

Joy From a Jailhouse

==A Letter to the Philippians==

8 — How to Walk in the Attitude of Christ

In his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis offers some helpful insights for understanding the unfathomable reality of the incarnation of Christ: In the Christian story, God comes down—down from the glory of heaven into time and space—down into humanity. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. It is the picture of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then flying downward in mid-air, then gone with a splash—vanished—rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the deathlike region of ooze and slime and old decay—then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks the surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious prize that he went down to recover. *That is what Jesus did for us in his incarnation.*

The incarnation is one of the focal points of the Christian faith—one of the most grand and wonderful things that God has ever done. This miracle of miracles is the theme of Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV). Let read those verses now: ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* ⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* ⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Based on the context of these verses, the goal of believers having the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus is unity in the church. Unity in the church can only come from an attitude of genuine humility, in which believers truly regard others as more important than themselves—which is the same attitude manifested in Jesus during His incarnation. The apostle John makes it clear that *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus [walked].* 1 John 2:6 (NIV) And Jesus commanded: *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* Matthew 11:29 (NIV)

The whole church must learn from the humility of Jesus. One of the most revealing instances of His humility was when He washed His disciples’ feet during the Last Supper. The menial task of washing dirty feet was reserved for the lowest of servants. Jesus had just been acknowledged as the prophesied Messiah at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days earlier. And yet, in gentle humility He ⁴ *...got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.* ⁵ *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* John 13:4-5 (NIV) This was especially touching because at this same time, His disciples were wrangling with one another over which of them would be the greatest in His kingdom.

Afterward Jesus asked them, ¹² *“Do you understand what I have done for you?”* ¹³ *You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.* ¹⁴ *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.* ¹⁵ *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* ¹⁶ *I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master,*

nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*” John 13:12-17 (NIV)

The way of humility is not the way of this world. It is especially not the way of the *leaders* of this world, who often take the very best of everything for themselves. Jesus described the scribes and Pharisees—religious leaders—as men who tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but who themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. Rather, they do all their deeds to be noticed by men. They love the place of honor at banquets, and the most important seats in the synagogues. And they love hearing men call them Rabbi and Teacher.

But this is *not* God’s way. God’s only begotten Son was born into the humblest of families in the humblest of places. In the eyes of those around Him, including His own family and friends, He lived an unexceptional life. The twelve men He chose to be His disciples were common men with little education or position. Jesus submitted to every humiliation and indignity from His enemies, and He refused to defend Himself. The highest of all became the lowest of all. *That* is the way of God. Jesus willingly left the glory of Heaven and heavenly attributes for our benefit. Let’s consider The Exalted Position Jesus Left...Philippians 2:6 speaks of Jesus, *Who, being in very nature God...*

Jesus’ humiliating step downward started from the exalted position seen in the fact that He existed in the form of God. Both before, during, and after His incarnation, He was, by His very nature, fully and eternally God. The Greek word for *being* denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person’s nature, that which is absolutely unalterable and unchangeable.

By His very nature, Jesus Christ is, always has been, and always will be fully God. So—**Jesus who was fully God simultaneously became fully man—that is the incarnation.** The Infinite became finite, the Sinless took sin upon Himself. The very heart of the Gospel of redemption is that *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) Although this Gospel truth is impossible to fully understand, it is necessary to believe.

It is tragic in light of the humble example of Jesus that many Christians believe that they deserve to live like royalty, even though the King of kings, Jesus Christ, often had nowhere to lay His head. Once again, Jesus instructed us to *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...”* Matthew 11:29 (NIV) So the question is, How Do I Walk in the Attitude of Christ?

1. I Will Not Seek Equality with God. (vs. 6b)

[Jesus] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...

From His exalted position as God, Jesus’ first step downward was not to consider equality with God something to be grasped. Although He continued to fully exist as God, during His incarnation, He refused to use His “*God Card*.” To be clear, in becoming a man, Jesus did not in any way forfeit or diminish His absolute equality with God. However, He *did* choose not to *use* all of the attributes of being God while He was on this earth.

Although He was in every way fully God, Jesus never used His power or authority for personal advantage. This choice set the incarnation into motion. He willingly suffered the worst possible humiliation rather than demand the honor, privilege, and glory that were rightly His. At any time He could have appealed to His Father and at once “*more than twelve legions of angels*” would’ve come to His defense. Question: **How much power do you think *one* angel possesses?** Consider this: In Isaiah 37, *one angel* obliterated 185,000 men in one night. Another question: **How much is a “legion”?** “Legion” is a military term that denotes a group of *at least 6,000 soldiers*. If one legion is at least 6,000 angels, then *Twelve* legion are at least **72,000 angels**. What’s the point? Jesus, who had ultimate power at His disposal, humbled Himself and set it all aside in His incarnation. Though He *was* God, while He walked on this earth, He did not seek equality with God. He chose to set His “*God Card*” aside for our benefit...so He could become a sacrifice for our sins.

This same attitude—an attitude of selflessly setting aside one’s possessions, power, and privileges—is the attitude that should characterize all who belong to Jesus. We should be willing to loosen our grip on the blessings we’ve been given, which are ours solely because of Christ. We must not hold on to our so-called rights and privileges. Instead, like Jesus, we must willingly sacrifice all that we’ve been given for the benefit of others.

2. I Will Make Myself Nothing. (Vs. 7a)

...but [Jesus] made himself nothing...

In the next step downward, Jesus continued to not cling to His divine entitlements. Instead, He made himself nothing—He emptied Himself. Jesus Christ emptied Himself completely of every advantage and privilege, refusing to assert any divine right on His own behalf. **He who created and owned everything forsook everything.**

Jesus emptied Himself of three divine rights:

- **First, He emptied Himself of His divine glory.**

Shortly before His arrest, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed:

¹ “*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.*” ... ⁵ *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.* John 17:1, 5 (NIV) Jesus forsook the worship of people and angels and submitted to misunderstandings, false accusations, and every sort of wrongful persecution that mankind would use against Him. He gave up the brilliance of heaven to suffer an agonizing death on the cross.

- **Second, He emptied Himself of His eternal riches.**

2 Corinthians 8:9 (NLT) says, ⁹ *Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.* Although some commentators have interpreted His *poverty* as a reference to His earthly economic condition, it really has nothing to do with that. The point is not that Christ gave up *earth’s* riches; the point is that He gave up *heaven’s* riches.

He forsook adoration and worship, and he forsook the service of angels because *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Matt. 20:28 (NIV)

- **Third, He emptied Himself of His unique, face-to-face relationship with His heavenly Father.**

And this, even to the point of being forsaken by the Father. To fulfill the divine plan of redemption, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) This was the Father's will, which Jesus came to fulfill. Yet even the brief separation from His Father as Jesus bore our sins on the cross caused Him to cry out, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*" Matthew 27:46 (NIV) As followers of Christ, we cannot empty ourselves to the degree that Jesus emptied Himself, because He started *so* high and we start *so* low. We have infinitely less to empty ourselves of. Even what we have was given to us by His grace. But we *are* called to follow Jesus' example by emptying ourselves of everything that would hinder our obedience and service to Him.

3. I Will Take On the Nature of a Servant. (Vs. 7b, c)

...taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...

In the next statement of His descent, as Jesus further emptied Himself, He forsook the full rights of Lordship by taking the very nature of a servant. Although He possessed the inherent nature of God, He willingly took upon Himself the essence and nature of a slave. He did not merely put on a slave's garment, so to speak—He actually *became* a slave in the fullest sense.

In Jesus' day, a bond-servant owned nothing, not even the clothes on his back. Everything he had, including his life, belonged to his master. Jesus did own His own clothes, but He owned no land or house, and no gold or jewels. He owned no business, no boat, and no horse. He had to borrow a donkey when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He had to borrow a room for the Last Supper, and he was buried in a borrowed tomb. So the King of kings and Lord of lords willingly became the Bond-servant of bond-servants. Among other things, a bond-servant was required to carry other people's burdens. As the supreme bond-servant, Jesus carried a burden that no other man could carry—he carried the sin-burden for all who would believe. As Isaiah revealed, *The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.* Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

Through His provision of salvation, Jesus served others more completely than any other servant who has ever lived. Jesus declared that "*The greatest among you shall be your servant.*" Matthew 23:11 (NASB) And yet, after we have faithfully done all that we've been commanded, followers of Christ are to take no credit for themselves, but rather, we are to confess with genuine humility: "*We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.*" Luke 17:10 (NIV)

4. I Will Humble Myself. (Vs. 8b)

...[Jesus] humbled himself...

Continuing the description of Jesus' descent, Paul says that Jesus humbled Himself. The emphasis here moves from Jesus' nature to His personal attitude. He was not merely humiliated by the nature and circumstances of His incarnation.

The Greek word for *humbled* means “*lying low*.” Jesus lowered Himself not only relative to God, but also relative to other men.

The most dramatic and moving time of Jesus’ self-abasement was during His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He was mocked, falsely accused, spit upon, beaten, and scourged. And that was *before* the crown of thorns, nails, and spear. And yet, He was never bitter, or demanding, or accusing. He refused to assert His rights as God—or even as a human being. This brings me to a question for us: **If Jesus, the Son of God and Savior, humbled Himself in this way, what does this say to us?**

5. I Will Become Obedient. (Vs. 8c)

...and [Jesus] became obedient to death...

In His stepping downward, Jesus was willing to suffer even to the point of becoming obedient unto death. His obedience and its impact on redemption is the theme of **Romans 5:12-19** which is summarized with these words: *Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*” **Romans 12:19** (NASB)

Jesus’ obedience did, indeed, take Him all the way to death, because this was the Father’s will. In agony, He implored the Father in the garden, “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*” **Matthew 26:39** (ESV) He knew the cross would be agony, and yet, He obeyed.

Long before His arrest, Jesus had declared, *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.* **John 10:17** (NIV)

He had a choice. Had He not had a choice, He could not have been obedient. “*No one has taken [my life] away from Me,*” Jesus said, “*but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.*” **John 10:18** (NASB) He was *commanded* by the Father, but not *compelled*. So ultimately, **Commitment to God’s will was Jesus’ will.** If you and I are real-deal followers of Jesus, shouldn’t the same be true of us?! **Commitment to God’s will is my will.** Can you say these words this morning and mean it? Can you say these words this morning, and it be true?

6. I Will Take Up My Cross. (Vs. 8d)

—even death on a cross!

In the final feature of His descent and degradation, Jesus submitted even [to] death on a cross. There were many ways by which He could have been killed. He could have been beheaded, as John the Baptist was, or stoned or hanged. But He was destined not for just *any* kind of death—but for death on a cross.

Crucifixion is perhaps the most cruel, excruciatingly painful, and shameful form of execution ever conceived. It was originally devised by the ancient Persians and it was later perfected by the Romans. It was reserved for enemies of the state. No Roman citizen could be crucified, no matter how egregious his crime.

In his book *The Life of Christ*, Frederick Farrar describes crucifixion as follows:

“Death by crucifixion includes the most pain that an execution can produce—including dizziness, cramping, thirst, starvation, traumatic fever, the shame of public nakedness, and a long continuance of excruciating pain—all intensified to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness...”

And yet, in God’s pre-ordained plan, the crucifixion of His Son was not only acceptable, but mandatory. As Peter declares, *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.* 1 Peter 2:24 (NASB) In God’s infinite wisdom, death on a cross was the only way of redemption for fallen, sinful, condemned mankind. Crucifixion was bloody, as were the Old Testament sacrifices that foreshadowed it. Priests in the service of the Old Testament temple were butchers; they were blood-splattered in their duty. Jesus, the Lamb of God, would also die a bloody death.

Knowing the horrid death that awaited Him, Jesus told His disciples and all who would follow Him, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Luke 9:23 (NIV) Let me put this in present-day terms. *“If anyone would follow Jesus, he must deny himself, his own will, and his own way, and take up his electric chair every single day, and follow Him.”*

If we are to truly walk in the attitude of Christ, Jesus must be Lord of our lives, and every single day—we must put our own desires to death and follow Him.

**So if you’re serious about following Jesus, that’s what you’re signing up for.
So what do you think? Do you still want to follow Him?**