

The Humiliation of Christ

One of the songs we sang in the cantata a few minutes ago was the *Poverty Carol*, a song composed many years ago by a musician in Wales. It's a song I was not familiar with until we learned it for this program.

The lyrics are:

All poor men and humble, All lame men who stumble
Come haste ye, nor feel ye afraid.

For Jesus our treasure, With love past all measure,
In lowly poor manger was laid.

...

Then haste we to show him The praises we owe him;
Our service he ne'er can despise:

Whose love still is able To show us that stable
Where softly in manger he lies.

The song urges the poor and the humble to come to Jesus, who himself began his human experience in poverty and humility. He was born in a stable and laid in a "poor manger." He was content to be born into that very humble condition.

2Co 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

There is more than one variety of poverty. We may be poor and lame in a physical or a spiritual sense. Jesus conferred a blessing on those who were poor in spirit. In fact, it's only those who recognize that they are spiritual bankrupt who turn to Christ for salvation. It's the sick who need a physician. Jesus came to earth in humility, and those who follow Jesus must humble themselves and admit their own weakness and failure.

Jesus warmly welcomes those who join him in his humility. Self-confident, wealthy, powerful people seldom see their need for Jesus. It's the poor, the lame, the broken who sense their need for forgiveness and restoration. The composer urges us—"haste ye, and be not afraid" to approach Jesus, because he too is humble and lowly.

Perhaps the supreme passage explaining Jesus' humiliation is Phil 2:6-7. This passage gives us insight into what really happened when Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to earth. This is a passage rich in meaning and theology, especially regarding the nature of Christ. We may not think of it as a Christmas text, but it certainly is.

Today we'll consider some important truths about Jesus' humiliation in coming to earth as a baby.

I. Prior to His birth in Bethlehem, Jesus enjoyed equality with God.

Two phrases show us this truth very clearly.

A. "being in the form of God"

1. A common *misunderstanding* of this statement is that Jesus was somehow less than God because He had only the "form/appearance" of God, not the nature/essence of divinity. That is precisely the opposite of what Paul is saying here.
2. The word "form" (μορφή) describes the characteristics or qualities that are essential to a thing. Form describes what a thing is by nature.
3. When Paul says that Jesus existed in the "form" of God, he's claiming that Jesus had those characteristics which are *essential* to God. So he's saying something like, "while being essentially God..."
4. This is a very clear statement of Jesus' deity. The Bible teaches that Jesus is essentially and equally God.

App: People are willing to say many things about Jesus—that he was a great teacher, a good example, a great moral philosopher perhaps. But the Bible clearly and repeatedly asserts that Jesus is God in the flesh. If a person is unwilling to affirm that, he has no business calling himself a Christian. And he has no hope of salvation.

B. “thought it not robbery to be equal with God”

1. The word “robbery” describes something retained or held by force. The word refers to “a thing to be grasped, a thing to be held on to, like a prize or treasure.”
2. Jesus determined not to hold on to/retain something – “to be equal with God”
 - (a) Jesus was willing to release, temporarily, his glorified position where he enjoyed equality with God.
 - (b) This does *not* imply that Jesus was no longer equal with God when he came to earth. God cannot cease being God.
 - (c) He’s saying here that Jesus determined not to hold on to his position of honor/glory/majesty with God.

Trans: So we have a couple of statements that tell us about Jesus’ nature: 1) His nature or essence is the same as God; 2) He did hold on to his exalted position of majesty and honor. This is the first step in his humiliation.

II. Jesus temporarily laid aside the privileges of Deity.

“made himself of no reputation” -- The original language says literally, “emptied himself.”

- A. Of what did Christ “empty” Himself when He took on human flesh?
1. *Not* His deity nor His attributes, both of which are eternally essential to Him. God can’t give up his attributes and still be God.
 2. The words “emptied Himself” imply something like “gave up his rights.” When Christ left the glories of heaven to come to earth, He temporarily laid aside full, visible display of His glory (other than a partial unveiling during His Transfiguration in Matt 17:1-2).
 3. Actually, the KJV translation seems to get the sense just about right: “made himself of no reputation.” It’s talking about Jesus’ humiliation in coming to earth and taking on human flesh. He emptied himself in the sense of humbling himself.

- B. Jesus gave up the *status* and *privilege* that was his in heaven: he did not count equality with God a thing to be clung to for his own advantage, but “emptied himself” or “humbled himself” for our sake, and came to live as a man.

Trans: So we find this remarkable contrast: Jesus was in form/nature God, enjoying equality with God and all the glories of heaven. He left the privileges of deity behind when he came to earth, humbling himself to take on the nature of a human.

III. Jesus added to himself a fully human nature.

This is what we call the “incarnation” – God taking on human flesh. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th’ incarnate Deity!” (from “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” by Charles Wesley).

We then find 3 phrases saying how he did that:

A. “took upon him the form of a servant”

1. God the Son added humanity to himself. He existed as fully and equally God; but when he came to earth he “took upon him” a human nature. How? Via the virgin birth.

Luke 1:35 And the angel ... said unto [Mary], The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

2. “The form”—this is important because of how Paul used the word earlier—“form of God.” This shows us that we’re not just talking about the appearance of things, but the true nature of things.
3. “Of a servant”
 - (a) The word “servant/slave” is a term of abasement and humiliation, the exact opposite of the term “Lord.”
 - (b) Christ entered human life as a person without advantage, with few rights or privileges of his own.

(c) He was born to serve, not to be served.

App: Because of Jesus' humble position, he can fully identify with us. He can have sympathy with us because he has personal experience as a lowly servant. He was born into very humble circumstances.

In the *Poverty Carol*, the composer urges those who are poor and lame to come to Christ without fear because Jesus himself was born into poverty. He was “meek and lowly in heart.” He was always receptive to those who came to him humbly, acknowledging their sins.

B. “was made in the likeness of men”

1. Paul previously said that Jesus “existed” (KJV “being”) in the form of God. That speaks of eternal existence.
2. Now he uses the term “was made,” which speaks of beginning or becoming. Jesus' existence as a human had a beginning point—at his conception.
3. .8 The word “fashion” (σχήματι) usually speaks of outward form or appearance. Jesus took upon himself a normal human body. He looked like a regular person.

App: People sometimes wonder what Jesus looked like. We don't have any accurate pictures. No one today knows what he looked like.

Often in paintings we see him looking very other-worldly, very different than typical people—halo around his head, shining garments, etc. E.g., “Silent Night” lyrics—“radiant beams from thy holy face...”

When Jesus was born, he looked like a normal child. Later in life, Jesus looked like a typical Jewish man of that era. He didn't stand out in a crowd. There was nothing particularly unusual about his appearance.

Isa 53:2 ... he hath no form nor comeliness (majesty); and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Jesus so fully adopted “the likeness of men” that he appeared to be quite ordinary. But he was anything but average; he was the unique Son of God.

Vs. 8 The final, culminating act of humiliation Jesus faced was death on the cross. He came into the world for that very purpose—to provide a final, perfect sacrifice that would take away sin. Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus receive the benefits of his sacrificial death—forgiveness of sins and a home in heaven.

Our focus at this time of year is Jesus birth, the incarnation—his taking on of human flesh. His birth marked the beginning of this process whereby he humbled himself in order to provide the final sacrifice for sin.

This passage tells us much about what happened when the Son of God came to earth.

- 1) Jesus existed in the form of God and enjoyed equality with God;
- 2) he emptied himself, temporarily laying aside the glories of heaven and the rights of divinity, making himself of no reputation;
- 3) he added to his deity the form of a servant, the likeness of men, and was born into very humble circumstances. His final act of humiliation was his death on the cross.

The *Poverty Carol* reminds us that Jesus welcomes humble, broken people. He was born in very humble surroundings to poor parents. His first days were spent in a feeding trough most likely surrounded by farmyard animals. The Bible assures us that Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. He understands the human condition. He’s well aware that we are broken, sinful people. When we come to him humbly and repentantly, he will welcome us warmly.

Jesus put it his way: Mt 11:28-30 *Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light.*

That invitation still stands today. In the words of the *Poverty Carol*: All poor men and humble, All lame men who stumble Come haste ye, nor feel ye afraid.