

Truth for Today

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Speaker: Mr. Arthur Goodwin

Philippians - The Christian Life: The Humble Mind - Philippians 2:1-11

Unrecognised

Many of you will have heard the story of King Alfred the Great; of how on one occasion he was escaping from his enemies and took refuge in the home of a peasant woman, she not recognising him. In return for her hospitality, he was commissioned to keep an eye on her cakes baking on the stove whilst she attended to her other chores. Unfortunately, King Alfred fell asleep and the cakes were burnt: much to the displeasure of the woman, who told him so in no uncertain terms.

The passage that we have before us as the subject for our meditation this morning is Philippians 2:1-11, and in this passage we read of One, far greater than any earthly king, who appeared in the world to carry out a stupendous task, yet was recognised by only a few. I refer, of course, to the first advent of Christ.

The Philippian Church

The Philippian Church was a recently-established one, actually formed during the second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:1-40). On the whole, it was a spiritually healthy church. On two occasions they had ministered to the Apostle, as we read in Philippians 4:16. They had shown fellowship with him in the gospel (Philippians 1:5); they had enjoyed his personal fellowship, the fellowship of the Spirit (Philippians 2:1). And their spiritual progress had given him much joy. He is touched by their love and hence he writes them this letter. But nevertheless his joy was not quite complete and it was his desire that it might be fulfilled by their further Christian progress. It would appear that in Philippi there were still a few things that needed putting right and in Philippians 2:2-3 we have an indication of what they were. For instance, there appears to be a lack of unity, and so Paul exhorts them to be like-minded - to mind the one thing. In Philippians 4:2 we read of two sisters, Euodias and Syntyche, whom Paul exhorts to be of one mind in the Lord. Then their love for one another would be true and real, not superficial or hypocritical. There would be a proper estimation of one another. Strife and vainglory would be eschewed (Philippians 2:3). In Philippians 1:15, we find that there were those who were preaching Christ of contention and, whilst it is not exactly said that this was happening at Philippi, it may possibly have been so.

Dear friends, how a church testimony can be weakened when such things as these are allowed to come in. Disharmony is evident and the name of the Lord is dishonoured.

Lowly minds

In this letter we find that Paul constantly refers to the mind: on at least four occasions; here, (Philippians 2:8) Philippians 1:7, Philippians 3:15 and, as we have already indicated, Philippians 4:2. In this passage we are exhorted to have lowly minds, and particularly lowly minds towards the brethren. We are to esteem our brethren better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We are not to take a position of proud superiority over them.

Now we come to Philippians 2:5 and here Paul begins to show how such a mind is developed. Let me read the passage, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." (Philippians 2:5-10)

The Apostle points us to our great example: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Strictly translated there is no 'was' in this passage. Christ did not only have such a mind whilst He was here upon earth. He has such a mind now. It is characteristic of Him, and so the Apostle says "Let this mind..." - so should our minds be.

In Philippians 2:6-8 the Apostle, guided by the Spirit of God, discloses what this mind of Christ was, and here in these verses we have one of, if not the most profound truth of scripture enunciated. Just 3 verses; 63 words; but the whole basis of the Christian Faith is brought before us.

The deity of the Lord Jesus

Dear friends, if these words we are about to consider were not true there would not, and never could be, a soul in Heaven. So what do we read? "Christ Jesus being ..." better the word is "subsisting", it is what He ever was. Christ Jesus subsisting in the form of God. Here we have one of the strongest expressions of His deity. The Lord Jesus Christ ever was God. Scripture constantly affirms this truth. For example, in John 1:1 we read: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In Isaiah 6:1-5 the prophet saw the King, Jehovah of Hosts, and in John 12:41 the Spirit tells us that it was Christ Jesus that He saw and of whom He spoke. Even the Jews, his bitterest enemies, in John 5:18, acknowledged his claim to deity. They refused to believe it, but nevertheless they had to admit that this is what he claimed. His words to Nicodemus were: "We speak that we do know..." (John 3:11), not we speak that which has been revealed to us as a prophet would have to say. With the Lord it is intrinsic, personal knowledge. He speaks as one who is familiar with God.

And yet this basic truth is assailed, no doubt by Satan, today on every hand. Think of all those companies that refuse to accept that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. The Jehovah's Witnesses Unitarians, almost all the cults, all refuse this basic fundamental truth.

Then we read that He was in the form of God (Philippians 2:6). That is not just a reference merely to His outward appearance, but it refers to the inner, essential quality of the person or the thing referred to. So you see, dear friends, Christ had no reason to desire to be on an equality with God. It was not something that He ardently desired for such is the meaning of "thought it not robbery" Why? Well because He was God. In Zechariah 13:7 we find that He is Jehovah's fellow. He is God. Satan, in Isaiah 14:12-14, under the name of Lucifer, said: "I will be like the most high." He had a desire to be like the Most High. Not so with our blessed Lord, He is the Most High.

He emptied Himself

And then in Philippians 2:7-8, we learn of the path into which the mind of Christ led him. What it entailed; what did it entail? Well, it was for the accomplishing the will of God. Working out the great divine plan of redemption. And so, firstly we find that He made Himself of no reputation. This is a very difficult passage to translate. It may be rendered, and perhaps more revealingly, He emptied Himself. See Him as Isaiah saw Him: the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, His train fills the temple, the cherubim come, they cover their feet and they cover their faces with their wings, they cry one to another "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). What a sight!

Now, dear friends, consider Him as He is portrayed in the gospels: A babe in a manger (Luke 2:6-20), a poor man (see Matthew 17:27), a weary man (John 4:6), a homeless man (Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58), an outcast (see Matthew 12:14), and a subject of hostility and derision (Luke 23:39). What an emptying. Christ Jesus made Himself, it was not imposed upon Him, He made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7). And let us never forget that no matter what the position was that He took, He never ceased to be God. His Godhead glory may have been veiled for a little time, but it never ceased to be.

The form of a servant

From the form of God He took upon himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). It is the same word in both cases. The former is intrinsic, the latter is what in His grace He assumed: He became a servant. In Luke 22:27 we read, and it is spoken, of the Lord, "I am in the midst of you as the one who serves." Whose servant is He, we might ask. Well without doubt He is God's servant. Coming into the world, He said: "Lo I come to do Thy will, O my God" (See Hebrews 10:7). This was the work that God had given Him to do, and oh how willingly He carried it out. But His service is exercised towards us. In Luke 12:37, again speaking of Himself, he said: "He shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them." What wonderful grace on the part of the one who made Himself of no reputation. Another display of His service was shown in the upper room, only shortly before His death, when He takes a basin and a towel and girds Himself and washes His disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). And today He is still a servant on the right hand of God, He is our advocate for when we sin and He is our great high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), to present our prayers and our praises in virtue of the worth of His own person and work. But he is not only a servant, he is also a man. Angels are servants, but the Son of God is servant to no-one. But He took a place lower than the angels and took His place in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). He became what He was not before - a man.

Why was such a step necessary? It was because salvation could be accomplished in no other way. The penalty of sin is death (Genesis 2:17, Romans 6:23). God had decreed it. It had to be paid. God's righteousness demanded it. And so God, the Son of God, becomes man in order to give His life as the penalty of sin. In Philippians 2:8 we read that He humbled Himself or He made Himself low; really, He made Himself very low. He could, of course, have come as a king or some other great magnate, but no, He became the lowest of men.

Now in this passage we come to the great crisis in the life of our Blessed Lord. The lowly one becomes obedient. To whom? God, whose will it was that no man should perish but that all should live (see 2 Peter 3:9). He became obedient unto death. Not obedient to death as the master. Death had no claim upon Him. John 10:17-18 clearly say so. There he states: "Therefore doth my father love me because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." So this was the destiny to which that lowly mind led Him. And what a death it was. The death of the Cross. The cruellest and the most horrible of all deaths by execution. The stigma, the physical suffering, was terrible and the Lord Jesus was a true man and He felt it. But what He suffered under the hand of God was infinitely worse. There on the cross He became sin for us. There the river of God's wrath rolled over Him. Listen to His cry "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)

*O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head,
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead
To bear all ill for me.
A victim led, Thy blood was shed;
Now there's no load for me.*

*Jehovah lifted up His rod
O Christ, it fell on Thee;
Thou was forsaken of Thy God;
No distance now for me.
Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed:
Thy bruising healeth me.*

(Mrs. Anne Ross Cousin 1824-1906)

He endured the cross

In Hebrews 12:2 we read: "... He endured the cross despising the shame." The shame he could despise, but the cross He had to endure. What our blessed Lord suffered during those three hours of darkness we cannot begin to comprehend. If you examine this passage carefully I think you will find that there are seven steps downwards that the Lord took, from the glory on high to the cross of Calvary. Why did He take them? Well, Hebrews 12:2 says it was for the joy that was set before Him.

We read that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son" (John 3:16). And we read in Proverbs 8:32 that "his [the Son of God's] delights were with the sons of men". He loved mankind and so He came to pay the awful price that was necessary in order that our sins might be forgiven and that we might have an eternal place with Him and with the Father in heaven.

Dear friends, every one of you who is listening to me this morning, may I ask, have you responded to this love of the Lord, for the great work that He has done, what He was willing to endure for you? Have you received Him as John 1:12 puts it, and thus been brought into the family of God? The first Adam brought in death by disobedience. The last Adam was obedient unto death. And in so doing brought in life, eternal life.

And so we come to the end of the consideration of these few verses. God becoming man. Who can understand it? About 150 years ago a godly man and a great student of scripture said something like this: "That Jesus Christ is God, this I know. That Jesus Christ is a man, this I know. How to put these two facts together, this I do not know. But that they are together, this I do know."

God exalted Him

But the passage does not end there. We praise God that Philippians 2:9-11 follows Philippians 2:5-8. In Luke 14:11, we read: "Whosoever exalts in himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Lord Jesus Christ was not left on the cross, He was not left in the tomb, but God has exalted Him to the very highest place that heaven affords. Philippians 2:9 begins "Wherefore..." It refers back to the seven steps downward that were taken by the Lord and now goes on to speak of what has ensued because He took them. Again a further examination of

Philippians 2:10-11 will reveal that there are seven steps upward. The first is that God has highly, the word is "super", God has highly, God has super-exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. Here we have God's response to the work of Christ. In Hebrews 1:13 we read that God said: "Sit on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." And that, dear friends, is where He is now, at the right hand of the Father on the Father's throne. All the angelic hosts in heaven, all the redeemed on earth bow before Him and in a coming day during His millennial reign, every knee - in heaven, on earth, even under the earth, even the infernal beings will bow at the name given to Him.

In Philippians 2:9 it is not merely a name that is given to Him, but really it should be "has given Him the name". Expositors differ as to what this name is. Some say it is Jehovah. Others think that it might refer to Revelation 3:12, where the Lord promises to the overcomer in the church at Philadelphia: "I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name." What that name is we cannot say for certain. And I certainly would not deem to be authoritative on it. But personally I think that it is still the name of Jesus. For Philippians 2:10 says specifically that it is "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Jesus, Jehovah the Saviour (see Matthew 1:21). Now invested with a new glory. Now no longer the lowly outcast of Jewry, but the glorious, exalted Lord of all. But whatever that name may be, at its very mention all will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Note that He will be Lord, Lord of all to the glory of God the Father.

What a passage! And given to us, dear friends, that we might have the mind of Christ.

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