

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Our Great Example Philippians 2:5-11

Intro: Paul begins [ch2](#) by returning to his exhortation for proper Christian conduct that he began to discuss in [1:27](#). When believers engage in, or rather practice conduct that reflects the reality of their heavenly citizenship, it will manifest itself in a level of Christian unity that will be noticeable to all outside observers. It will also result in a type of evangelism that will be nothing less than assertive and effective. As [ch2](#) open, Paul again says that if the Philippian believers have experienced any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any affection and mercy; then they should be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord and one mind. Of course, as believers in Jesus Christ and children of God, they had experienced all these things to the full. Paul is merely calling them to live in such a way that reflects this obvious truth.

In order to remove any ambiguity or confusion, Paul goes on to describe to the Philippians (and us) what this unity brought on by our heavenly citizenship should look like. Essentially, it is the denial of selfish ambition and conceit on the part of the individual believer and the taking up of the responsibility to look out for the interests of others. This may seem like a tall order – and it is, but just because a command is difficult doesn't mean we can just disregard it. Sure, this is one command in a long list of commands that Christians are to adhere to but let me assure you, this one is important. Caring for others is at the heart of a right relationship with God and all rebellion against God is inevitably linked to a corresponding disregard for others.

Let's consider the case of Lucifer: originally the highest of all created beings, the anointed cherub who was to lead all creation in worship of God. But that wasn't enough for him! He wanted to become like the Most High, a name of God that means Possessor of heaven and earth. Old Lucifer didn't want to rule with God, but instead of God. He let his selfish ambition get the better of him. While his plan didn't succeed it did succeed well enough in that it has brought misery to millions of people and angels and continues to do so still today. The chief good of all creation lies in communion with God. In opposition to this, Lucifer exalted himself and brought misery to those

who followed him.

Today, we are going to briefly look at the greatest tragedy of history and compare it to the greatest story ever told and relate it to Paul's exhortation to proper Christian conduct.

5-11 – In **Isa 14** there are two verses that tell of the thoughts that entered Lucifer's head at the moment when he first rebelled against God (**13-14**). Every verb and every image in this passage points to Satan's *desire* to rise to the zenith of God's universe: I will ascend...I will exalt...I will sit...I will be. Satan boasted that he would go up. But the words that follow (**15**) speak of his actual destiny: "But you shall be brought down to Sheol..."

Our text contains the NT counterpart to Lucifer's words in Isaiah. These verses illustrate the descent of Jesus Christ from the highest position in the universe down to His death on the cross. Then, they carry us up again to see Him seated once more on the throne of His glory before which every knee shall bow. Satan said, "I will go up . . . up . . . up" but God said, "You will be cast down to hell." Jesus said, "I will go down to the cross" and God the Father said, "You will be given a name that is above every name."

This passage is one of the most glorious sections in the NT. Here is seen the great sweep of Jesus' life from eternity past to eternity future and we're granted a private viewing of the breathtaking purposes of God in human salvation. This text is unique in the NT because it alone provides an open door into the mind of Jesus Christ. It tells us what His thought processes were as He came to earth and it tells us why He came. Of course, Paul doesn't provide all that's in the mind of Christ. He highlights only those qualities of Jesus that fit the needs of the Philippians at the time. Thus, the lack of unity among the Philippian believers provided the occasion for the greatest Christological passage in the NT. It plumbs the very depths of the essence of Jesus Christ, His incarnation and His eventual glorification!

But, despite the great doctrinal statement that is made here, we must remember that behind it all, Paul is focusing on the attitude that exists behind the story of Jesus. He is taking this attitude and presenting it to every believer as the pattern on which we should base our lives. This pattern is what lies behind all reality: everything we know to be true, factual - correct. This is also the pattern by which God will ultimately judge all of His

creation. The story Paul tells is a story of cosmic proportions. It is the greatest story ever told; it is the story against which all other stories are either pale reflections or outright perversions of.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this passage is how it was received by the early believers. Paul is talking about a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived only a generation before in Jerusalem. He's declaring tremendous things about Him. Yet, he says these things in such a way that we know he's not inventing new doctrines, nor is he arguing a hotly contested position. Paul is merely presenting what he knew to be the accepted teaching of all the Christian churches. Paul writes these things as if every Christian knew them to be true beyond question.

These verses bring us near to the bedrock of the early Christian faith and preaching. They contain most of the distinctive articles of the early Christian creed. They teach the divinity of Christ, His preexistence, His equality with God the Father, His incarnation and true humanity, His voluntary death on the cross, the certainty of His ultimate triumph over evil, and the permanence of His reign. Some scholars have foolishly tried to dismiss some of these doctrines as late developments in church history but that is clearly not the case. These doctrines concerning Jesus were always known. Christianity is Christ—this Christ. These things were believed about Him from the beginning.

I will admit that Paul uses an economy of words in his delivery of the great doctrines of Jesus Christ in this passage. It is just 7 short verses but they are pregnant with meaning; they are bursting with so many truths that are impossible to find in any other single location in Scripture. So, in order to do the text justice, we're going to do an overview of it today and then deal with the individual sections next time. First, we'll fly over the forest to see the lay of the land and then we'll get down and walk through the forest to see what treasures are hidden beneath the canopy.

5 – Paul is about to describe to us, in wonderful detail, the mind of Christ in the following verses. But, before he describes the mind of Jesus to us, he tells us what we should do with the information: let this mind be in you... It's all too easy for us to read the following description of Jesus and stand back and admire it from a distance. God wants us to be awed by this glorious information but He doesn't want us to stop there. He also wants us to see

this attitude of Jesus as something that we must enter into and imitate. When Paul says, “Let this mind...” it means that this is something we actually have a choice about. Paul here is applying the lesson before he even delivers it.

You might be shocked at this assertion, thinking that it's quite a tall order to just decide to have the mind of Christ but that's not the case at all. Paul tells us in **I Cor** that we already have the mind of Christ (**2:14-16**). How is this possible? Well, if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you have been given the Spirit of God (**14**). The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Trinity. But, both Paul and Peter also refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ (**Rom 8:9; I Pt 1:11**). If you're wondering how it's possible for a believer to know the mind of Christ; all they need to do is listen to the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ. We already have the mind of Christ. What Paul is saying here is that we must choose to walk in it. You have to let it be so.

The 1st view we have of Jesus is a reference to His pre-incarnate state. Here He is preeminent. Paul says that before His incarnation, Jesus was in the form of God and was God's equal. These are 2 terms that explain each other. To be in the form of God is to be equal with God. Form is translated from the rare Greek word *morphe*, which only occurs twice in the Greek NT. It doesn't mean “image” as in the image of God in human beings. It refers to both the outward appearance of something, and its essential nature. What Paul is saying here is that Jesus existed before His appearance on earth and if you were blessed to see Him, the vision would be the vision of God.

Of course, Paul didn't believe that God was literally visible and this statement wasn't meant to suggest that God has a physical form, but only that Jesus possesses all of God's attributes; that He is God. Is God omniscient? So is Jesus. Is God all-powerful? So is Jesus. Is God the creator, the redeemer, the truth, the way, the life, the past, the present, the future? So is Jesus. Paul's phrase being in the form of God is a deliberate declaration of Jesus' divinity.

Here Paul's words soar to the same heights John reaches in the magnificent prologue to his Gospel (**Jn 1:1-4**). The same preeminence was taught by Jesus when He referred in prayer to “the glory which I had with You before the world was” (**Jn 17:5**). This is Christ's past glory. It's this great

preeminence He possessed in eternity past that gives so much value to citing His life as the ultimate pattern of humility and self-sacrifice.

Another word that needs to be addressed is robbery. This comes from the Greek word *harpagmos* which has been translated as something to be exploited or something to be grasped. In essence, Jesus didn't consider the outward manifestation of His divinity (glory) as something to be held on to selfishly for His own ends. This fits nicely with the point Paul is making to the Philippians. They shouldn't act out of selfishness or self-aggrandizement but, like Jesus Himself, they should put aside their status and self-interest for the benefit of others. The picture Paul paints of God here is quite staggering. The eternal Creator of all things sees His power and glory as simply a means to offer help and salvation to His human creations.

The 2nd view of Jesus in our text is His condescension. Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate state in eternity past, was above all humans and above all angels. Yet He became lower than both out of love for humanity and in obedience to His heavenly Father. Even Paul, who had suffered many beatings, shipwrecks, torture and stoning, would never have had to go to the extremes that Jesus suffered. Paul was a Roman citizen and was exempt from crucifixion. There was no depth to which Jesus did not go. Instead of standing on His pride, the divine Christ emptied Himself

Imagine the scene that must have taken place in heaven before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. God is omniscient, but angels aren't. The Bible says there are aspects of salvation that angels don't understand but "long to look into" (1 Pr 1:12). The angels must have known Jesus would descend to earth and they had to be wondering what form He would take on to enter human history. They had only ever known Him as the preeminent and glorious Son of God, the 2nd Person of the Trinity. Would He appear in a blaze of light bursting into the night, dazzling all who beheld Him? Would He appear as a mighty general marching into pagan Rome? Would He come as the wisest of philosophers, putting the wisdom of Plato and Socrates to foolishness by a supernatural display of intellect? To the shock and surprise of the angelic host, there was no display of glory, no pomp, no marching of the heavenly legions! Instead Jesus laid aside the glory that was His from eternity. He steps down from the heavenly throne and becomes a baby in the arms of a mother in a backwater of the Roman Empire. At this display of divine condescension the angels are amazed, and they burst into such a

swelling of praise that the shepherds heard them on the hills of Bethlehem.

Setting aside His glory and coming to earth as a baby was not the extent of Christ's condescension. It was a big part of it but it wasn't the worst part of it. It wasn't enough for Jesus to just become human. He who shared the form of God from eternity past descended to the level of a slave! In the Greco-Roman world, you couldn't get any lower than the level of a slave. A slave was property, in legal terms and sometimes in experience. A slave was a living tool, a thing rather than a person. You might ask, "Who was Jesus a slave of?" That's beside the point. Paul's just stressing the huge change in status that the incarnation brought about. It was impossible for him to find a lower status to illustrate the degree of the divine humility Jesus displayed.

Still, there may be other ideas associated with Paul's choice of image here. Crucifixion was the typical punishment of rebellious slaves and so the mention of death on the cross follows naturally from this. Jesus Christ not only became the lowest of the low, He also suffered the most humiliating and terrible fate for a slave.

The final picture we have is of Jesus again on the throne of heaven. 4 times in His ministry Jesus spoke on the text: "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" ([Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14](#)). Jesus didn't just teach this principle, He lived it! His own life is the greatest example of that principle.

The first half of each clause in the sentence has an active verb. The individual must humble himself, rather than exalt himself. The second half of each clause has a passive verb: will be humbled and will be exalted. The individual is exalted by God. We find the same thing in our text. Everything that's said in the first 4 verses of [Phil 2:5-11](#) has Jesus as the subject. He didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. He made Himself nothing. He became obedient. The second half of the passage has God as the subject, and Jesus is passive ([9-10](#)).

Grasp what Paul is saying here - Jesus will reign and God the Father will see to it! The thought is also solemn as it embraces all of mankind. You will see Him and you will bow before Him. Will it be in love and adoration as you fall gratefully before the One who loved you and died for you? Or will it be

by compulsion as you are forced to your knees by the angels moments before you are removed from His presence forever? Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). Jesus is the Savior who loves you and gave Himself for you. Today is still the day of His grace and He still offers it to you. Won’t you come to Him today?

A last important point to ponder is the way in which this great passage is introduced to the Philippians. It’s not an abstract statement of a difficult doctrine. It’s not a controversial section at all. It’s just a part of Paul’s argument to the hearts of his readers on behalf of Christian conduct. Paul’s not battling an error of faith; he’s pleading for a life of love. He knows full well the temptations that threatened to destroy the harmony of Christian fellowship at Philippi. His desire is that they should be “of one accord, of one mind”; and to achieve that blessed end they should forget about themselves and remember others. He appeals to them by their common share in Christ, in the Spirit, and by their affection for himself.

But there’s one more plea and that’s for them to have “the mind that was in Christ Jesus;” the mind He had when He came down from heaven, and was made man, and suffered for us. Here is both the model and the motive for the Philippian saints and every other believer. Paul exhorts us to be of one mind with each other, how much more should we be of one mind with Jesus Christ – His mind! Nothing short of the “mind” of the Head must be the “mind” of the member; and then later, the glory of the Head will be shared with the member too: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne (Rev 3:21).

Paul’s not just disseminating facts, delivering doctrine or spouting rhetoric. He’s making an unapologetic appeal for unselfishness and harmony. What powerful lever does he employ to move the affections and the will of his readers? Nothing less than the reason of reasons, argument of arguments—the Lord Jesus Christ! Nothing in Christianity lies outside of Him. His person and His work embody all its teaching. His example is the sum of our morality and life.

The writer of Hebrews describes it as “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Do you long to be pardoned from sin and accepted by

God? You will only find it, possess it, by “looking unto Jesus” crucified. As a believer, do you need power, victory over sin, opportunities to witness? You will find it and possess it as you “look unto Jesus” risen and reigning. Do you desire a biblical model to live according to? You won’t find it in commandments written on stone tablets. You will only find it or receive it as you yield yourself up to it, as we “look unto Jesus” in His path of love, from the throne to the cross, from the cross to the throne, till the Spirit inscribes that law upon our inner most hearts.

How true that is! How much we all need to constantly look to Jesus! Have you done that? Will you do it? To look to Jesus is to look to One who is altogether lovely and who is able to satisfy the deep longings of your heart.

