

The Humility and Service of Christ in Me
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(READ Phil. 2:5-11)

I find it interesting that the scriptures record loud and enthusiastic praise for Jesus and to Jesus at both his first and second comings; both times in human history when Jesus arrives on earth he receives a lot of positive attention and praise. It happened at the first Christmas when Jesus was born. (Luke 2:13-14) "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom is he pleased!'" When Jesus was born a weary world rejoiced.

And there's also a lot of praise anticipated and expected when Jesus comes again. That's what the last part of our passage from Philipians touches on. A day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Revelation prophecies a ton of praise at Jesus' second coming. We are happy to offer that praise now; we are his church, his saved people, so we've tasted and seen his goodness and glory. But the praise of Jesus will resound like the Niagara Falls in all nations and in all nature at his second coming.

But when you read the gospels and read about the actual life and ministry of Jesus, there's not a lot of praising going on. There's some here and there, but even some of that praise is short lived or superficial. He gets attention, but almost like a circus act. "Do it again, Jesus! Do it again!" and once that's over everybody pretty much goes about their business. Instead, it seems that Jesus' 33 or so years on earth were rather normal. Dare I say even routine and dull. He lived a pretty ordinary life (for the only begotten of the Father, at least). Sure, the last few years of his life were rather dramatic, but that was the exception. Our life is rather normal, too; we have a lot of dull routine. We take 2 steps forward and 1 step back. Throw a few facepalms in there when you make mistakes. And, if you're walking in the Spirit, I'm guessing you practice some dutiful, quiet obedience and have your fair share of heartache and suffering thrown in. That's what Jesus' life was like. He was worthy of endless praise, but got a steady dose of misunderstanding and suffering as he went about his responsibilities in obedience to God.

And there's an example in that, FBC. And it's an example that leads to glory - are you willing to wait for it? Last week, I taught the first half of our short series called *The Humility and Service of Christ in Me*. The goal of this series to become like Jesus; to live out the Christmas story in our daily lives where we honor and glorify our Heavenly Father like Jesus by living a life of service. But that life of service needs to flow from an attitude, a mindset. A life of service doesn't just happen. Paul told the Philipians it only happens when you put on the mind of Christ. That first Christmas, Jesus Christ emptied himself of all his glory and power and took on the form of humanity. He did not grab the high praise and privilege of his Father; he didn't demand some equal status as God. And we must put on that same attitude.

I've learned over the years that moms could easily quote Rodney Dangerfield's favorite motto: I don't get no respect! Case in point. When the temperature is somewhat warm, Korby and I will share some of the cooking because we do a lot of grilling in warmer weather; I do the outside grilling and Korby will take care of everything else. But for half the year (like right now) Korby pretty much carries the entire load of meal preparation by herself. But that doesn't stop some of my boys from giving me a hearty thank you when we sit down for supper. Now, I love that my boys are developing an attitude of appreciation; it usually sounds something like, "Thanks mom and dad!" But they say that even when I don't do anything; they give me credit for Korby's work. So, I say, "Well, you know, your mother did all the work." I'm not really sure why, but they don't want me to feel left out. Judah might say, "Well, you got the butter out, right? You poured my milk?... See, you did something. So thank you, Dad!" like my 30 seconds of help equals Korby's 30 minutes of meal prep. Do you know what my wife does? She simply sits quietly by with the mind of Christ. She doesn't pound the table grasping for the recognition. She doesn't fish for the compliments. She doesn't do those things because she's emptied herself, taking the form of a servant. She's embraced the mind of Christ where glory is found in not in being recognized, but serving in the name of the one who is truly deserving of all recognition. That's where a life of service starts.

But there's another step to being this kind of servant. It obviously starts with an attitude, with a mindset. If you don't have that, you'll never get to the service. But there was more that marked Jesus' life. Look at vs. 8, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Paul lets us know in vs. 8 that the humble mindset of Jesus got translated into action. And did you notice the action? Obedience. Here's the big idea for this morning (I'm just going to tell you): to be a servant like Jesus you must be obedient to God.

It seems obedience is a naughty word in Christianity of late. I remember being told the stories of those many-years-my-senior in churches a lot like ours where many majored on keeping the rules. Faith was about meeting some religious standard and grace seemed to be short supply. No room for mistakes or sinners. Of course, in churches like that people are motivated by fear and guilt and many are pushed away because who can live up to the standards? And then, like it does so often, things swung in a new direction. In the 70s, 80's and 90's a new emphasis on grace was introduced to the church. Books on grace hit the shelves of Christian book stores by popular preachers. It was a huge breath of fresh air to a battered and guilt-laden church. God's lavish, unmerited, unrelenting grace and mercy took center stage.

Today, we're living in the wake of that shift. And, of course, it was a necessary turn, a necessary reminder. But a new problem emerged. Now, it seems, church struggles to fit grace and obedience together. We convinced: Yes, God's grace is free and, yes, God's people must obey him. But, we're perplexed. How do these fit together? And why, again, do I need to obey God if he saves me by grace? And when we can't figure out how they fit together, we'll keep grace and get rid of obedience. And so today obedience has become optional in many churches. Something we *should* do, but not something we *must* do.

With the rest of the time we have, I'm going to try and do the impossible; I'm going to and respond to 3 questions. 1) I want to share with you how grace and obedience fit together (that's really important so we don't become joyless religious zealots OR permissive and worldly frauds), 2) I want to show you where obedience comes from. And 3) I want to talk why you need obedience to get to service. We'll get practical here. I know I'm crazy for trying to do this, but that's just the kind of guy I am.

First of all, how do grace and obedience fit together? I love how Peter puts it in 1 Peter 1:13-19 (READ). I don't have the time to really dig into this, but notice just a few things. First of all, notice how he states clearly that our standing before God, our reception into God's family is a matter of God's grace. Vs. 13 - Set your hope *fully* on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Do you see the word *fully*? Why *fully*? Why not hope in grace and works? Why not hope in my obedience? How about we just don't sweat it and take the everything-will-work-out approach? No. Peter says, "set your hope fully on God's grace in Jesus Christ" because it's your only hope; there is no other hope. You and I and every person to ever live have only one hope; God's grace in Jesus. We are guilty before God; we will be judged. He will banish us to a place of punishment that we do deserve. But Jesus died to save us; Jesus was resurrected so we could live forever with God. And we benefit from Jesus' death and resurrection by calling on Jesus for salvation; we receive his gift of forgiveness by aligning ourselves with Jesus by faith; it's our only hope. That's why we set our hope fully on his grace.

But this new life is one that should be lived obediently. Look at vs. 14; as obedient children don't keep doing the stuff that Jesus died to forgive you of. Look at the end of vs. 15; your conduct needs to be holy because Jesus is holy. God looks at our deeds (vs. 17) so you better care about them. But while God looks and even judges our deeds, how are we saved (look at vs. 18)? *Knowing* that you were ransomed (rescued) from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold (or your good works), but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Do you see how grace and obedience fit? Grace is how we're saved. Our rescue by God is a gift that Jesus purchased for us by dying on the cross. And now as we live these saved and free lives, we care about being obedient. We conduct ourselves obediently before God. We want to be like Jesus so we want to behave like him. Not that our behavior earns us anything; instead, our behavior showcases the glory of God. That's how these two things fit together.

Secondly, where do we get this obedience? Well, we should ask, "where did Jesus get his obedience?" He set the example; how did it work for him? The easy answer might be, "From the Bible." And of course, you can't know God's will without knowing God's word so, certainly, the word of God plays a critical role in our obedience to God. But that's not where it comes from. Also, we might say the Holy Spirit. And that's true as well. God's Spirit living inside of us empowers us to be obedient making us alive to God's will and way. But God uses means to

make us obedient. God uses events and circumstances and even our faithful actions to make us obedient. The answer to this is in Hebrews 5 (READ vs. 7-10).

We see some of the cost Jesus endured to give us the Christmas message and story. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, when he took on flesh (when he became human) he shed that glory and majesty and was like us. He lived in relationship with God like we need to. In frail and broken bodies with faith in God. And then we see in vs. 8 that although he was a son, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. Two quick points.

1. Jesus had to learn obedience. It's not something that came naturally. It's not something he had downloaded from heaven. He learned it. Friends, if he had to learn it, so do you.
2. He learned through suffering. When we think of the suffering of Jesus, we obviously think of his death on the cross. But let's not forget the 33 years of suffering prior to his death. He suffered in life like you and me.

What might some of that suffering be? Well, we think that Joseph, his father, died sometime in Jesus' early life. There's no record of Joseph after Jesus' childhood. So, if he died Jesus endured the pain and suffering of his father's death. Or what if Joseph became unfaithful and deserted his family? There would be a lot of suffering with that, too. We learn in John 8 that Jesus was mocked for not having a father; imagine what scorn Jesus might have endured as a child and adult from his peers. His own brothers hated him; many of us know the pain that comes by having division in the home. And then throw in all the persecution, animosity, and hostility during his 3 year earthly ministry. Jesus suffered.

Here's how this works: sufferings and trials reveal our mettle; they expose our hearts and show what's on the inside. So, these moments of suffering force us to a crossroads: what are we going to do? Which way are we going to go? Are we going to go our own way; are we going to trust our own wisdom (that's disobedience)? Or are we going to trust God's way (that's obedience)? And in the life of a believer, these trials and sufferings lead us to God; they show us that our devotion and obedience to God isn't as pure as we thought. They give us glimpses of our weaknesses. And guess what we then do? We turn back to God. We learn in a deeper way what an obedient life looks like and we start walking that path empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Don't despise your sufferings, my friends. I know they are unpleasant; I know they are hurtful. But God is using them. He's using them to change you, to make you more obedient. That's how it worked for Jesus and that's how it will work for you if He is in you.

Finally, why must I be obedient to serve others? Remember how I just said that in our moments of trial and stress we're going to be tempted to trust your own wisdom and pursue our own desires? That not only leads to a disobedient life, but it also leads to a selfish life. It's not natural for you to prefer the needs of others, to put the interest of others before yourself. You're going to prefer yourself; we all will apart from the power of God's Spirit. And guess what will

diminish as you prefer your needs? Your service to others. You can't be a servant to others and be more concerned with yourself. You just can't.

As Korby and I have talked at length about God's sanctifying work through parenting, it's one of the things that makes parenthood, motherhood, so difficult. Yes, of course, the normal stuff like sick children, increased bills, sleepless nights are hard. But adding to the challenge is dying to yourself more and more. You can't be the moms and dads you want to be if you keep worrying about you. You must die with an attitude of humility. But your flesh, your selfish side, is screaming, "What about me! Look at me! Feed me first!" But you can't do both. You will either serve others in the name of Jesus first (like Jesus did) or you will serve yourself first. I only know of one way you will live a life of service to others when your flesh, your selfish side screams for attention and that's by obediently following the words of Christ. Christ will always direct you in the right way. What's the right way?

Can I ask you to take a step of faith this morning? Can I ask you to push the pause button on all of your Christmas worries like travel and hosting and present shopping to focus on what really matters: being more like Jesus? Can I ask you to consider the humility and service of Jesus and pray, "God, will you give me that this Christmas? Will you help me turn away from my selfish tendencies? Will you make the message, 'put yourself first' repulsive to me? Will you give me the humility of Christ? And will you become obedient to the commands of God? Not because that saves you; but because it's the only path towards being a servant. Friends, if this feels impossible, remember, God is in the gift-giving business. He wants to give you the gift of rescue. Rescuing you from living for yourself and 2 Cor. 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

Questions for the week

- Does "obeying God" sound like good news or bad news to you? How come?
- Do you sometimes think that your obedience to God earns his grace? What can you do to keep God's grace free?
- What was the most helpful and challenging word you heard this morning?