

The Humility and Service of Christ in Me
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It seems everybody wants to share their version of the Christmas story. Charles Schulz does with his Charlie Brown Christmas. So does Dr. Seuss with the Grinch. I wonder how much money Hallmark makes with their many Christmas movies every year. Now, all of these stories are passed on and shared to make an impact. *How the Grinch stole Christmas!* teaches us that the heart of the season can live on in spite of loss. Charlie Brown teaches us that Christmas is bigger than the superficialities. And Hallmark... well, I think they just want to make people cry.

The Bible tells us the story of Christmas, too. In fact, it's the only true and authorized version. But did you know there are several versions of the Christmas story in the Bible as well? The ones we are most familiar with come to us from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. That's where we learn about the wise men and shepherds, Joseph and Mary. But there's more. The prophets were the first to tell the Christmas story. Their stories were about promises; the promise of a coming Savior. They're not so familiar because they don't include our favorite characters; I get that. And just like those other stories I mentioned before, the Bible wants to make an impact in your life as well. That's what I'm hoping to help you see these next two Sundays. I have a brief, 2-week sermon series about how Christmas should impact the way you live your life. How Christmas should change you. I hope you're eager for that.

To begin, let me tell you at least the beginnings of the theological story of Christmas. Here's how it starts: (John 1:1-3, 14) *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 anything made that was made...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Let's stop and talk about what we just heard. Your focus, your attention should be on this Word. The Word is the lead character of this version of the Christmas story. Let's see what we learn about this Word.

1. He was in the beginning. John says it with the same rhythmic and rhetorical sound of Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." If this Word was in the beginning like that, it means this Word is eternal. This Word is from the very foundation of the world. Right away we learn this Word is quite special.
2. The Word was with God. So, this Word wasn't some rogue force or some alien intruder. This Word comes as a partner of God himself.
3. The Word was God. Without missing a beat, John says not only was the Word with God, but the Word was God. Does that leave you scratching your head a tad? How can the Word both be with God, but also be God? Hold that thought and let's consider the last thing I want to draw your attention to.
4. In vs. 14 we learn who this Word is. This Word is the only Son from the Father. This Word, vs. 14 says, became flesh (meaning, became human like you and me - flesh and blood). This is

our direct Christmas reference. We know from the Christmas stories of Matthew and Luke that the virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to a son whose True Father was God himself. That's what John is making reference to here. This Word from the beginning, who was with God, who is, in fact, God himself, is Jesus Christ born to Joseph and Mary.

When I read and think about these deep mysteries, I can feel smoke coming out of my ears a little bit; I can see that's starting to happen to you so let me wrap this part up. I'm hoping you're not surprised that these deep mysteries are just outside of our reach to fully understand. I'm hoping you're not surprised by being left stunned and amazed. We can know God; but it's just that we only know in part, we can only see in part because of his gracious revelation. And instead of making you frustrated, it's meant to inspire you and illicit hope and faith. Part of this mystery of God is that the One God of the Universe - there's just one God - eternally exists in the dynamic relationship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We don't worship three gods, though I know that's what it might sound like. Somehow, mysteriously, beyond our ability to understand, our God is One who exists forever as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now, why bring this up? This probably won't not warm your heart like those Hallmark movies (though I hope that changes over time). This mystery is important to know for the reason I'm about to show you from Phil. 2 This Sunday and next, I'm going to show you how the story of Christmas should impact and change you; why you might live differently because of Christmas. I hope that's good news. I hope you can see that you're not the man or the woman you want to be. And God has help for you. He has truth to lead you to be more alive, more content, more loving than you are today (now that sounds like a great Hallmark movie).

Turn with me to Phil. 2. Now, let me tell you what the Apostle Paul is doing in Phil 2. Paul is teaching this church to live in harmonious peace with one another. That's his desire for them. And to help encourage and teach them how to do that he tells them about Jesus. That's where I want to pick up (READ vs. 5-11).

Ok, here's where we are going these two weeks. The goal, the purpose of our Christian life is to live a life of service to the glory of God, just like Jesus. We just read that's what Jesus did; he took the form of a servant and became obedient to God even to the point of death. And by doing so, he magnified the power and promises of God through his resurrection. Next week, we are going to examine this example of Christ as we seek to make ourselves servants to God in the same way. When we live like that, in loving service to others in the name of Jesus, we worship God as well. But that life of service starts somewhere. A life of service doesn't just happen. It flows from the headwaters of humility and that's we're going to talk about today so we can get to a life of service.

The first thing I want to show you is found in that first verse we read, vs. 5; it says, "Have this mind among yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus." The mind, the mentality that Paul is commanding is one where you sacrifice for others. You prefer the needs and interests of others. You count other people more significant than yourself. That's the mind, the mentality, that Paul says is *already* yours in Christ Jesus

Paul doesn't say this mind *can* be yours; that it *should* be yours. No, he said *it is* yours in Christ Jesus. Friends, this is part of the glorious reality of faith in Jesus Christ. Do you remember how God said, "Let there be light" and then there was light? Just like that. It was there just because God said it; because he declared it to be so. Light came out of nothing because of the order of God. That's what happens when we become followers of Jesus. When we become born again, it's something God pronounces, it's something God declares. He orders it to be and it is by his mercy and grace. Yes, of course, we have a response of faith and worship and obedience. But - and this is what is so important to see - new life, forgiveness of sin, a relationship with God, having the mind of Christ doesn't happen because of our response of faith and worship and obedience. New life happens because God declares it so by his grace.

I know so many of you are like me. There are times that you get discouraged because it doesn't seem that your mind is like Jesus' mind. You're angry when Jesus is patient. You're selfish when Jesus is sacrificial. You're impure when Jesus is pure. My actions don't always match Jesus'. And I get discouraged by that; I know many of you do, too. And that's where this word from Paul is so encouraging. Have this mind among yourself (so, put it on. Live this way! It's a command to do it) which *is yours* in Christ Jesus. He's already given you this by his grace just like he's already given you his forgiveness by grace. When we are born again, FBC, when God makes us new he gives us - already! - the gift of the presence and power of Jesus. It's already ours. We don't have to wait to receive it; we don't have to wonder if we will receive it all. We just have to put it on in faith.

So, this mind, this posture, that leads to a life of service is one where I count others more significant than myself. Now that is quite countercultural; that's very different than what our world says we should be like. I just read an article this past week about Christmas; here's the title: *Putting yourself First this Christmas*. That's a tempting message; We're only a week into December and my wife is on a service warpath. The timer is burning rubber with the amount of hours she's putting in for other people so they can have a great Christmas. I bet it's tempting for her think, "I should put myself first this Christmas." It sounds like the medicine for a weary body and soul. It's just that's the exact opposite attitude Jesus had and that Jesus gives us.

What kind of attitude did Jesus have? Look at vs. 6 (READ). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equal. One's not *better* or *more important* than the other. But notice the attitude of Jesus. He didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped; to be held onto. He wasn't going to demand equal attention or notoriety. What did he do? He emptied himself. He spent himself. When Jesus came to earth to be born of Mary, he shed so much of his glory and power. He took the form of a vulnerable child.

Since all my boys have graduated from the baby-cute stage, I'm starting to look for babies to hold. It's fun to get my 10 minute fix and then hand them back when they need a new diaper. Babies are are fragile and vulnerable. I remember when I was a first time dad being afraid of dropping or hurting Eli. Sure, babies are adored, but not because of their majesty or glory, not because of their power or strength.

Jesus had a mindset, he had an attitude, a disposition that compelled him to come to earth, to take on flesh and blood, to be born a baby boy, to save us from our sins. It was an attitude of humility. An attitude that said, "I'm not concerned about getting my own. I'm not going to put myself first. I'm not worried about getting the attention, getting the fame. In fact, I want everyone to know my Father. My Father in heaven is kind, he's gracious and merciful. He's powerful and amazing. But he's also misunderstood; he's not known. I want to change that. I am going to live, I'm even going to die so that people can know my Father." That's the attitude of humility that Jesus needed to have to live the life of service that we admire.

And you need to have it, too, if you want to experience the life-changing power of the Christmas story. Friends, this is the heart of Christmas; Jesus Christ emptying himself of all of his kingly glory with an attitude of humility. Will you empty yourself to become the men and women that God is calling you to be? Will you stop thinking about yourself all the time and what you think you deserve and become like Jesus? Are you willing to let go of even what you could rightly claim as your own? That's hard to do, isn't it? It's just so hard to have this mind ourselves. I mean, it's not that we don't work hard to serve; it's not that we're unwilling to make sacrifices. But when do I get my thanks? When do I get a little recognition? Or how about a break; I work, work, work, but I never seem to get a break like everybody else.

I know I have a long way to go. Do you? And how do we get there? What needs to change in here (head) and in here (heart) so that I have the right mindset? Let me make suggestion something to you.

Embrace your New Birth. What do I mean by that? I mean that if God has truly given you eyes to see that you are a sinner and that Jesus is a merciful and powerful Savior and you've realigned your life to follow Jesus in faith (that's what it means to be Born Again - to experience the New Birth) than embrace it. What do you mean *embrace it*, Brian? I mean, go all the way. Just don't talk about this in one aspect of your life, embrace it with every aspect of your life because when we are Born Again what happened? We died to ourselves. That's the realignment that I just mentioned. That's what Paul means when he says (Gal. 2:20), "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." We just read 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

You see, the part of you that wants the attention, that wants the notoriety, the part of you that thinks it's right to put yourself first is the old you, the dead you. It's the part of you that needed to die on Jesus' cross. And if you're truly born again, you did die on that cross; the old man or woman has been put to death. So, why are you trying to resurrect that old, dead, prideful you that wants attention and recognition and favors? That's what I mean by saying embrace your *New Birth*.

You see, here's what happens: most of the time when we come to Jesus we really didn't know what we were signing up for. We thought we were signing up for God's love and his forgiveness from

our sins and a mansion in heaven when we die. And, yes, people told me that I had to repent, that I had to turn to Jesus and away from my sin. But what we didn't realize when we first came to Jesus is just how much and how often we would have to turn. How much we'd have to die. We didn't really know the depth of our rebellion and the claim Jesus Christ was making on our lives. We had a clue, but not like this. And so here's what happens: as we walk with Jesus and we go through the trials of life we see more clearly what true faith in Jesus really looks like. And it requires more humility, more sacrifice, more surrender, more obedience, more faith than we ever dreamed. And when we hit that moment and see it, we're taken back a little and the battle rages. Do I really want to keep following Jesus? Will I be obedient even now? And here's what we American Christians typically do; we ignore the demand of following. We pretend it's not there. We act like the calls of total surrender is for this super-spiritual Christians. Us normal Christians can keep putting ourselves first. We can be a little selfish. We can keep our favorite Juke-a-ma-zoom and still follow Jesus.

This is why you hear around here the call to keep repenting. To keep turning. Friends, I'm regularly learning of my need to keep repenting. And do you know what, my flesh hates it. The selfish part of me doesn't want to keep repenting. That's why I need to keep hearing God's word, I need to keep coming to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to keep turning to Jesus. It's why I need to keep singing the songs of praise reminding myself that there is no better place to be than in the presence of Jesus. Embrace your New Birth, FBC, all the way.

Maybe you're wondering: Ok, Brian, but if I truly empty myself, if I take on the humble mind myself considering God and others before myself... who's going to take care of me? Great question. And you're right. When you humble yourself you leave yourself vulnerable and open. It's scary to think of being so humble. That's why Jesus pronounces with a beautifully bold voice, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Jesus has grace for you when you are humble. In the scriptures, grace is the empowerment of God. Do you remember Paul talking about his weaknesses in 2 Cor. 12? And when he was discouraged and fearful in his weakness Jesus proclaimed (vs. 9), "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power [what power? The power of his grace; he just said it] is made perfect in weakness."

So, go ahead, FBC. Celebrate Christmas with a change of attitude; be humble like Jesus. Empty yourself like Jesus. Don't worry about getting your own; don't focus on the attention others are getting. Don't be preoccupied with yourself at all; be preoccupied with Jesus. And when you humble yourself like that, embracing your New Birth, Jesus will liberally provide his grace for you and take care of your every need.

Key vs. Phil. 2:5

Questions for the week

- What thoughts and emotions are produced in you when you think about the mysterious nature of God (i.e. wonder, confusion, joy, frustration)? How come?
- What prevents you from embracing the mind of Christ?
- Why is it so important to change your thoughts before your actions?