

The Servant Who Is Lord

Introduction (Text: Philippians 2:5-11)

A. **For many people, winning is everything—even if you win by intimidation—and success is measured by achievement and position.** The question seems to be “Can I get what I want out of life, and how soon?”

B. **James and John, the brother disciples of Jesus, were bitten by the bug of winning—of being number one—so they asked Jesus for the privilege of sitting at His right and left hand in His coming kingdom.**

- **They had not only missed the central facet of Jesus’ teaching, they were totally unaware of the nature of the kingdom Jesus established.** But Jesus, unwilling to stoop to intimidating or humiliating others for any reason, did not rebuke them in the presence of their friends.
- He simply asked a question to force further thought, **“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”**

C. **James and John still missed it.** Without hesitation they responded, **“We can.”** But Jesus knew they did not know, so He pressed His teaching about the nature of His kingdom, concluding, **“whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44, RSV).** And to disallow any mistake of what He was talking about, He added, **“For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45).**

D. Had Paul heard that story? **In verses 3-4, he laid the claim upon the Christians at Philippi not to be served but to serve. Now in verses 5-11, he shows clearly what that means.** He gives us one of the most beautiful pictures in all Scripture of the nature and character of Christ, and one of the most demanding challenges to those who would be His followers.

#1: The Lord as Servant

A. **This section of scripture is packed with meaning and is a hinge passage of Paul, affirming the pre-existence of Christ and describing the nature of the Incarnation.** Verses 6-7 graphically state the case.

- **I am almost breathless before such a passage and tremble at the thought of commenting on it—that I may say too little or too much and detract from the majestic truth that is here.**
- There are intriguing theological nuances, aspects of interpretation that could occupy pages—especially questions about what it means to be in the form of God, or having God’s nature, and possessing equality with God.

B. **H. R. Mackintosh** has summarized the conclusion to which most scholars would come in commenting on the passage, and these questions about Christ “being divine by nature”: **“It is asserted—and on the assertion hinges the thrilling moral appeal of this passage—that before He came as a man, Christ’s life was Divine in quality, not merely like God but participant in His essential attributes.”**

- Not only here, but numerous other passages, Paul embraced with certainty the pre-incarnate as well as the incarnate life of Christ being of divine nature. In this passage though, he grabs our attention with a puzzling suggestion: Christ **“did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.”** We need to put this verse in different words to understand the meaning.
- **Caird suggests** the clearest restatement of it: **“Christ, being in the form of God, was equal with God, but did not count this a prize to be clutched.”** The idea is so mountainous that we may never scale it, but that is all right. To be in awe, even puzzled awe, in contemplating God’s coming to us in Jesus Christ is a proper Christian response. **We can ascend to great heights of the mountainous truth, however, by comparing Christ and Adam.**
- Paul did this often (**1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49; Rom. 5:12-14**). Adam the man grasped at equality with God; Christ renounced equality with God to become man.

C. Thus the phrase in **verse 7** is crucial: Christ **“made himself nothing.”** The **KJV** translation, **“made himself of no reputation”** is inadequate to capture the expansive meaning and power of what Christ did.

D. **The Greek word, *huparchein*, translated “being” in our text, is not the common Greek word for “being.” It describes what a person is in essence—that which cannot be changed; the innate, unchangeable characteristics of a person.**

- **Through chances, changes, and all circumstances this being—essence (*huparchein*) remain the same.** Paul, I think, would not regard as possible the surrender by Christ of His divine nature.
- **Paul’s own experience of the risen Lord was such a vital factor in the formation of his thought that, as He who had come to mean so much to him surely did not begin to exist when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, so the nature of this one did not change in essence, when He became man.**
- **He did empty Himself, though, of the glories of heaven, of the prerogatives of being divine; He emptied Himself of rank, privilege, and rights. *The Lord became a servant.*** Doesn’t this harmonize with Jesus’ prayer in **John 17:4-5?**

E. More clearly than any place else in Scripture, the shape of the incarnation is described here: humiliation, weakness, and obedience. **“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross”** (v. 8). Was Paul thinking of the Suffering Servant in **Isaiah 53:12**?

#2: *The Mind of Christ in Us*

A. **In many ways verses 5-11 make up the greatest and most moving passage that Paul ever wrote about Jesus—certainly the most descriptive.** But not only is this a vivid description of who Jesus is, it is a call to us. **Thomas A. Langford** has expressed this as clearly and as succinctly as is possible:

“In Jesus we find embodied the self-giving of God to persons and the self-giving of a person to other persons. Jesus is the Lord who is a servant, and Jesus is the servant who is Lord. As the Lord who is servant, Jesus identifies with human life so as to establish a redemptive relationship. As servant who is Lord, Jesus calls us to acknowledge his lordship through our servanthood. The grace of God in Jesus Christ calls us to a graciousness which is a self-abandonment to the love of God and the love of the neighbor.”

B. Paul introduced this great theological statement of who Jesus is to support his call to the Philippians to look out not only for their own interests, but also for the interests of others.

- His toughest word was in **verse 3: “Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,...”** In what stark contradiction that is to the rampant self-interest being expressed by most.
- **It is scathingly clear: the call of Christ is that our ultimate concern must be for others, and that concern leaves no room for indulgent self-concern. The call is to have the mind of Christ who emptied Himself, and became a servant.**

C. **Not many of us want to be servants, do we? And those who have the notion that Christianity centers in service need to realize that there is a vast difference between the kind of serving most of us do and the willful decision to become a servant.**

- **Most of us serve by choosing when and whom and how we will serve. We stay in charge. Jesus calls for something else. He calls us to be servants, and when we make this choice, we give up the right to be in charge.**
- **Then, amazingly, we experience great freedom. We become available and vulnerable. We lose our fear of being stepped on, manipulated, taken advantage of. Aren't those our fears?** What joy comes, what energizing of life, when we act out of the desire to be a servant, rather than

the pride of choosing to serve now and then, when and where and whom we wish.

D. **Carl Jung told of a man who asked a rabbi, “How come in the olden days God would show Himself to people, but today nobody ever sees God?” The rabbi said, “Because nowadays nobody can bow low enough.” Let this mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus, who bowed low, emptied Himself, and became a servant—then we will see and know and share with God!**

#3: *The Servanthood Exalted*

- A. **It is the paradox of the Christian gospel that the last become first, the humble are exalted, the servant becomes Lord, the poor become rich.** The **Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11)** are Jesus’ catalog of the way things are turned upside-down, inside-out in the new economy of God’s kingdom.
- B. **So Jesus’ enunciation of the humble being exalted (Matthew 23:12) was gloriously fulfilled in His own case. He ascended after the Resurrection and now sits at God’s right hand: (verse 9-11).**