

TRANSFORMED BY THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST

By Mark Beard

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

■ Someone wrote, “Christ’s perfect life was the perfect manifestation of human life as God intended it.” (Hewett, 70) With such an example of humility and selflessness, it is amazing that we see so little of the attitude of Christ in our world. It would seem—in relation to people today—that looking out for number one is all that matters. The problem is that this attitude has crept into the church causing division based on nothing more than someone wanting to exert his will over another. This may be human but it is not spiritual. It may be expected of the world, but it is an indictment against the Christian. The Christian, by virtue of the new birth, should have been transformed by regeneration and by following the example of Christ.

On occasion, we see something in the life of some seemingly ordinary individual that reminds us of that sacrificial attitude seen in Christ.

■ Roger Rosenblatt writes of just such a person in *Time* magazine’s article, “The Man in the Water.”

He writes, “As disasters go, this one was terrible, but not unique, certainly not among the worst on the roster of U.S. air crashes. There was the usual element of the bridge, of course, and the fact that the plane clipped it at a moment of high traffic, one routine thus intersecting another and disrupting both. Then, too, there was the location of the event. Washington, the city of form and regulations, turned chaotic, deregulated, by a blast of real winter and a single slap of metal on metal... And there was the aesthetic clash as well—blue-and-green Air Florida, the name a flying garden, sunk down among gray chunks in a black river. All that was worth noticing, to be sure. Still, there was nothing very special in any of it, except death, which, while always special, does not necessarily bring millions to tears or to attention. Why, then the shock here?”

The person most responsible for the emotional impact of the disaster is the one known at first simply as “the man in the water. (Balding, probably in his 50’s, an extravagant mustache.) He was seen clinging with five other survivors to the tail section of the airplane. This man was described by Usher and Windsor [a park police helicopter team as appearing alert and in control. Every time they lowered a lifeline and flotation ring to him, he passed it on to another of the passengers. “In mass causality, you’ll find

people like him, said Windsor. “But I have never seen one with that commitment. When the helicopter came back for him, the man had gone under. His selflessness was one reason the story held national attention.

Much like the man in the story, when the world looks at Jesus of Nazareth from a distance they see only a good man who did some good things, but certainly no one to get excited about. But when we examine his life and actions closely, it is no wonder that nearly 2000 years later history is replete with instances of this unassuming man’s impact on the world. Although Jesus was meek and gentle, he was also known to be bold and powerful. But He was never known to seek anything for himself. No wonder this man

Jesus holds our attention so completely. There is something moic abou~ ~ ~han ~ fact that He was the Son of God. What was it that made Him, as the Son of God, so amazing to mankind? Could it be that, among other things, His way of thinking both surprises and stuns us? Why? Perhaps because His attitude is so unlike ours.

In our text Paul is writing to a group of believers who are at odds with one another. They were only thinking of their own rights, plans, and interests. It is to these individuals that Paul is appealing. He is calling for unity among the believers. However, he knew unity would only be possible if they changed their attitudes. To show them how they can change, Paul is encouraging them to be transformed by following the example of Christ in submission and humility.

Likewise, when we follow the example of Christ in humility and submission, our attitudes will be transformed. As we follow the progression of Paul’s thoughts, there are three *lessons* we can learn from the example of Christ:

1. Our attitudes are transformed by recognizing who we are.
2. Our attitudes are transformed by seeking God’s will before anything else.
3. Our attitudes are transformed by remembering that it is God who rewards.

First of all, I would like for us to see that **our attitudes are transformed by recognizing who we are. (vv.5-6) I suppose one** of the greatest obstacles standing in our **way of being the servant God** wants us to be is SELF. That’s right, we hinder the work of God in our lives more than

the devil. Why would I say such a thing? It's because this old human—sinful—nature wants to be served first. Let's face it, most of the time we are not secure enough in God to abandon self for God. We are afraid that "self" is going to get cheated. But when we look at Jesus we see one of the greatest reasons Jesus was the perfect example of a servant. In short, it was because His self-esteem was not at stake. He understood His role in the redemption of man. He wanted nothing for Himself. He simply came to do the will of God.

Paul admonishes us in our text, "Let this mind (attitude) be in you. This should remind us that *as children of God it should be natural for us to think like the Son of God.* (v. 5) If we are the children of God as we say, then as Jesus, we have nothing to prove, nothing to lose, and nothing to hide. In other words, it is this attitude of being confident in God that causes us to be pleasing to God.

Most of the striving, discord and competition between true members of the body is due to our lack of confidence in God. We forget that we are the chosen of God and that God is no respecter of persons. Why should we be jealous, competitive and pretentious when we know what God has done for others He will do for us, and that the only thing that matters is what we do for the glory of God.

In addition, Jesus teaches us that *we are servants with nothing to hold onto in this life more important than the will of God.* (v.6) According to verse 6, Jesus was in the "form of God, yet He did not feel that equality with God was something that He had to hold onto for His benefit. As one writer observes, "Perhaps Paul had in mind a contrast between the two Adams. The first Adam attempted to seize equality with God {Gen.3:5}. The second Adam, Christ, possessed that glory as His own, but He did not hold onto it. He exchanged the form of God for the opposite, "taking the form of a servant" or, literally, 'of a slave. He was Lord, possessing supreme authority. He became a slave, one who can only obey. (Tolbert p.23) The word of God has something very important to say to those who have lost sight of their identity and purpose in Christ. The scripture tell, u~ we ~ve bee~ "ho~igh t it a pri~e, therefore glonfy God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (I Cor. 6:20) in short we are not our own, w~ ar~ Ciod ~ETv~flt~.

Secondly, I would like to point out that **our attitudes are transformed by seeking the will of God before anything else (yv.7~8)** How many of us have made our plans and charted our course before ever considering what God would have for us? We just believe that our plans are so good that God

is certain to get involved in them. Too often, in the church, we take the action that is most likely to make us look good. But as someone once said, “God did not save you to be a sensation, He saved you to be a servant. (Hewett p.452) Paul had this to say of Jesus in verse 7, “but [He~ made Himself of no reputation. Ask yourself, “Does God expect anything different from us?”

Our text also teaches us that *in humility, the faithful servant lays aside his own ambitions. (v.7)* This does not mean that the servant loses his identity or that he has no will. Christ certainly did not lay aside His deity or His divine attributes in the incarnation. But He did lay aside, for a time, the independent use of His divine attributes and submitted Himself to the plan and will of the Father. The faithful servant, in this case Jesus, lays aside His own will because He knows the One He has submitted Himself to will treat Him justly. That’s why Jesus ‘made of Himself no reputation. He trusted God in the same way He expects us to.

The natural mind cannot understand the benefits of rendering service to another before themselves, much less unconditionally trusting another to treat them as they would treat themselves. After all, the world looks at Jesus and only sees a good man but certainly no one who accomplished anything worthwhile. Yet notice how God has taken His Son Jesus, One with no reputation with the world, and exalted Him.

■ Mack Stokes writes, “Some tell us that Jesus’ life was not very important. They say He wrote no books, composed no songs, drew no pictures, carved no statues, amassed no fortune, commanded no army, ruled no nation. And yet... He who never wrote a line has been made the hero of unnumbered volumes. He who never wrote a song has put music into the hearts of nameless multitudes. He who never established an institution is the foundation of the church that bears His name. He who refused the Kingdoms of this world has become the Lord of millions. Yes, He whose shameful death scarcely produced a ripple on the pool of history in His day has become a mighty current in the vast ocean of the centuries since He died.

(Hewett,)

In addition, let me point out that a *faithful servant renders unconditional service. (v.8)* Paul begins verse 8 with the statement, “And being found in the appearance of man He humbled Himself. We would tend to think that for God to be in the appearance of man (being considered no different from other men) would be humiliating enough but Jesus humbled himself further. As one preacher said, “We shall never know what Christ’s humiliation was till we know what His exaltation and His glory are.” (Nicoll p.300)

How did He humble Himself further? By becoming obedient to the point of death. Not just any death, but the most humiliating kind—death on a cross. This was a death that not even a paganistic Roman citizen would be sentenced to die. Even the Jews believed it was evidence of the curse of God. Isn't it ironic that the act of crucifixion was reserved for slaves and foreigners—in a sense, Jesus was both. But all man could see was the humiliation and seeming defeat of this man Jesus.

The person unaware of God's plan might ask, "What was the cross all about?"

■ Oswald Chambers has this to say in response, "The cross did not happen to Jesus: He came on purpose for it. He is 'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The whole meaning of the incarnation is the cross. Beware of separating 'God manifest in the flesh' from 'the Son becoming sin. The incarnation was for the purpose of redemption. God became incarnate for the purpose of putting away sin; not for the purpose of self-realization...."

The cross is not the cross of man but the cross of God, and the cross of God can never be realized in human experience. (70)

We need to make clear that Jesus was not a servant blindly following another's orders, nor did He come to enrich Himself in some way. He was co-architect and at the same time co-executor of the divine plan of salvation. In the great council room of God, before the creation of man, the Second Person of the Trinity destined to be the Son of God said, "I 'll be the sacrifice." In light of this my question is, "If the Master can become the servant and render unconditional service, then why can't we?"

The third thing we can learn is that **our attitudes are transformed by remembering** that it is God who rewards. (vv.9-11) It is evident that the standards of the world are the opposite of the standards of God. Also, we do not receive rewards in God's kingdom as men do in this world. Here among men it is the one who can grab the most for himself that is considered "successful" or the "winner. Yet in God's kingdom those who simply finish the race, not finish first, are victorious. Those who give up what they cannot keep to gain what they cannot lose are the ones who are rewarded. It is a paradox of sorts. The only way to gain glory is to not seek it. The only way to be exalted is to humble oneself. God is not looking for "a few good men" to populate eternity He is searching for "whosoever will" to bow before Him that He might be glorified in them and in return He will give to them an exalted place in His presence.

Jesus lived Out the principle that tells us in *due season God exalts those who submit and obey. (v.9)* I suppose the most memorable example His attitude of submission is seen in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was willing to say, even though it meant His death on the cross, “Father not my will be done but yours. It is for this reason that He has been given a name above every name. What is this name? It’s not just a name, it is “the” name. Paul is speaking of the exalted position of Christ, His dignity, the way in which He is acknowledged in the universe.

We work all our lives hoping that at the end we will have a “good name. When people think of us we want them to remember our character, our good deeds, and what we accomplished. We want to be remembered honorably. Rest assured there is no more honored name in the universe than the name of JESUS. He has a name “above every name.

This very fact assures us that *there is a place of honor and reward for the faithful. (vv.10-11)* The reward of Christ is that He is exalted to the highest position of authority that all might acknowledge Him as the only sovereign Lord to the glory of the Father. According to our text, . . . every knee should bow,... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord. Every angel, every saint—departed and living, every unbeliever—living or in hell, and even satan and his demonic host will speak the words, “Jesus is Lord.’ This will fulfill the purpose of the Father; Christ will be proclaimed Lord to the praise and glory of God the Father.

Remember, Paul is writing to a group of individuals who had, evidently lost sight of these facts and their goal. They were looking more at what others had received than what God had for them. Perhaps they had begun to despair that they would ever be rewarded for their faithfulness to God. How many problems have developed over the centuries in the church because people lost sight of what their faith is all about and began to feel unappreciated and forgotten? How many times have you fought the temptation to feel bad toward someone else because it appeared they were getting the credit for your hard work? It’s hard to work together in harmony with another when we feel that things are not fair. Also, it’s hard to work for God when we forget our purpose and our goal. We must keep in mind that it is God who rewards and He does so in His own time.

■ Ray Stedman, in *Talking to My Father*, writes: An old missionary couple had been working in Africa for years, and they were returning to New York City to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They discovered they were booked on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions.

No one paid attention to them. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, with passengers trying to catch a glimpse of the great man.

As the Ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much over him, but nobody gives two hoots about us.

"Dear, you shouldn't feel that way, his wife said.

"I can't help it; it doesn't seem right.

When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were full of the President's arrival, but no one noticed the missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat on the East side, hoping the next day to see what they could do about making a living in the city. That night the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife, "I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly.

His wife replied, "*Why* don't you go in the bedroom and tell that to the Lord?"

A short time later he came out from the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?"

"The Lord settled it with me, he said. "I told Him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one meet us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'But you're not home yet!'"

Yes, there are rewards for faithfulness, but not necessarily down here."

(Larson, 197-198)

As we take one last look back at our text, we see that having the proper attitude can change our outlook on life and service to God. When we have the mind of Christ or when we think like Christ then we recognize who we are, we realize that the will of God is all important, and we understand that the rewards of God are all that matter. This is the kind of thinking that will transform our attitudes.

All we need to do is remember our motivation. Archbishop Secker used to say, "There are three sorts of servants in the world: some are slaves, and serve Him from fear; others are hirelings, and serve Him for wages; and the last are sons, who serve because they love. (Hewett, 452) What greater

motivation could we have than love?

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