

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

This week we will be continuing to look at the Christmas story from the standpoint of Paul based on **Philippians 2:5-8**. Let me read these verses for you. **“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.”** Why have I represented this passage as a Christmas passage? I have represented this passage as a Christmas passage not because it details for us the observable facts surrounding Christ's birth, such as we find in the gospels, but rather because it describes for us certain unobservable facts surrounding His birth that give us insight into Christ Himself.

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.”** In other words, he challenged them, like Christ, to have a heart of a servant.

But Paul was not satisfied with simply challenging the church at Philippi to have, like Christ, the heart of a servant, but he went on to describe how Christ manifested that heart as He very methodically and with purpose descended from the riches He knew in heaven to the rags He came to know on earth. And this of course led us to the question that we began to answer two weeks ago.

So what was that question? This was the question: What steps did Christ have to take in order to descend from riches to rags? And what was the first step that we highlighted two weeks ago?

The first step in Christ's descent from riches to rags was His willingness to give up His rights (Philippians 2:6). So where did we see this willingness?

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.”**

Notice the word “form.” It is the Greek word “MORPHE,” which describes the essential character of something.

So what, according to Paul, was the essential character of Christ or His “MORPHE”. He tells us. His “form” or “MORPHE” was that of “of God” or “deity.” And because His essential character was that “of God” or “deity” He had certain rights.

And one of those rights was “the right of equality.” Let me once again read **Philippians 2:6** but this time I will read the entire verse. What does it say? This is what it says, **“Who, although He [referring to Christ] existed in the form [or the MORPHE] of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** And of course, when it talks about “equality,” it is talking about “an exact equality.”

Therefore, though Christ had the right as God to enjoy an “exact equality” with all the other members of the Godhead, He in His service to others was willing to give up this right. This is certainly what is implied when the verse goes to say that Christ did not regard equality with God or **“exact equality [with God] a thing to be grasped.”**

Hopefully this is a message that we, as the disciples of Christ, have taken to heart. And why is this so important? It is important because if we never come to the point where we are personally willing, like Christ, to give up our rights in service to others, we will certainly fail to do so when push comes to shove.

But we are not yet done. This morning we will now consider the second step that Christ took in His descent from the riches that He knew in heaven to the rags He came to know on earth? So what was this second step?

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. But this is exactly what Christ did.

Let us look at **Philippians 2:6** once again but this time I will also read the first part of **Philippians 2:7**. So what does it say? This is what it says. **“Who, although He existed in the form of God, 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.

So how would it be best to understand the use of the term “emptied” (KENOO) here in **Philippians 2:6**? It is best to understand “emptied Himself” in its metaphorical sense since it is consistent with the way the word is used each time it appears in the New Testament (Romans 4:14; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:15; 2 Corinthians 9:3).

So what does this mean for us practically when it comes to understanding what Paul meant? This is what it means: When Paul said that Christ “emptied Himself,” he meant that Christ emptied Himself of Himself by not insisting upon His right to exact equality with God, thus rendering Himself of no effect. Or we could say it this way: When Paul said that Christ emptied Himself,” he in effect meant that Christ died to Himself.

I often talk to people who say they want to live a Christ-centered life or they want a Christ-centered marriage. But so often they do not really understand what they are asking for. A Christ centered-life or a Christ-centered marriage is extremely costly.

A Christ-centered life is a life willingly committed to serving others without any regard for our own personal rights. A Christ-centered life requires that we empty ourselves of ourselves thus rendering ourselves of no effect. Or in other words, a Christ-centered life requires that we in our quest to follow in the footsteps of Jesus die to ourselves.

From the standpoint of the world this kind of approach to life might seem kind of stupid. But the truth is that this is truly the only way this life can be approached if we are going to find life and life abundant.

Let me read for you **Matthew 10:39**. **“He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”** And this is the truth.

Do we want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Then let us be willing to give up our rights, not just a few of our rights, but all of them so that when push comes to shove we might like Christ empty ourselves of ourselves.

And of course, if this is something that we are willing to do, the whole of our lives will be changed, and based on the Word of God our lives will be changed for the better. And again what is our inspiration for doing this? Our inspiration for doing this is Christ's example who although He existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself.

And where did this emptying of Himself lead Christ? Christ's emptying of Himself initially led Christ to leave the glory of heaven in order to take up residence on earth (Philippians 2:7). In order to do this, two things were required of Him.

First of all, Christ's change of address from the throne room of heaven to the manger in Bethlehem required Him to veil His majesty. So how exactly was His majesty veiled?

First of all, His majesty was veiled in respect to His appearance (Isaiah 53:1-2). Let me read for you **Isaiah 53:1-2**. And what do these verses say? This is what they say. **“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.”** Who are these verses speaking of? They are speaking of the incarnate Son of God or Christ. And what do these verses make clear to us? These verses make very clear to us that the majesty that Christ enjoyed in heaven was not longer visible when He took up residence on earth. In other words, no one looked at Christ's appearance and said, “Now, truly this is God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But now let me ask you this question. Did Christ's 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 **Matthew 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** told his readers, **“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 majesty veiled?

His majesty was veiled in respect to His changed entourage (Luke 2:8-11). In heaven we constantly see God being worshiped by the heavenly hosts. Certainly if Christ’s majesty was going to be veiled it would need to leave behind His 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 a rather common entourage of rather ordinary people.

But now let me ask you this question. Did Christ’s Father ever lift Christ’s veil so that the worship of Christ by the heavenly host could be 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 angel 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 Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”** And then a few verses later a multitude of the heavenly host appear to the shepherds and are praising God.

Christ always enjoyed the visible worship of the heavenly hosts prior to His incarnation but after He emptied Himself and His majesty was veiled that worship was rarely seen and only seen when His Father permitted it. But there is still more. There is still another way the majesty of Christ was veiled.

Christ’s majesty was veiled in respect to how His relative attributes would be displayed. If Christ and others from the moment of His birth were fully conscious of His relative attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, it certainly would have set Him apart and identified Him as

deity therefore it necessitated a change. So what exactly was this? The change that occurred when Christ's majesty was veiled was that His attributes would no longer be fully put on display.

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**, “**Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him**” and yet in **Matthew 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, nor 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 **Matthew 4:12** before He withdrew in Galilee, but yet at a different time was able to say to Nathaniel in John 1:48 in response to his question about how He knew him, Jesus responded, “**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 displayed as God. This led Him to veil His majesty. Christ's majesty was veiled by a changed appearance, a changed entourage, and by a change in the way His relative attributes were displayed.

May God give us the grace to empty ourselves of ourselves so that we in our quest to serve others might follow in the footsteps of Christ.