

July 13, 2008  
Houghton Lake UMC

## **“Jesus’ Great Humility”**

Philippians 2:1-7

How can we get a glimpse of whom God really is? How can we truly understand the great expanse of infinity? After all, we are only human. From our minute perspective a few inches above the terra-firma, we gaze through the fog of earth’s atmosphere and stand in awe by what we see. How can we, who know less than 100 years of living, comprehend a being outside of time? How can we, who know only the distance of a few thousand miles, comprehend a being without boundary---both through the telescope and outer space, and through the microscope and inner space? God is the being who fills all in all. How can we comprehend a being who knows the pressure of a black hole a million light-years away, and at the very same time knows the very thoughts of our hearts? How can we understand a being who creates and destroys at the same time, and who saves by dying so that we may be born again?

And yet, that is what we attempt to do when we try to describe the sacrifice of Gods’ incarnation into human flesh when Jesus, the very Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, was born in Bethlehem. In an instant, the one who knows all things stepped down from the infinite and became a baby in a young girl’s womb. The one who was all-powerful became helpless and needy and totally dependent.

Max Lucado describes it this way:

“The Omnipotent, in one instant, made himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierceable. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. The creator of life being created.”

How can we grasp a being, omnipotent, all powerful, becoming a helpless baby? How can we understand a being who dwells outside of our space / time existence but who decides to become a part of our human existence and history? After all, deciding to be born in this world

guarantees that He will die! And yet, that is what we are trying to grasp when we proclaim with John in chapter 1 of his gospel that, “The word became flesh and we beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

There is only one way to describe it. He “emptied himself” of all he was and became like we are. This emptying -- this humbling -- we call the “Incarnation” in theological terms.

Incarnation: “the taking on of human form and nature.” That is the dictionary’s definition of the word. But, in our text today, Philippians Chapter 2, Paul describes it much more graphically. “Who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (to be held on to) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

You see, my friends, Jesus was alive before he was born. He is the only being that has done or could do that. In Genesis 1:1 the Bible tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God the Father had the blueprint for creation. In Genesis 1:2, the second verse of the Bible, it says, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The Holy Spirit was also actively involved in creating. But that isn’t the end of the creation story. John 1:1-3 tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Later in the chapter (verse 14) John declares that the “Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Begotten Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus was the one who did the creating, my friends! He was there!

Jesus witnessed the creation of Adam and Eve, the temptation by Satan, and the fall of the human heart from perfection into sin. Jesus, the Son of God, has witnessed the unfolding of all of human history. Jesus witnessed the flood, the covenant with Abraham, and the burning bush of Moses. Jesus watched as David was anointed King of Israel and Solomon dedicated his temple.

But, he also watched as 400 years of kings came and went and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He witnessed the Babylonian captivity, Daniel in the Lions' den, Esther's brave announcement to King Xerxes, and Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem. He witnessed Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire conquer Israel and then dissolve as the Roman Empire took over the world. He watched it all, and he knew the time when he would come and demonstrate his love for us. Jesus knew all things but chose to limit himself at the perfect time in human history.

In Galatians 4:4 Paul described Jesus' incarnation like this: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

The time was right, and Jesus did not argue. He voluntarily humbled himself, emptying himself of the infinite, and was born as a baby on Christmas morning.

Is it any wonder then, that the angels sang and all of heaven burst with song? Jesus would voluntarily humble himself and empty himself to become a being of his own creation. Jesus would come and show us the very face of God.

We often think of Jesus' great sacrifice in terms of his death on the cross, because it was on the cross that he paid the price for our sin. But, that was actually Jesus' third great sacrifice. Jesus' first great sacrifice was the incarnation. His second was becoming subject to death. His third sacrifice was dying on the Roman cross, to be resurrected by God, the Father. Jesus went all the way.

Jesus came in human form, to correct the human condition. Jesus came to show us God -- to show us faith in action, to show us perfect humility, perfect obedience, and complete self-sacrifice. Jesus came to be the perfect example of a human being obedient to God. Jesus came to be the second Adam on the earth, and to do it right this time. Jesus came to begin the process of rebuilding the communion humans once had with God in the Garden of Eden. The power of sin and death, however, had built a wall between God and us that could not be broken without God's direct intervention. Jesus was that direct intervention.

I want us to clearly understand God's sacrifice for us -- and acknowledge that the sacrifice did not begin at the cross. It began at Jesus' incarnation and lasted until the resurrection took place. Jesus' entire human experience was God's sacrifice for us, and it was a far greater sacrifice than he asks of us.

Today, through faith in Jesus Christ, the gap between God and our sinful hearts can be bridged. God has made a way for us to conquer sin and live in victory with him, because Jesus came and lived among us and endured our pain without sinning. Jesus came and lived our lives, being tempted in every way just like we are. The writer to the Hebrews described it in this way: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 5:7-10)

My friends, Jesus, the Son of God, came for you and for me. He came that we might see God in action, reaching out for us in love and mercy and forgiveness. Jesus is God in human form. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible, spiritual, God. He came that we would know him as he really is, and that we might love him and follow him into eternal life. God was willing to sacrifice everything so that we could have an intimate relationship with him once again. Jesus made that sacrifice complete when he died on the cross. He showed us what real humility is. Because of Jesus' obedience we can have that intimacy with God through prayer and worship. We can have that intimacy every moment of the day when we seek him daily in prayer and worship, praise and obedient service.

What else does the Apostle Paul show us in this Kenosis passage? What happened because of Jesus' humility? God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest place. The Father gave "Jesus a name that is above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

In this passage Paul is calling us to be just as humble. He wants us to humble ourselves in full surrender to God's will for our lives so that God the Father can exalt us, as well. That's what will happen when we are allowed to enter heaven and eternal life. Paul is calling us to follow Jesus' example, to rely on God the Father in every way, so that God can exalt us in his time and way with blessing and, eventually, with eternal life.

Will we face pain and hardship? Yes. Jesus did. Will we be overworked and exhausted? Yes. Jesus was. Will we be broken by life, misunderstood, betrayed by friends, and challenged in every way to fail? Yes. This is all possible, and Jesus experienced all of these things. It was a part of his obedience to God, living in a world that failed to understand his mission and his vision. When we join Jesus on the road of faith we certainly can experience all of the things that Jesus experienced -- even martyrdom. Praise the Lord, we live in a country that protects our freedom to worship and walk by faith. But there are those in our world who pay the ultimate price because of their faith in Christ.

Hear again the Paul's exhortation for us (it begins with today's text): "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." This is what Paul wants us to be as a congregation in Houghton Lake, Michigan. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." This is what Paul wants us to practice with each other. He wants us to build one another up, to encourage each other to be righteous and holy and like Jesus in humility. We are to imitate Jesus so that when the perfect time comes, God can exalt us to our proper place in His kingdom. It starts with complete humility.

Let us pray...

Lord, we come to you today, humbled by what you have sacrificed for us. We come today, challenged to be like you in thought, word and deed, and challenged to be truly humble in

spirit. We come today with the challenge to consider others better than ourselves, to exalt those who are around us, and to live righteous, holy lives. Take away our boasting and our conceit. Help us to find our strength, our righteousness and our self-esteem in you and in your great gifts of grace and forgiveness. Help us to practice exalting others and being people who encourage goodness and kindness in those around us. Help our attitudes to be the same as Christ Jesus.

In your name we pray, Amen