

9th December - Jesus emptied himself

Philippians 2.1-11

There are two big themes in this passage.

First of all, Paul presents the magnificence of Jesus – the sheer wonder and magnitude of who he is and what he has done.

And secondly, but just as importantly, there is the personal and corporate response which Paul is trying to extract out of his readers – which is, in the words of v4, that they should show humility in their relationships with each other by putting others first.

The climax of his argument comes in v5ff where he begins to lay out before them the example of Jesus: *In your relationships*

Then he presents them with 3 examples from Jesus' life:

Last week we looked at v6, *Jesus gave up his rights* – that, though He was God, Jesus put **us** first. The Message puts it like this: *Jesus didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.*

This week I want us to think a little bit about the 2nd example *Jesus became a servant*. Ch2.4-7

The first part of v7 states 'he made himself nothing' (NIV)

KJV ... 'He made himself of no reputation;

ESV A literal translation says 'He emptied himself' or 'he poured himself out'

I didn't realise but this has been a hugely contentious verse over the centuries because it raises the question 'What did the pre-incarnate Jesus empty himself of?'

Some have used this verse to argue that Jesus emptied himself of his Deity, that is, he left some or all of his 'God-ness' behind.

But of course this interpretation does not fit with the rest of the NT which consistently affirms the full divinity of Jesus – what someone called 'Undiminished Deity dwelling in humanity'.

Let's remind ourselves of just 3 go-to passages:

- In John 1.1 & 14, written by the beloved disciple. He wrote: 'In the beginning' – i.e. before the creation of the world – 'was the Word, and the Word was *with* God and the Word *was* God. [This same undiminished] Word, became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'
- John's testimony is powerful, but in John 10.30 Jesus speaks about it himself. He says 'I and my Father *are* one' – he doesn't say *were* One, or *will be* One, he says we *are* One. And the Jews understood what he was claiming because we read that as soon as he said this they tried to stone him for blasphemy;

- And, as I mentioned last week, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul is unambiguous: 'In Christ *all* (that is 100% of) the fullness of the Deity lives in *bodily* (that is 100% human) form.' (2.9)

Paul did *not* say Jesus emptied himself of Deity. The Message translates: 'When the time came he'

We can identify at least two things he set aside:

(i) He gave up his riches:

In 2 Cor 8.9 Paul writes, '*Though he was rich*' – the Bible says the heavens and the earth and everything in them and on them belonged to him; and he possessed all power, authority, sovereignty, glory, honour, and majesty; he was rich – '*yet for our sakes he became poor*' – he gave it all up and took on himself human frailty, vulnerability, limitation, suffering and ultimately death on a cross.

Descent by Lucy Shaw

Down he came from *up*, and *in* from *out*, and *here* from *there*.
A long leap,
an incandescent fall
from magnificent to naked, frail, small,
through space,
between stars,
into our chill night air,
shrunk, in infant grace,
to our damp, cramped earthy place among all the shivering sheep.
And now, after all,
there he lies,
fast asleep.

(ii) He gave up his Glory:

If Revelation gives us a picture of Jesus' glory now, *after* his resurrection and ascension, then it must also be a picture of the glory he shared with His Father *before* His incarnation, because he said he was *returning* to His Father.

Let me read Revelation 4.

I love the old story of the rich man who, on his death bed, negotiated with God to allow him to bring his earthly treasures with him when he came to heaven. God's

reaction was that this was a most unusual request, but since this man had been exceptionally faithful, permission was granted to bring along just one suitcase. The time arrived, the man presented himself at the pearly gates, suitcase in hand- BOTH hands, actually, since he had stuffed it with as many bars of gold bullion as would fit. Peter said, "Sorry, you know the rules-you can't take it with you." But the man protested, "God said I could ... one suitcase." St. Peter checked, found out that this one would be an exception, prepared to let the man enter, then said, "OK, but I will have to examine the contents before you pass." He took the suitcase, opened it, saw the gold bars and asked quizzically, "You brought PAVEMENT?"

Jesus gave up His glory. However, in John 17.5, Jesus, who knows he will soon be returning to his Father, is praying. He says 'Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I *had* with you *before* the world began.'

In those precious moments Jesus is conscious of the glory he *once* shared with his Father, and he is looking forward to it being restored again. Perhaps this glory restored might be part of the joy he saw before him which enabled him to endure the cross?

Anyway, he emptied himself, and the verse continues: v7b he became a servant'.

Jesus came subversively – he didn't come with pomp & ceremony; and he didn't come with a display of power; he came in weakness and humility, in the form of a servant.

Jesus says of himself: For even the Son of Man came not to *be served* *but to serve* and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10.45)

In his devotional, *The next door Saviour*, Maz Lucado tells a story:

I was asking myself that question when I spotted the squirrels outside my window. A family of black-tailed squirrels has made its home amid the roots of the tree north of my office. We've been neighbors for three years now. They watch me peck the keyboard. I watch them store their nuts and climb the trunk. We're mutually amused. I could watch them all day. Sometimes I do.

But I've never considered becoming one of them. The squirrel world holds no appeal to me. Who wants to sleep next to a hairy rodent with beady eyes? (No comments from you wives who feel you already do.) Give up the Rocky Mountains, bass fishing, weddings, and laughter for a hole in the ground and a diet of dirty nuts? Count me out.

But count Jesus in. What a world He left. Our classiest mansion would be a tree trunk to Him. Earth's finest cuisine would be walnuts on heaven's table. And the idea of becoming a squirrel with claws and tiny teeth and a furry tail? It's nothing compared to God becoming a one-celled embryo and entering the womb of Mary.

But He did. The God of the universe kicked against the wall of a womb, was born into the poverty of a peasant, and spent His first night in the feed trough of a cow. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" ([John 1:14](#)). The God of the universe left the glory of heaven and moved into the neighborhood. Our neighborhood! Who could have imagined He would do such a thing.

Why? He loves to be with the ones He loves. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

God views service and humility as strengths, not weaknesses. What steps in your relationships can you take to show greater humility? How can you expand your service to others?

Hebrews 4.14-16 says: *Since we have a great high priest*

Isn't that encouraging, that we have an advocate, who right now, at the right hand of Father God, is able to plead our cause because he shared our humanity? No wonder the writer says *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

In his hymn 'From the squalor of a borrowed stable', Stuart Townend wrote:
*King of Heaven now the friend of sinners; Humble servant in the Father's hands
Yes, he walked my road, and felt my pain; Joys and sorrows that I know so well
Yet his righteous steps give me hope again; I will follow my Immanuel.*

Paul wrote: v5-7

Brothers and sisters:

Let us glorify Jesus, for he loved **us** more than he loved his own life;

Let us approach him with confidence and seek his help for all our needs because he shared our humanity and understands our weaknesses;

And let **us** cultivate an attitude of humility, so that, as Jesus took the form of a servant, we too will serve one another.