp. He was willing to give it up in His service to others. How do we know this? Let us once again go back to **Philippians 2:6** but this time we will read the entire verse. So what does it say? **“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”**

Christ, prior to His incarnation, had the right to equality with God but He chose not to grasp it. Isn't this what the verse says. This is exactly what the verse says. And why was this?

The reason why Christ did not demand His right to equality was because it was a necessary first step in His descent from the riches He enjoyed in heaven to the rags He experienced on earth. He had to be willing to give up His right to equality otherwise He would never have been able to have His glory veiled in human flesh. And if He was unwilling to have His glory veiled in human flesh then we could never have been saved. But praise God! He was willing.

And this of course is something that we need to take to heart. And why is this? If we are not genuinely willing to give up our rights, even as Christ was genuinely willing to give up His rights in serving others, we will never be able to follow in His footsteps. And this certainly would be a terrible thing.

So what are some of these rights that we might need to be willing to give up in our pursuit of serving others.

Husbands needs to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their wives if the giving up of their rights as husbands would in some way serve their wives.

Wives need to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their husbands if the giving up of their rights as wives would in some way serve their husbands.

Parents need to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their children if the giving up of their rights as parents would in some way serve their children.

Children need to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their parents if the giving up of their rights as children would in some way serve their parents.

Employers need to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their employees if the giving up of their rights as employers would in some way serve their employees.

Employees need to be willing to give up their rights on behalf of their employers if the giving up of their rights as employees would in some way serve their employers. Could this willingness on our part actually cost us something? Absolutely!

Christ's willingness to give up His right to equality eventually cost Him the glory that He enjoyed with His Father before the world was (John 17:4-5). I am sure you remember the words of Christ in His high priestly prayer. Let me read for you once again the words of Christ in **John 17:1-5**. **“These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, (2) even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. (3) And this is eternal life that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. (4) I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. (5) And now glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.’”**

Did the willingness of Christ to give up His right to equality cost Him something? Absolutely, it cost Him the glory that He enjoyed with His Father before the world was. And if we in fact are willing to follow in His footsteps and are willing to give up our rights it may very easily cost us something as well.

So be warned if you are willing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and are willing to give up your rights even as He was willing to give up His rights it will cost you something.

Let me ask you this question. When you go home this afternoon do you have a right to be treated with kindness? Of course you have the right to be treated with kindness. You have the right to be treated with kindness because this is how God would want you to be treated. But even though you and I have the right to be treated with kindness it does not mean that this will in fact happen. In fact, quite the opposite might happen.

And if this in fact happens, that we are not actually treated with kindness the very thing that we have the right to expect, how will we respond? Will we insist that those within our home respect us even while we trample on their

right to receive kindness from us or will we patiently endure the insults, the slights and the misdeeds while still seeking to care for them, to be kind to them, to do for them what they failed to do for us.

Hopefully it will be the latter. Will this be easy? Of course not! It is not easy for me and it will not be easy for you. But let us always keep before us the example of Christ and take inspiration from Him.

So is this something you want to do? If it is, then I would encourage to consider various people in your life who may presently failing to respect your God given right to be treated kindly, compassionately, lovingly and so forth and determine within yourself before God that you will not in insisting on your rights respond in kind.

May God give us the grace to be willing to give up our rights in seeking to serve others even as Christ Himself, in His service to others, was willing to give up His rights.