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## Philippians 2:5-11 Sermon

Title: Learning from Christ, Our King of Humility

### **Sermon Legend:**

- 1) **Exposition** – 40%
- 2) **Application** – 10%
- 3) **Illustration** – 10%
- 4) **Introduction/Conclusion/Thread** – 15%
- 5) **Scripture Text(s) and Notes** – 20%
- 6) **Quotations from secondary sources** – 5%

### Hook:

Good morning everyone! Thank y'all for being here. I'm excited and honored to preach God's Word today.

I want to start off with a quote from arguably the greatest ruler in the history of mankind. He was an ancient king who conquered nations and built one of the most powerful kingdoms in the world. Nobody could compare to His reign. He had a strategy that was very different than other rulers, a strategy that no one has been able to replicate.

Here's the quote: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

Who said that? Sound familiar?

It shouldn't be surprising if you walk into "Messiah Bible Church" that you're going to learn about Jesus. We are Christians. We are Jesus people.

So, if I had one opportunity to preach on a Sunday, one opportunity to tell people about the Messiah of Messiah Bible Church, I'd probably pick this passage from Philippians. So I did!

This is one of the most Christ-exalting passages in the entire Bible, and I can't wait to dive into this text.

### Introduction to Philippians:

Before we jump in, I'd like to start out at the 30,000-foot level looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippians is an incredible book. It's a little, jam-packed letter of joy that Paul wrote while he was in prison. You can feel Paul's affection for the Philippians and his joyful confidence in the power of Christ throughout the entire letter.

There are several key themes Paul is driving home in his letter that will help us understand the purpose of his message. Here are four major themes: joy, the gospel, the day of Christ, and imitating Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Paul uses the words “joy” and “rejoice” over a dozen times. All his joy is rooted in Christ. He is filled with joy seeing how Christ’s people are bearing fruit and overflowing in love and righteousness, he is filled with joy because Christ’s gospel is being preached and people are getting saved, and he is filled with joy because he has the power of Christ’s Spirit living in him so that whether he lives or dies, Christ will be glorified in his life. This is a Christ-centered, Christ-exalting letter of praise.

Remember, Paul is writing this from prison. He’s not concerned about his comfort or whether he’s going to get out of jail cell. Whether he lives or whether he dies, Paul will glorify Christ. If I die, he writes, I will depart and be with Christ. What could be better than that? If I live, I get to have more fruitful labor in saving souls and edifying the saints. That was his mindset. He thought his imprisonment was actually a wonderful thing since it has served to advance the gospel (1:12). **May the Lord give us that mindset, that we would find our joy and motivation seeing the lost come to salvation and believers becoming bold for the gospel.**

And because Christ is so glorious, God wants us, as partakers of His grace (1:7), to live a life worthy of Christ, striving for unity in the faith, proclaiming the gospel fearlessly, and enduring suffering and persecution (1:27-30). As Paul says in the four verses before our passage, God wants us to walk in humility, love, and unity. Paul says in verses 3-4, “<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” One translation puts it, “do nothing according to **rivalry** or **vainglory**, but rather in humility **esteem** each other as **far better** than your own selves”

That brings us to our passage this morning. This is also one of the most important and difficult passages in the New Testament regarding the person of Christ.<sup>2</sup> This passage was also the source of much controversy in the fourth and fifth century debates over the Trinity and the nature of Christ. What does it mean that Jesus was “in the form of God”? What does it mean that Jesus “emptied Himself”?

I could preach several sermons on this passage, but here is my goal for today. My goal is not to survey every opinion in the scholarship. My goal for everyone here is adoration and imitation, Christian worship and Christian living, beholding the glories of Christ and learning how to be

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Comparing all of Paul’s writings, there are at least 10 words or phrases that are unique, unusual, or uncommon in this passage.

disciples of Christ.<sup>3</sup> That's why the title of my sermon is "Learning from Christ, Our King of Humility."

So let's look at how humble Jesus was and is so that 1) we may worship and adore Him, and 2) so that we may imitate and follow Him.

Exposition:

Alright, let's start in verse 5:

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

Go ahead and write this down as our first point: 1) Jesus considered others more important than Himself (2:5)

Continuing his message of unity, Paul tells the Philippians to have the "mind" of Christ Jesus. I find other translations besides the ESV helpful. "Have this **attitude** in yourselves which **was** also **in Christ Jesus**" (NASB). "You must have the same **attitude** that Christ **Jesus had**" (NLT). "In your relationships with one another, have the same **mind-set as Christ Jesus**" (NIV).

Paul is saying that we should imitate the mindset of Jesus and how He lived in a self-sacrificial, humble way of service toward others.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is the ultimate example of living with a self-sacrificial mindset. He is the *example par excellence*, the Michael Jordan of sacrificial service, if you will.<sup>5</sup> And clearly, this was the same mindset Paul had. He told the Philippians in chapter 1 to share in the sufferings and joys of Christ, and later in chapter 2 he tells the Philippians to imitate Timothy and Epaphroditus as worthy servants of Christ.

As we have been learning in our series in the book of Acts, Paul risked his life over and over again for the sake of Christ and His church. Paul's life was an embodiment of humility and self-sacrificial love. He was constantly compelling the church to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, not just with his teachings but with his life, and that is the type of lifestyle and mindset that God asks of you today.

When we read Paul's letters, we are seeing what it means to be a Christian, to imitate Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, the Crucified King, the Slaughtered Lamb of God. "Imitate me as I

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 91. "So while Philippians 2:6–11 is filled with theological hot points that we must consider closely, we must remember that Paul's purpose for penning it isn't to stimulate debate. It's not here for argumentation; it's here for our adoration and emulation. As a result of adoring Christ and emulating Christ, we will experience unity as a people. Unity isn't the result of preaching on unity; it's the result of people adoring and emulating Jesus. The more we behold His glory and imitate His character, the more unified we will be as a church."

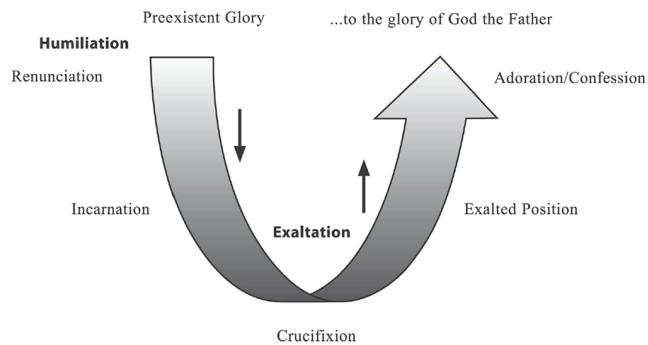
<sup>4</sup> Some commentators see Paul's positional "in Christ" theology here, that because we are united to Christ, we have the very same mind of Christ, like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:16. We are indeed in Christ, but Paul is showing here how Jesus is our ultimate role model.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 92.

imitate Christ” is one of Paul’s go-to slogans, and Paul is about to show us how Christ is our Model of Humility.

Verse 5 introduces us to what scholars call the Christ Hymn in verses 6-11. It is more similar to a creed or a statement of faith than a modern hymn.<sup>6</sup> Almost every line in this passage has a rich theological phrase that is uncommon in Paul’s writings, so I want us to take it slowly, verse by verse, so that we can see and behold the depths of Christ’s glorious humility.<sup>7</sup>

I’d like to share a picture that’s helpful for explaining the flow of this hymn. You can look on the screen for this:<sup>8</sup>



This passage is painting an arc of humiliation and exaltation in Jesus. Paul is outlining Christ’s existence in eternity past, then incarnation, then crucifixion, and finally his resurrection and ascension. In verses 6-8, Paul talks about the remarkable humility of Christ. In his incarnation, Jesus, the One who lived in his preexistent glory as the invisible, eternal, exalted God of heaven, diminished himself by becoming a physical, mortal, lowly man on earth. And not only that, Jesus emptied himself even further by enduring one of the most humiliating and disgraceful deaths known to man in his crucifixion. “Therefore,” as verse 9 says, because of Christ’s obedience, God the Father has exalted Jesus and seated Him at his right hand so that everyone would praise and honor Jesus as Lord.

Let’s look at verses 6-8, and then we’ll look at each verse individually.

<sup>6</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 352-54.

<sup>7</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 364–365. “Aside from the obvious point that the passage originated either from Paul himself or he took an existing Christian liturgical or creedal statement for the purposes of this passage, there is little point in seeking to zero in on one or other of the supposed origins and background for the passage. Indeed, when we defer to one possible background among the many that potentially lie in its provenance, it inevitably produces a reductionist reading of the hymn, missing its wider meaning. No one viewpoint seems to satisfactorily provide us with a confident answer to the question of origin... As such, the passage should be interpreted in the context of Philippians as it is and on that basis alone... However, all the elements of the redemptive story would appear to coalesce within the hymn, in which there is a move from divinity to humanity and back to divinity. The point is that Christ alone has saved humanity and the Philippians are to reach for the ideal of the attitude he demonstrated in his mission. All other claimants to power in the name of truth are reduced to rubble when the underlying narrative is fully understood.”

<sup>8</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 93–94.

2:6-8 who, though he [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Go ahead and write this down as the second point in your outline: 2) Jesus emptied His glory by becoming a man (2:6-7)

Paul is focusing on two truths that illustrate Christ's humility in these verses: His incarnation and His crucifixion.

2:6 who, though he [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped

Let's start with the first part, "though he was in the form of God"

This line has two incredibly important truths.

First, let's start with the phrase "**form of God**." The Greek word for form, *morphe*, is not talking about an external appearance. It's describing the essence and inner nature of Jesus. **Who** is Jesus? Jesus is God. **What** is Jesus? Jesus is divine. He has the divine essence. He does not appear to be God, He is not a created being, nor is He some type of angel or demigod. He is God Himself. "For in Him [Jesus] **all the fullness of God**, all the fullness of deity, was pleased to dwell"<sup>9</sup> (Colossians 1:19). That's what it means for Jesus to be in the form of God.<sup>9</sup>

Now, if you are a Christian, this may seem obvious that Jesus is God. "Why are you even bringing this up?" you might ask.

But you'd be surprised that some Christians do not know that Jesus Christ is God. I was just talking to someone at our church last week who heard and believed the gospel when he was 9 years old. He believed Jesus Christ was his Savior and that He died on the cross for his sins. But it wasn't until 5 years later that He realized and embraced that fact that Jesus is God!

In fact, according to a 2020 study done by Ligonier Ministries, 30% of self-identified evangelicals, people who believe in the Bible as God's word and the importance of believing in Christ as the Savior, agreed with the statement, "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God."<sup>10</sup> 30%!

The truth that Jesus is God must be taught and fought for, especially today. Most people in America believe that Jesus was a great teacher or a moral example but nothing more than that. There are even so-called biblical scholars who say that Jesus never claimed to be God and that the earliest Christians never worshiped Jesus as God.<sup>11</sup> Their arguments can sound compelling,

<sup>9</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 94.

<sup>10</sup> See the article [Is Jesus Divine? 30% of "Evangelicals" Say No](#).

<sup>11</sup> Bart Ehrman is one of the leading atheist biblical scholars: [Did Jesus Call Himself God? - The Bart Ehrman Blog](#)

and after all, they are scholars who have dedicated their lives to researching the Bible and Christianity.

If someone confronted you and said that Jesus was not God, how would you respond?

I want to give you several passages that make it crystal clear that Jesus Christ is God. I have a more complete list in my manuscript that you can find online, but I'll share just a few to have ready whenever you come across someone who is unsure about Jesus' divinity.

1. Matthew 1:23 Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name **Immanuel**" (which means, **God with us**).
2. John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
3. John 5:18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God**.
4. John 14:9-10 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me?**<sup>12</sup>
5. John 20:28 Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**"
6. Romans 9:5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, **is the Christ, who is God over all**, blessed forever. Amen.
7. Titus 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of **our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**,
8. Hebrews 1:8 **But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God**, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.
9. 2 Peter 1:1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness **of our God and Savior Jesus Christ**

Okay, now that we have clearly established the first truth that Jesus is God, let's look at a second truth from this part in verse 6: "though he **was** in the form of God"

The Greek word translated into "was" in the ESV is the word for "be" or "being." The Greek form of the word implies an ongoing essential status.<sup>13</sup> It could be translated "though **he was and continues to be** in the form of God."

The Bible describes what theologians call the "immutability" of God. God is eternal and unchanging. We see this in verses like Malachi 3:6, "For **I the Lord do not change**," or Psalm 102, "Of old you [the Lord] laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 14:8–10.

<sup>13</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 385.

your hands... They will pass away, **but you are the same**, and your years have no end.” This is an essential attribute of God’s nature.

In other words, as God, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Why is this important? Paul is saying that Jesus has always been God and will always continue to be God. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8, 22:13). He never laid aside his divinity at any point in redemptive history. This denies any notion that Jesus was a created being (which is what Arianism taught in the fourth century and Jehovah’s Witnesses teach today) or that he was elevated to divinity because of his works (see the early heresy of adoptionism in the fourth century and Mormonism today).<sup>14</sup>

That’s the first half of verse 6. Paul says that Jesus is fully God. This is crucial for His argument! Getting back to verse 6, Paul says that Jesus “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

For those who grew up reading the King James Version, it says Jesus “thought it not **robbery** to be equal with God.” This is a challenging and unusual word in the Greek, but I think the best translation for this is Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be **exploited**.<sup>15</sup>” The English phrase ‘a thing to be grasped’ translates a single Greek word *harpagmos*, which can mean a “prize” that one seizes or holds onto.<sup>16</sup> In this case, Paul implies that Jesus did not hold onto his exalted status of glory to exploit His people but voluntarily relinquished it in an act of sacrificial love and humility.<sup>17</sup> This adds to Paul’s admonition to the Philippians in verses 3-4, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

What Paul is saying here is that even though Jesus the Son was coequal with the Father, He gave up His exalted status in heaven and submitted to His Father’s will. Jesus did not stop being God, but He selflessly set aside the blessings and privileges He had by becoming a man.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 385.

<sup>15</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 379.

<sup>16</sup> It’s often applied to robbers who seized loot, but I don’t think that is exactly what Paul has in mind here. See J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 110.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Barnett, *Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord*, ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 53–54.

<sup>18</sup> See a great quote from Chrysostom: “Suppose someone commits a robbery and grabs something that does not belong to him. Wouldn’t he be inclined to hold on to it tightly, to grasp it and not lay it aside for fear of losing it? But suppose someone else possesses an estate by nature. He would not have any fear of losing it. He would not then be afraid to descend temporarily from his estate of dignity. He would know that he would suffer no loss, because it belongs to him naturally.... We are human beings. We are not divine by nature. We do not possess goodness by nature. But to God divinity belongs by nature.... His dominion was not acquired by seizure but was natural. It was not the gift of another but always stable and secure.” M. J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 240.

It is an amazing thought. The eternal God and Creator of all things has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation. Our God is in the heavens, and he does all that he pleases (Psalm 115:3). But shockingly, the immortal God became a mortal man. He voluntarily gave up His exalted *privileges* for our sake.

Contrast our God with the Greek gods of Paul's day. They were immoral, power-hungry despots who were far more like sinful human beings than anything godly. And contrast our King with the rulers of today. Jesus did not use His power to exploit people for his own self-serving glory but instead emptied himself by becoming a man to die on the cross for our sins.<sup>19</sup> As Jesus Himself said, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

This is completely backwards to what the world tells us today. We live in a self-exalting, self-love, self-care world that worships the unholy Trinity of me, myself, and I. And that's our mindset by default. We all naturally live to preserve ourselves, but Jesus calls you to die to self. Scripture tells you to put off and put on, to put off your old sinful nature and to put on your new nature. And you do this primarily by serving other people, by placing the interests of others above your own. Remember, this was Paul's mindset! He's still in prison as he's writing this letter. He doesn't care about maximizing his comfort or preserving his life. He poured out his life for Christ and the church because Jesus poured out His life for Paul and the church. And that should be our response.

Continuing in verse 7, instead of clutching onto His glory for Himself, Jesus "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

The Greek word for emptied, *kenosis*, implies a deprivation of something from its proper place.<sup>20</sup> The right question to ask is not "*What* did Jesus *empty* or *remove* from Himself?" as if Jesus somehow lost something by becoming a man. Jesus did not lose His divine nature! Instead, the question is "*Into what* did he empty Himself?"<sup>21</sup> Jesus took on humanity. He brought the whole of His eternal, undiminished divine nature into a new and unimaginable state. Jesus becoming a man was a voluntary deprivation of the exercise of Lordship.<sup>22</sup>

One of the Protestant reformers described Christ's emptying of himself this way: "Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of divinity; but he kept it concealed for a time, so that it might not be

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<sup>19</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 389.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 113.

<sup>21</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 113.

<sup>22</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 113.

seen under the weakness of the flesh. Accordingly, he placed his glory out of the view of men, not by diminishing it, but by concealing it.”<sup>23</sup>

Jesus “concealed” His glory by becoming a man like you and me in the Incarnation 2,000 years ago.

Think about Christmas for a moment, the birth of Jesus. The King of the ages, the immortal, invisible, Creator of the entire universe, the One who made the sun and the big dipper and Saturn, the One who made the Grand Canyon and the Olympic Peninsula and all the oceans and all the great white sharks and killer whales...

He became a baby.

The infinite Creator becoming a finite creature, the everlasting God becoming a mortal man.

And He wasn’t born at Methodist hospital down the street. His parents weren’t celebrities or lawyers or even middle-class or blue-collar folks. He was born in a feeding trough in a barn to a poor Jewish teenager in small, obscure village called Bethlehem.<sup>24</sup>

That’s how much Jesus emptied himself.

And this is just the start of Jesus’ condescension. He stoops down even further.

Go ahead and write this down for the third point in the bulletin: 3) Jesus **humbled** Himself by dying on a cross to save us (2:8)

Paul continues in verse 8, “And being found in human form, he **humbled** himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

I don’t think we realize just how low Jesus went. The message of the cross might be stale to us. It might be falling on deaf ears, especially for Christians who have known the Lord for a long time now. Many of us have heard “Jesus died on the cross for our sins” countless times, but do you realize what He endured? In the ancient world, the cross was called the “infamous stake,” the “criminal wood,” and the “most evil cross.” It was the worst fate imaginable. Cicero, a Roman philosopher and historian in the first century, described crucifixion as “the cruelest and most terrible punishment.”<sup>25</sup> It’s a similar feeling when you hear about the Holocaust, that feeling you get when you hear about Hitler’s concentration camps, the horrors of Jews being taken to the gas chambers.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory B. Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, ed. Graham Tomlin et al., vol. XI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 50.

<sup>24</sup> James M. Houston, “Bethlehem,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 290. “When Jesus was born there in NT times, Bethlehem was only a village (Mt 2:1–16; Lk 2:4–6, 15; Jn 7:42). It lay near the N-S highway connecting Jerusalem with Hebron to the south. A transverse route across the Judean hill country followed the Valley of Elah to Bethlehem, one of 7 such E-W roads. The central mountain ridge of Judea sloping E and W contracts from an average width of 8 miles to only 2 miles or less between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This feature provided a natural borderland, Jerusalem being the most southerly border town of the northern region, and Bethlehem the most important northern border town of the southern area of Judea. So although it remained small, Bethlehem was never a daughter settlement of Jerusalem.”

<sup>25</sup> David A. Fiensy, “Crucifixion,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

And it was the humiliation of the cross that caused people to reject Christianity, a “stumbling block for Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:21). Jews treated the idea of a crucified man of God with great suspicion, since Deuteronomy 21:23 declares a divine curse upon a criminal punished by death and hanged on a tree.<sup>26</sup> Jews thought, “How could the Messiah be someone who was cursed by God?”

Gentiles also objected to the shame of the cross. Celsus, one of the most outspoken enemies of Christianity in the second century, objected to Christianity **because** of the ugliness of the cross. How could Christians worship a crucified, convicted criminal? How could such a disgraceful man also be the glorious Son of God who came down from heaven? If Jesus was truly divine, He should have disappeared from the cross or punished the people who crucified Him.<sup>27</sup> This is exactly how the crowds mocked Jesus while He was hanging on the cross. **Everybody** mocked him. The Jewish rulers, the Roman soldiers, the two crucified criminals next to him. Listen to this passage from Luke:<sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine<sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”<sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “**This** is the King of the Jews.” (23:35-36). **This** is your King, Israel! This is your Messiah—a naked, cursed, corpse on a cross.

That’s what it means that Jesus emptied Himself. This is our humble God. But why? Why did Jesus subject Himself to such a shameful death?

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). God becoming a man to bear our sins on a cross isn’t a new thing. It’s not unique to the New Testament. Paul didn’t make this stuff up. It is a fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah centuries before Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Look at verse 7 again: “but Jesus emptied himself, by taking **the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men.” Paul’s phrase in verse 7: “**taking the form of a servant**.” This is key. Paul could have skipped this phrase and just said, “He emptied himself by being born in the likeness of men.” We know that Jesus was a man. He had the same exact human nature as we do, except without sin. But what does Paul mean by “the form of a servant”? I believe Paul is referencing the Servant of the Lord prophesized in Isaiah and other places in the Old Testament. One of the most famous prophecies about the Servant of the Lord is found in Isaiah 53. It’s an incredible description of the Messiah and what He will do to redeem His people from their sins.

And it answers the question of why Jesus humbled himself to become obedient to the suffering of the cross. This might be my favorite passage in all of Scripture, and it’s worth reading the

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<sup>26</sup> David A. Fiensy, “Crucifixion,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Henry Robert Reynolds, “JOHN, GOSPEL OF,” in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology*, ed. James Hastings et al. (New York; Edinburgh: Charles Scribner’s Sons; T. & T. Clark, 1911–1912), 700.

whole chapter. For the sake of time, let's just look at verses 4-6. Look at how closely this matches everything that Jesus went through.

- 4 Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

This adds so much meaning to Jesus' identity as taking "the form of a servant." The One who was in the form of God took on the form of a servant. The Suffering Servant of the Lord is the Lord Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, who took on the punishment that we deserved to reconcile us to God.

We see from this passage in Isaiah and our passage in Philippians that Jesus emptied Himself willingly. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He said "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17-18). Jesus willingly submitted to the curse of the cross to redeem us from the curse of sin and death.

Go ahead and write this down as our final point: 4) Jesus glorified the Father and is exalted because of His sacrifice (2:9-11)

Paul illuminates the identity of Jesus even further in verses 9-11:

2:9-11 Therefore God [the Father] has highly exalted him [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This adds even more revelation to the majesty of Jesus. There is so just much here! Let's unpack all the riches.

Because of Christ's obedience to the cross, God has exalted Him as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

There are two major truths I want to draw from these verses. First, Paul is adapting a verse from Isaiah. In Isaiah 45, Yahweh, one of the main names of God in the Old Testament, the God of Israel, is declaring His lordship and power as the only true God and Savior. He is compelling Israel to turn away from worthless idols and put all their trust in the everlasting God who created all things.

You can read these verses on the screen:

“And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: **‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’**<sup>28</sup> (Isaiah 45:21-23)

Isaiah says that every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess allegiance **to Yahweh**, that **Yahweh** is the Lord of all, but Paul is saying here that every tongue will confess that **Jesus Christ** is Lord! Paul is driving home the point of Jesus’ identity as God and Lord. Jesus the Son is coequal with the Father who is Lord over all things, and the Father has exalted His Son and bestowed on Him the title of Lord because of His humble obedience at the cross.<sup>29</sup> God has exalted Jesus as the ruler of all things, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21). This is what Jesus meant after His resurrection at the end of the book of Matthew. His disciples see Him, worship Him, and prepare themselves to receive a final commission from Jesus before His ascension to heaven (28:16-17). What does Jesus say? “**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18).

This is what it means to confess with your mouth that “Jesus is Lord.” It’s an acknowledgement and trust in His universal power and reign that He received after His death and resurrection.

And He’s not just Lord for Christians. Paul says that **every** knee will bow and **every** tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is Lord over all. Some will confess Jesus as Lord out of humility, love, and adoration in heaven. Others will confess Jesus as Lord out of envy, hatred, and anguish in the lake of fire. One day, the rulers of the most powerful nations in the world will bow before Jesus and submit to His authority. Think about the most ancient rulers. All the Pharaohs in Egypt, King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, Cyrus in Persia. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan. Or let’s go more modern. Stalin and Lenin in Russia, Hitler in

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<sup>28</sup> Paul may have adapted this from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. Isaiah 45:23 says, “I am swearing an oath according to myself: Unless righteousness shall go forth from my mouth, my words shall not turn back, because every knee shall bend to me, and every tongue shall swear by God.” See Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Second Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Is 45:23. See also Paul’s direct quote of Isaiah 45:23 in Romans 14:10 to make a point that we will all give an account to the Lord: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

<sup>29</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 101.

Germany, Mao in China. Or today. Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin. They will all bow and confess the lordship of Christ before His throne.

From the greatest to the least, across every tribe, tongue, and nation, everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That includes every person in this room and every person listening online today. So, here is my question for you listening today: who is *your* Lord? Who is the king and ruler of *your* life? As citizens of a heavenly kingdom, you are called to do more than merely confess allegiance to a King with your mouth. Actions speak louder than words. You are called to walk the talk.

Like I said at the very beginning, we're here to learn just how humble Jesus was and is so that 1) we may worship and adore Him, and 2) so that we may imitate and follow Him.

If you worship and adore Jesus as your king, then imitate and follow Him as your King of Humility. Paul says right before our passage in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves," because Jesus did that for you at the cross. And not only did Jesus show this at the cross, but His entire life was a life of counting others as more significant than Himself. Let's take a stroll through Jesus' life in the gospel of John:

- Feeding the five thousand
- Forgiving the woman caught in adultery
- Healing the man born blind
- Raising Lazarus from the dead
- Washing the feet of His disciples
- Healing the ear of a soldier arresting him
- Making arrangements for John to care for his mother Mary while He was dying on the cross

This is the humility and love that God is calling *you* to imitate.

I could go on and on about how Jesus considered others more important than Himself, but how can we do this today in 2025? Here are some practical applications for how we can consider others as more important than ourselves:

- Husbands: serve your wives. Listen to her. Make her feel valued and cherished. Pray for her every day. Put her interests above your own. Help her with the kids and responsibilities at home. Set aside your hobbies and interests, and do things that she enjoys.
- Wives: support your husbands. Respect him. Encourage him to pursue godliness and leadership. Pray for him every day. Be a helpmate. Don't discourage him.
- Kids (especially the ones that I have in Youth Group!): obey your parents. Treat them with honor, as the people God chose to bring you into this world, who fed and nursed you

and gave you clothes and a home. Tell your parents how much they mean to you. Obey with a good attitude! Not reluctantly.

- For everyone: ask yourself, “What are the interests of the people around me?”
- If you’re in school, how can I help my classmates learn? How can I be a friend to someone who is lonely? How can I be friends with people I don’t really like? I don’t care who it is. The jocks, the nerds, the gamers, the LGBTQ+ crowd. They are all made in the image of God and worthy of our love and dignity, and they all need the love of Christ and the power of the gospel.
- If you’re at work, how can I deliver the best results to clients and customers for their sake, not for my own benefit? How can I help my team grow and succeed? How can I build relationships with coworkers that go beyond work? Corporate America, the blue-collar world, wherever you’re at, those are some of the biggest mission fields. People are so broken. They become experts at hiding behind a mask of competence or busyness, but deep down inside they are empty. They’re on the brink of divorce, they’re addicted to alcohol or drugs or pornography, they’re depressed and suicidal, wondering what their purpose is and why they exist. People need hope, and not an abstract optimism in life, but the true hope of the gospel, the hope of eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and the knowledge-surpassing love of God for sinners.
- We’ve got the holidays coming up. When you’re with your family, what does it look like to live in harmony with them? To not hate them because they’re “crazy democrats” or “socialists” or “MAGA republicans” or “conspiracy theorists” or whatever label you want? This is the week of Thanksgiving, a time to thank God for everything He’s given us, not a time to complain and fight. Paul says, “Do all things without grumbling or arguing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.” Is that how you treat your family members during the holidays? Is that how you represent the Lord Jesus Christ to them?
- For our brothers and sisters in the church, pray for them! Make a list of people and pray for them every morning. Text the people in your small groups during the week and ask how they’re doing. Set up a time to pray over the phone each week with a brother or sister! Ask people, “How can I be praying for you this week?” Pray for people on the spot! Don’t just say you’re going to pray for someone and never do it. Open your home and cook a meal for someone and care for their soul. This pleases our God.

You are salt and light. If salt loses its taste, what is it good for? If a lamp is put under a basket, how can anyone see? You will shine the light of Christ when you live like Him. By this the world will know that we are Christ’s disciples, if we have love for one another, the sacrificial commitment for the good of each other, counting others as more important than ourselves.

When you pursue JOY—Jesus first, others second, and you third, you will have joy! Dying to self is the path of joy and freedom in Christ.

May the Lord turn our hearts away from selfishness and purify our hearts so that we can live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ and be pure and blameless on that day when Jesus returns, when every knee will bow before the King of Kings. May we pursue friendship with Jesus and confidently follow His words, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

Bow your heads with me in prayer.

*Philippians 1:9-11 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*