

## Study 06

### *“Humble Messiah, Part 1”*

Philippians 2:5-8



### **Dwelling in the Word**

1. Prayerfully read through Philippians 2:5-11 (ideally in a few different translations) and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

### **Beginning the Conversation**

1. Open your time discussing what you think it means to be a Christ follower. How do you think Paul understands the relationship between believing things about Jesus and living your life like Jesus?
2. NT Wright says, “The real theological emphasis of the hymn... is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God.” In what ways does Jesus show us what God is like? Discuss as a group.

### **Digging Deeper**

1. While we have tended to define “humility” exclusively as an internal attitude about ourselves in relation to God. Paul, in contrast, defines it externally as distinctive conduct towards others, specifically by having a disposition that puts the needs and concerns of others over our own. How does this understanding of humility challenge your view?
2. Pretend for a moment that you have forgotten everything you know about Jesus. What would we know about Christ if all we had to go on was Philippians 2:6-8? Make a list of attributes and character qualities of Jesus solely from this passage.
3. To pinpoint Jesus’s own “considered disposition” or posture the sermon focused on the three actions taken by Jesus Christ: 1) “Did not regard equality...” (2:6); 2) “He emptied himself...” (2:7); and 3) “He humbled himself...” (2:8). What do each of these actions reveal about Jesus’ disposition?
4. In 2:6 Paul says that Jesus “did not consider equality with God as a status to be exploited for his own advantage....” How do you think of your own status? Is status important to you? While we may have rights and privileges associated with our status, how do you think walking like Jesus in humility would change how we think of ourselves and treat others?
5. As humanity was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), so in the incarnation, Christ is made in “the likeness of human beings” (2:7). How does Jesus repeat, replicate, and reverse Adam’s story of the fall? (See Romans 5)

### **Living it Out**

1. In describing what humility looks like, Paul pointed to Jesus. With this in mind, reflect on the following questions:
  - a. How am I promoting unity in the church through humility?
  - b. How am I serving my fellow Christ-followers?
  - c. Of what advantage am I letting go in order to serve?
  - d. Is my way the way of power or of humble sacrifice?
2. There is a tension between the call to be like Jesus in his humble disposition towards others, and our boundaries to protect ourselves and the actions we take on behalf of others. How do you balance caring for yourself in healthy ways with also living a life of service to others?



## Humble Messiah, Part I

Philippians 2:5-8

October 13, 2024  
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Greenfield Community Church

## Humble Messiah

- A. Appeal to steadfastness and unity: "Conduct yourselves as worthy citizens of the gospel" (1:27-30).
- B. Appeal to unity based on their common life in Christ: "make my joy complete by being like-minded" (2:1-4).
- C. Appeal to the example of Jesus: "the same considered disposition as Jesus the Messiah" (2:5-11).
- B. Application of appeal based on their common life: "continue to work out your salvation... for God is at work in you" (2:12-13).
- A. Application of appeal based in the case of opposition: "Do everything without grumbling" (2:14-16).

## Humble Messiah

Philippians 2:5-11 is Paul's "master story" of Jesus, a poetic narrative of the gospel in miniature.

- Literary masterpiece
- Theologically deep
- Practically profound

## Humble Messiah

"Paul outlined the humiliation and exaltation of Christ in order to encourage the Philippians to adopt in their mutual relations the same attitude toward power and social status that Jesus exhibited during the incarnation" (Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church*, 140).

## Humble Messiah

The passage naturally divides into two parts:

The self-humiliation of  
the Messiah (2:5-8)

The exaltation of the  
Messiah (2:9-11)

In your relationships with one another, have the same considered disposition as Jesus the Messiah:

Who, *precisely because* he was in the form of God

*He did not consider* equality with God as a status to be exploited for his own advantage,

But *he emptied himself*, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of human beings; and, looking like a normal human,

*He humbled himself* by becoming obedient all the way to death – even death on a cross!

## The Messiah's "Downward Mobility"

Christ "in the form of God"      Absolutely highest status

PREEXISTENCE  
(1) "Did not regard equality..." (2:6).

INCARNATION  
(2) "He emptied himself..." (2:7).

CRUCIFIXION  
(3) "He humbled himself..." (2:8).

Paul's Point: We are to imitate the same humble disposition of Jesus!

Absolutely lowest status

## A Humble Disposition

"In your relationships with one another, have the same *considered disposition* as Jesus the Messiah" (2:5).

- Paul is encouraging them to cultivate the same disposition (φρονεω *phroneo*) that Jesus had.
- Jesus provides a tangible example of the posture of humility that 2:1-4 encourages.

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## The Preexistent Messiah

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"Who, precisely because..." (2:6).

- (1) Concessive participle: "though he was in the form of God"; or (2) Causal: "because he was in the form of God."
- It is *precisely BECAUSE* Jesus was in very nature God, that he did what he did.

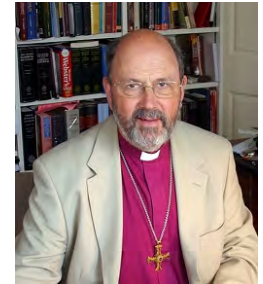
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## The Preexistent Messiah

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"The real theological emphasis of the hymn... is not simply a new view of Jesus. *It is a new understanding of God*"

– N.T. Wright



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## The Preexistent Messiah

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Christ was in "the form of God" and shared "equality with God" (2:6).

- "Form" (μορφή *morphe*) - outward appearance that fully expresses the real being or substance that underlies it. Describes Christ in his preexistent divine glory (e.g., "being robed in divine glory").
- "Equality" (ἴσος *isos*) - something equal in position and status (John 5:18).

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## The Preexistent Messiah

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"He did not consider equality with God as a status to be exploited for his own advantage" (2:6).

- "To take advantage of, something to exploit" (ἄρπαγμος *harpagmos* with ἡγεομαι *hegeomai*) - something already present and at one's disposal (not "robbery").
- Reveals to us something that Christ refrained from, even though he could have.

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## The Preexistent Messiah

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“Paul calls them to the example of Christ, who held the highest possible status—that of God himself—but decided no to take advantage of his position by keeping himself from the vulnerabilities and suffering of human existence. Thus Christ’s decision does not imply that he gave up his equality with God, but that he expressed his equality with God in giving for others” (George Guthrie, *Philippians*, 165).

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## The Incarnate Messiah

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“But *he emptied himself...*” (2:7).

- “Emptied” (κενω *kenao*) – emptying something of its effect or meaning; divested himself of his prestige: “he gave up his divine privileges” (NLT).
- Not emptying himself of his divine attributes, but emptying himself of the privileges, powers, and prerogatives of his status.

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## The Incarnate Messiah

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“...by taking the form of a slave...” (2:7).

- In the incarnation, Christ divested himself of his divine status, and took up the status (and social shame) of a slave.
- Slaves in ancient Rome would have been treated in a wide variety of ways, that which marked all slaves is that they were all under obedience to a master.

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## The Incarnate Messiah

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“...by being made in the likeness of human beings; and, looking like a normal human...” (2:7).

- “Being made” or “becoming” (γινομαι *ginomai*) – suggests Jesus shared in our human nature (Rom 8:3; Heb 2:17).
- *Imago Dei* in reverse: As humanity was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), so in the incarnation, Christ is made in “the likeness of human beings.”

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## The Crucified Messiah

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*"He humbled himself* by becoming obedient all the way to death – even death on a cross! (2:8).

- "To humble" (ταπεινω *tapeinoo*) - to cause someone to lose prestige or status, humble, humiliate, to put to shame (2:3, 5).
- In the incarnation Jesus became subject to the things that humanity is subject to, including ultimately death – even death on a cross.

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## Conclusions

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In Christ on the cross, God is most fully revealed.

- God's perspective on the gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that ...." (John 3:16).
- The Son's perspective: he did not consider his own status, but he emptied himself, he humbled himself, and died on the cross for our sake.

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## Our response?

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Thankfulness

Faithfulness