

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

PHIL. 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

11 And *that* every tongue should

confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

JOHN 13:12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

NOTES

A Humble Lord Is Born

Lesson Text: Philippians 2:5-11; John 13:12-17

Related Scriptures: John 1:14; Matthew 20:20-28

TIMES: A.D. 60-61; A.D. 30

PLACES: from Rome; Jerusalem

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GOLDEN TEXT—"But [he] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

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Lesson Exposition

EMPTIED—Phil. 2:5-8

A humble mindset (Phil. 2:5-6). It has been suggested that the church at Philippi was a favorite of Paul's because it did not have the level of controversies that were relatively common in some of the other congregations he founded. Moreover, the Philippians assisted Paul by supporting him financially (cf. 4:10-20).

Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this letter. Therefore, this and three other letters written at about the same time (Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon) are often referred to as the Prison Epistles.

In spite of the fact that no major problems plagued the Philippian church, there were some disagreements. But wherever people come together, there is always the possibility of discord and selfishness. Consequently, Paul encouraged them to be "of one accord, of one mind" (vs. 2). He admonished them that nothing they did should be done out of rivalry or personal pride. Instead of being focused on their own individual interests, the interests of others should be paramount among them. What better way to show this than by

the example of Christ Himself?

The mindset or attitude of Christ should be our continual model. Since He was ever and always concerned about others, so it should be for us.

Obviously, the Apostle Paul believed and taught that Christ was not only the Son of God but "equal with God" (vs. 6). The word translated "robbery" means "to grasp" or "cling." While scholars debate the precise meaning, it is clear that the Son of God was willing to divest Himself of certain privileges to become human. He did not cling to His equality with the Father but gave up some divine prerogatives for a time.

Supreme obedience (Phil. 2:7-8). That Christ "made himself of no reputation" literally means that He *emptied* Himself. Of course, there are discussions concerning precisely how and in what ways Christ emptied Himself by becoming human. As seen in the Gospels, both the deity and humanity of Christ are affirmed and manifested in various ways in various contexts.

"'Christ indeed,' says Calvin, 'could not divest himself of Godhead; but he kept it concealed for a time . . . he laid

aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it” (Motyer, *The Message of Philipians*, IVP).

In spite of the fact that Christ was “in the form of God” and “equal with God” (vs. 6), He voluntarily took upon Himself “the form of a servant” (vs. 7). While there are several words that can be translated “servant” in the New Testament, this is the Greek word *doulos*, regularly used of a common slave.

As the Son of God, Christ could have come to earth in a glorious form, revealing instantly that He was the Lord of glory. Instead, He came “in the likeness of men.” This was “a voluntary deprivation of the exercise of Lordship” (Motyer). Though conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ birth itself was like any other human birth. Like all humans, He felt pain, became hungry and thirsty, felt disappointment and discouragement, and was tempted to sin—although He never actually was guilty of any sin (cf. Heb. 4:15).

While many examples of Christ’s humility could be cited, the greatest was His willingness to obey the Father’s will and go to the cross. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” and “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

When Paul added the words, “even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8), he was emphasizing the horrendous nature of the suffering experienced by those who were crucified. Intense pain experienced in several different ways was the lot of the crucified. Added to this in Jesus’ case was the humiliation and burden of bearing the sins of the world (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-25).

EXALTED—Phil. 2:9-11

Name above all names (Phil. 2:9). Because the Lord Jesus was willing to obey His Father and go to the cross for the sins of fallen humanity, “God

also hath highly exalted him.” This exaltation included not only His resurrection but also His ascension and His installation at the Father’s right hand in heaven.

Although He was humiliated at the cross, Jesus has been exalted and given a name that is above every other name in the universe.

Every knee, every tongue (Phil. 2:10-11). Those who reject Jesus are actually despising God’s free offer of eternal life (cf. Acts 13:46), as well as scorning His grace and Christ’s sacrifice (cf. Rom. 3:22-24; 5:1-2).

A time is coming, however, when every human being will humbly bow before Christ and confess Him alone as Lord of all (cf. Isa. 45:23). This will occur at the final judgment. Those who refuse to confess Christ before His coming in judgment shall nevertheless be forced to confess Him at that time.

But that latter confession will by no means lead to their salvation. Rather, it will merely confirm their eternal damnation.

The ultimate goal of confessing Christ is to bring glory to God the Father. All that we do should bring glory to God.

HUMILITY IN ACTION— John 13:12-17

The Master’s example (John 13:12-13). As this chapter opens, Jesus knew that His hour had come, that is, the time for His sacrificial death had arrived. His last meal would be the Passover. As the other Gospels record, it was during this feast that He instituted the Lord’s Supper. John omits that detail, but he does relate that Jesus arose, took a basin of water, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.

Once Jesus had completed this task, He asked His disciples, “Know ye what I have done unto you?” He wanted to know if they had under-

stood the significance of what He had done for them. He had set them an example of how a Christian should humbly serve all fellow believers. As he had taught them previously, the greatest Christian is the one who makes himself the servant of all his brethren (cf. Mark 10:42-45).

Humble service (John 13:14-17). “Verily, verily” represents the Greek *Amen, amen* and was used by Jesus to emphasize a teaching that was of surpassing value.

Starting with a timeless principle, Jesus instructed His disciples in the significance of His washing of their feet. No servant is greater than his master, and no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. Since Jesus, their Master, has set this example for them, humbling Himself in service to His disciples, Jesus’ true disciples should never consider themselves above likewise humbling themselves to serve one another. Even the lowliest task is no excuse to decline serving fellow believers.

Since their Master and Teacher had been willing to thus humble Himself, doing the most demeaning task of washing the feet of His disciples, then they themselves should follow His lead.

For the present, the disciples might understand these things only in terms of service to one another. Eventually they would understand that in Christ, both masters and servants were also alike in the area of personal suffering. Once Jesus ascended and the disciples began preaching the gospel on their own, they would realize that they were likewise meant to suffer just as He Himself had suffered at the hands of the world. As He would tell them, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. . . . Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his

lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (15:18-20).

Those who realized these truths and put them into regular practice would be happy and blessed in their service to the Lord.

We should not be misled into thinking what most people today mean when they use the word “happy.” True happiness is found in following, serving, and obeying Christ. The one who is truly happy is so because he knows that the Lord is with him; his heart is in tune with the priorities of the Lord Himself. Thus he knows in his heart that no matter how much he suffers in this life, he will one day surely reap the rewards of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. To what group of epistles does Paul’s letter to the Philippians belong?
2. What was Paul saying in encouraging them to be of one accord?
3. What is clear from the word “robbery” in Philippians 2:6?
4. What was the ultimate demonstration of Christ’s obedience?
5. Whose name is above every other name in the universe?
6. What is the ultimate goal of confessing Christ?
7. Why did Jesus wash His disciples’ feet?
8. What principle did Jesus draw from the foot washing?
9. In what area are Christian disciples and their teachers alike?
10. What is meant by true happiness in Christ?

—John Alva Owston

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Christ humbled Himself. We should do the same (Phil. 2:5-8).
2. Our greatest joy should be knowing that our Saviour will be elevated to the place of supreme authority (vss. 9-11).
3. It is important for us to realize that if we are truly serving the Lord, no task is beneath us (John 13:12).
4. Christians should follow Jesus' example in leading by serving (vss. 13-15).
5. We are not greater than our Lord, who willingly served (vs. 16).
6. Joy comes from doing the Lord's will for us (vs. 17).

—Charity G. Carter.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. It seems that most people are determined to build a great reputation for themselves. How and why would people make themselves "of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7)?
2. Describe a time when you witnessed someone being "highly exalted" to a new level. What was their attitude and demeanor (vs. 9)?
3. Define "confess." What does it mean to "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (vs. 11)?
4. What are some ways you have symbolically washed other people's feet?
5. How can submitting to authority lead to happiness (vs. 17)?

—Charity G. Carter.

Golden Text Illuminated

"But [he] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7).

To defeat sin, God's Son started at the bottom and stayed at the bottom until He died. Overcoming humanity's entrenched arrogance required absolute humility.

Did the Son of God have to feign humility? We know that "the Lord . . . is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14), and the Messiah's role also suggests supremacy: "Thou shalt break [the heathen] with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. 2:9). Because of His power, this question is valid, but the answer is that His humility was real. Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29), and God's Son cannot lie.

Again, Jesus "was made in the likeness of men." This word, "likeness," comes from the Greek word *homo-ioma*. The Bible uses the same word in Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." We were made like God, and Jesus was made like us.

God intended a big happy family, but sin, pain, and human arrogance came and stood in the way. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, but for His mission to succeed, He had to lower Himself in at least three ways. First, He had to be subjected to human weakness and this sin-cursed world. Second, He had to sacrifice His reputation. Third, He had to become a servant unto death for two arrogant people groups: Jews and Gentiles.

—David Samuel Gifford.