



Text: Philippians 2:1-11¹
Series: Paul's Christmas Gospel
Title: Part 3 – Jesus, Born to Humble
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So far in our Christmas journey with Paul we've looked, first of all, at his teaching that "**Jesus was born to fulfill**" (Romans 1:1-4) the promises made by God that a king would be born in the line of King David and that his birth would bring peace and righteousness to those who believe in him. Second, we've also seen that Paul's Christmas Gospel declared that "**Jesus was born to redeem**" (Galatians 4:1-7) and that in his birth, "the man Jesus Christ" was perfectly positioned to be our Redeemer from sin.

Both of these expressions of the Christmas Gospel highlight what Jesus did for us by being born as a human being. But Paul's Christmas Gospel also declared that Jesus birth in Bethlehem created the setting for "the man Jesus Christ" to show us how to live. By becoming a man, Jesus not only intended to save us from our sin but to also show us how God wants us to live. Paul's Christmas Gospel declares that...

Jesus was born to humble.

There is a great deal of focus at Christmas on the humble nature of Jesus' birth in a stable. But the important theme that Paul grasps is that Jesus' humble birth was not only something that Jesus did for us. Yes, Jesus "humbled himself" by becoming a human being but the truth of Jesus' birth is that **his humiliation is intended to humble you and me.**

Here is Paul's Christmas Gospel as it was written to believers in the church in city of Philippi. I'm reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians chapter two, verses 1 to 11:

Philippians 2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

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And now here is Paul's Christmas Gospel about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and what it means for you and me...

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Do you remember "playing pretend" as a child? Little girls often dress up on cast off clothes, pretending to be older ladies, perhaps their mother. Little boys often pretend to be their sports heroes on the playing field.

The old saying has it: "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." But when we think about being disciples of Jesus, imitation takes on a whole new importance. It's not just about flattery; it's about authenticity and integrity. Consciously adopting the pattern of life that Jesus lived is integral to being one of His followers.

Paul wrote to the people of the church in the city of Corinth...

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1

Like children imitating their parents, believers are to default to the example of God. Paul set the model for the believers in Corinth when he called on them to follow his example of imitating Christ. Paul didn't merely call them to be imitators of his example. He consciously pointed them to his example of following Christ.

Some have understood this challenge to "imitate" Christ as involving external mannerisms. Some deeply spiritual people in the past have consciously adopted the poverty of Christ in a sincere desire to follow Jesus' example. But I really don't think that that is the essence of what Paul is asking us to do. As one writer put it, **the challenge to imitate Christ is not an invitation to mimic Christ.** (Thielman, 124ff)

We see that very clearly in Paul's challenge to the Philippian believers...

**"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"
Philippians 2:5**

The challenge is to think like Jesus and so act like Jesus. Paul's focus is on the attitude of Jesus, not on the activities of Jesus. But don't reduce what he's



saying to merely pious thoughts. Paul is calling us to a way of thinking that results in active living. But it's a way of thinking that results in different ways of living in different situations and we see this principle worked out in the churches of the New Testament.

For example, for the Thessalonian believers, thinking and living like Jesus meant experiencing joy in the midst of suffering.

“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

For believers in Ephesus, thinking and living like Jesus meant living a life of sacrificial love for the sake of others...

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2

Thinking and living like Jesus meant different things in different situations. Being a disciple of Jesus isn't about mimicking the behaviours of Jesus; it's about imitating the mind of the Christ in action. Some years ago a popular phrase appeared among the Christian community: “What Would Jesus Do?” Being a disciples of Jesus involves asking an even deeper question: “How would Jesus think?” But this deeper question will always lead us back to the first one. Thinking like Jesus will always call us to living like Jesus.

What was the particular challenge for the Philippians? Why did Paul call them to imitate Christ? In verses 1 to 4 of chapter 2 we find that some fractures were developing in the faith community in Philippi. There was a growing lack of unity among the believers that was marked by “rivalry” and “conceit.” He challenged them...

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Philippians 2:3

There was a developing “self-interest” that was eroding their fellowship and their witness in the community. Paul confronted them with the challenge...

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4

And a spirit of complaining and grumbling and argumentation was beginning to take hold among the believers and Paul exhorted them to root it out...



“Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,” Philippians 2:14-15

The church in Philippi was on the edge of becoming a squabbling, petty, selfish discredit to Christ! Their light was about to become dim unless they altered their course. They had a choice to make. They could either continue on the road of self interest and watch their light for Christ become dim or they could choose to imitate Christ. Right in the middle of Paul’s warnings about the road they were traveling he offers them the solution to their problem: the mind of Jesus Christ.

**“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”
Philippians 2:5**

That challenge comes to us every day in one way or another. It seems that unless we make a conscious choice to imitate Christ, we will naturally degenerate into self-interested squabbling pettiness. It’s only when we consciously take in and live out the example of Christ that we’re lifted above self-interest and raised to another plane of living. Paul points to three choices that Jesus made that he encouraged the Philippians to imitate.

First, he challenged the Philippians to **imitate Jesus’ example of using his privileges as opportunities to help others.**

“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,” Philippians 2:6

What Paul means when he wrote that Jesus was “in the form of God” is explained by the second phrase, “equality with God.” The word “form” means “that which truly characterizes a given reality.” (Fee, 204) In other words, Jesus looked like God because he truly was God.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul describes the nature of Jesus as...

“the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell....” Colossians 1:15-16, 19

But even though Jesus was God he refused to “grasp” the prerogatives of heaven for his own interests. The word “grasped” carries with it the sense of grabbing something to use it for personal advantage. Jesus saw his divine identity as something that could be turned to the advantage of others.

I want you to see how this worked out during his life on earth. Early in his earthly ministry, Jesus endured a time of testing in the desert. As a part of this spiritual



exercise, Jesus fasted for 40 days. At the end of that time of fasting, when Jesus was weakened by hunger, Satan tempted him by saying...

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:3-4

Jesus refused to use his divine power to provide for his own hunger, but when faced with crowds of 5000 (Mark 6:30ff) & then 4000 (Mark 8:1ff) hungry disciples, he didn't hesitate to miraculously provide bucketfuls of bread and fish for them. Jesus could have fed himself in the desert but he chose not to “grasp” his divine power for personal advantage.

And as he faced the prospect of the cross, Jesus could have called on His Father to send the angelic armies of heaven to come to his defense but he didn't make the call. (Matthew 26:53) But as he hung upon the cross, he looked at those who put him there and he didn't hesitate to call on His Father to forgive those who crucified him. (Luke 23:34) Again, Jesus refused to “grasp” his rights as the Son of God to protect himself from the cross.

A job counselor once gave this advice. “If you want to test the character of a man,” he said, “give him privileges not responsibilities.” “A real leader,” he said, “will use his privileges to help others” (Warren Wiersbe)

William Borden was a man who imitated Christ's example in his use of privilege in caring for others. His story is one of those that needs to be remembered. It's a story that tells us that Christ's example can be lived out in our lives if the mind of Christ is alive in us.

*In 1904 William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school. As heir to the Borden Dairy estate, he was already a millionaire. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave him a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Borden wrote home to say, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field." At the same time, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: **"No reserves."***

*Borden held nothing back. During his college years at Yale University, he became a pillar in the Christian community. One entry in his personal journal that defined the source of his spiritual strength simply said: **"Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time."***

During his first semester at Yale, Borden started a small prayer group that would transform campus life. This little group gave birth to a movement that spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting for



weekly Bible study and prayer. By the time Borden was a senior, 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in small groups.

Borden also strategized with his fellow Christians to make sure every student on campus heard the gospel, and he was often seen ministering to the downtrodden in the streets of New Haven. But his real passion was missions. Once he narrowed his missionary call to the Kansu people in China, Borden never wavered.

*Upon graduation from Yale, Borden wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: "**No retreats.**" In keeping with that commitment, Borden turned down several high-paying job offers, enrolling in seminary instead. After graduating, he immediately went to Egypt to learn Arabic because of his intent to work with Muslims in China. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, William Borden was dead at the age of 25.*

*Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "**No reserves**" and "**No retreats**," he had written: "**No regrets.**"* © 2007 PreachingToday.com Bill White, Paramount, California; sources: Daily Bread (12-31-1988); The Yale Standard (Fall 1970); Mrs. Howard Taylor, Borden of Yale (Bethany House, 1988)

No grasping. No acting out of self interest. "Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time."

Second, Paul challenged the Philippians to **imitate Jesus' example of pouring Himself out in service to others.**

"but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Philippians 2:7

Jesus "made himself nothing." As the **NASB** translates it, "**he emptied himself**," or as Bible scholar Gordon Fee translates the idea, "**he poured himself out.**" Jesus didn't cease being God in any way in order to become a man. While in "the form of a servant" he fully retained "the form of God." As another Bible scholar put it, becoming a man involved "**the divesting of his self-interest but not of His deity.**" (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Let's look at Jesus' life to see how he lived this principle out. One of the clearest examples of Jesus' pouring out of himself in taking on the role of a servant is found in John chapter 13. As Jesus prepared to move toward his appointment with the cross in Jerusalem he gathered his disciples together for supper. In those days, where the roads were dusty and travel was on foot, the washing of feet was as important in preparing for a meal as the washing of hands is in our day. The washing feet was a task performed by the servants of the house, not by the owner and master. But Jesus intentionally took a basin of water and a towel and began to wash the feet of his disciples. Why?



Jesus said to them...

“Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”
John 13:12-15

We’re so competitive by nature. We think that the ultimate goal is about being in charge, getting our own way, running the show. But Jesus taught us a different way of living as his followers. He taught us the priority of serving others.

Robert Roberts writes about a 4th grade class where the teacher introduced a game called The Balloon Stomp. A balloon was tied to every child's ankle, and the object of the game was to pop everybody else's balloon while protecting your own. The last person with an intact balloon would win the game. The concept was if I win, then you lose.

The 9-year-olds entered into the spirit of things vigorously. When the battle was over in a matter of seconds, only one balloon was still inflated. And, of course, its owner was the most disliked kid in the room.

A second class came later that day and were asked to play the same game—only this time the class was filled with developmentally [challenged] children. The Balloon Stomp proceeded quite differently. When the instructions were given, it seemed the only idea they grasped was that the balloons were supposed to be popped. But instead of fighting each other off, the children got the idea that they were supposed to help one another pop balloons. They formed a kind of balloon-stomp co-op.

One little girl knelt down and held her balloon carefully in place—like the holder for a field goal kicker—while a little boy stomped it flat and then he knelt down and held his balloon still for her to stomp.

On and on it went, all the children helping one another in the great stomp. When the very last balloon was popped, everybody cheered—and everybody won. The question you have to ask is this: "Who got the game right, and who got the game wrong?"

(© 2007 PreachingToday.com Dave Stone, in the sermon "A Reason for Self-Denial" (Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky); citing Robert Roberts, An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology (Cambridge University, 2003); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky)

I hear a lot of talk these days in the Christian religious world about “empowerment.” I hear people talking about “being empowered.” I hear people saying that the responsibility of the church is to “empower” people. How does that language stack up against Paul’s call for us to follow Christ’s example of the emptying of Himself? Perhaps the church’s real goal should be to teach people



how to empty themselves, not how to fill themselves up. And perhaps our language of personal spirituality needs to reflect this ideal, too. Perhaps we need to talk about becoming empty, poured out, of no account, rather than “empowered.” I suspect if we look hard enough for the source of this religious language we’ll find that its source isn’t in the Bible at all but in our culture. I suspect we’ve borrowed it and baptized it, like we do with many ideas. And I suspect that Christ weeps for it. But I know that Jesus rejoices when he sees believers imitating his example of emptying because he shows us that the greatest “empowerment” is found in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Poured out. Made nothing. Emptied. Imitating Jesus.

Third, Paul challenged the Philippians to **imitate Jesus’ example of humble, sacrificial obedience to the Father’s will.**

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

Here we have Paul’s Christmas Gospel in a compressed form. As I’ve said, Paul cannot conceive of celebrating Jesus’ birth without also declaring his death on the cross. Paul would be scandalized by our attempts to celebrate the Christmas miracle without at the same time declaring the glory of Easter. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem led him with deliberate, unswerving steps directly to the cross in Jerusalem.

On Friday, Ruth and I attended a concert of Christmas music in Calgary put on by the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra at Grace Presbyterian Church. The soprano soloist gave a beautiful, moving rendition of “O Holy Night,” the choir sang some of my favorite carols, the orchestra played wonderfully but what literally moved me to tears were the personal stories from three grade 6 students from Glenmore Christian Academy. The conductor of the CPO had asked them to share their thoughts on what made Christmas special to them. I was ready for stories about “family,” and “giving,” and “presents,” but what I heard were three testimonies to Jesus! And not only to his birth, but also to his death to save us from our sins! The crowd in that church heard the Christmas Gospel from those three young girls and I could not hold back my tears!

Jesus humbled himself to be born but he also humbled himself to die. To whom or what was Jesus obedient in his death on the cross? To the Roman crucifiers? To the rabid mob? To the “power of death”? No. None of these.

The prophecy in Isaiah of his coming and death on the cross as God’s Servant says...

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” Isaiah 53:10



Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed that the death of Jesus on the cross was...

“according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” Acts 2:23

And in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed to His Father...

“not my will but yours be done.” Luke 22:43

To whom was Jesus “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”? It was to His Father. The only way that sin could be punished and grace and peace extended to you and me was for Jesus to willingly give “himself for our sins” on the cross in obedience to His Father’s will.

And Jesus’ death wasn’t only “death” – it was “death on a cross.” Paul pushes the reality of the cross into our faces with this phrase. “Yes,” he said, “EVEN death on a cross.” Crucifixion was the most shameful method of torture and execution in the Roman world. The word “crucifixion” wasn’t even used in polite Roman company. Among Jewish people, death by execution on the cross invoked the curse of Deuteronomy 21:23 which says that...

“a hanged man is cursed by God.” Deuteronomy 21:23

Jesus’ death on the cross was an obscenity, a scandal, a shame, an embarrassment even to some Christians. But the writer of Hebrews tells us that despite all that, Jesus...

“endured the cross, despising the shame” Hebrews 12:2

Viewed through the will of God, Paul looks at the shameful cross and finds nothing about which to be embarrassed, nothing of which to be ashamed.

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14

The cross of Jesus completely reoriented Paul’s world. He’d been raised to see the cross as a symbol of shame. But now, because of Jesus humble obedience to the Father and the mercy that flowed to him from it, he saw the cross as his highest treasure, his place of liberation and freedom from sin, a demonstration of the Father’s mercy and love, a source of hope and peace. Paul was willing to stand with Jesus, to embrace the shame Jesus’ embraced on his behalf.



“Even death on a cross...” When we describe the crucifixion today, we often focus on the grisly details of the pain and suffering of those who were crucified. I think that is one of the errors that Mel Gibson fell into in his film about Jesus’ death. But that isn’t Paul’s point. It isn’t the pain of the cross that Paul forces to our attention; it’s the shame of the cross. Paul isn’t calling us to a life of pain; he’s inviting us to a life of humility. Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient” all the way to death, even the shameful death of the cross. That’s the life to which Paul is calling us.

What Paul saw developing in the lives of his friends in Philippi was a selfishness that needed to be put to death and the only instrument strong enough to accomplish the task was the cross of Jesus Christ. Self-interest needed to be crucified. Grumbling needed to be crucified. Rivalry and conceit needed to be crucified. Pride needed to be crucified and humility needed to be born in them and the cross of Christ was the only agent powerful enough to work that miracle of transformation.

Author and pastor Leith Anderson writes:

Several years ago I was visiting Manila and was taken, of all places, to the Manila garbage dump and saw something beyond belief. Tens of thousands of people make their homes on that dump site. They've constructed shacks out of the things other people have thrown away. And they send their children out early every morning to scavenge for food out of other people's garbage, so they can have family meals. People have been born and grown up there on the garbage dump. They have had their families, their children, their shacks, their garbage to eat, finished out their lives, and died there without ever going anywhere else, even in the city of Manila. It is an astonishing thing.

But Americans also live on the garbage dump. They are missionaries, Christians who have chosen to leave their own country and communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it. That is amazing to me. People would leave what we have to go and live on a garbage dump. Amazing, but not as amazing as the journey from heaven to earth.

The Son of God made that journey, and he knew what he was doing. He knew where he was going. He knew what the sacrifice would be. He journeyed from heaven to earth on a mission to save the human race. (© 2007 PreachingToday.com Leith Anderson, "A God's-Eye View of Christmas," Preaching Today #208)

But the journey, begun in the manger of Bethlehem, didn’t end on the cross in Jerusalem. Paul wrote...

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,



in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11

After letting go of his privileges, after emptying himself and after humbling himself, Jesus was exalted by his Father to the highest place and given the highest name.

I want you to notice one word: “bestowed.” It was given to him by the Father. The word translated as “bestowed” is rooted in the word “grace.” The title of “Lord” and the seat of highest honor were given to Jesus because of the Father’s grace.

I believe that Paul is telling you and me that if we follow Christ’s example of self-denial and self-sacrifice we too, one day, will be raised up and given far more than we could ever possibly give away. We won’t receive God’s reward because we’ve earned it. It will be “bestowed” upon us, just as it was on Jesus. The Apostle Peter wrote...

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...” 1 Peter 5:6

God calls us to think and live like Jesus. He calls us to imitate Jesus’...

- By using our privileges and resources to meet the needs of others
- By pouring ourselves out to serve the interests of others
- By humbling obeying the Father’s will in everything.

He calls us to a life of “no reserves, no retreats, no regrets,” of saying “yes to Jesus” and “no to self.”

How do we respond to this? We respond with worship and service. We respond with our minds and our lives, with the way we think and the way we live. Some years ago now Graham Kendrick wrote a song that captures Paul’s challenge to imitate Jesus’ example. It’s called *The Servant King* ...

Verse 1

**From heav’n You came helpless babe
Enter’d our world Your glory veil’d
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live**

Verse 2

**There in the garden of tears
My heavy load He chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
Yet not my will but Yours He said**



Verse 3

**Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered**

Verse 4

**So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving**

Chorus

**This is our God the Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King**

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Let's pray.

Invitation to Prayer Ministry

Song of Response:

- Once Again

Benediction