

Zachery Lewald Sermon #1

Complete Manuscript

SERMON INTRODUCTION, SCRIPTURE READING

Please turn with me to Philippians 2:5–11. Hear the Word of the Lord:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This is the Word of God. Let us pray for understanding from the Spirit.

PASSAGE INTRODUCTION

How do we define greatness?

Imagine standing at the bottom of a tall ladder. Everything around us, everything in our culture, tells us that the goal of life is to climb higher than everyone else. We are taught to pursue promotions, recognition, influence, wealth, and success. The higher we climb, the more valuable we are told we become. Social media and the modern culture encourages us to build a “platform.” Workplaces encourage us to outshine our peers. Even our own hearts crave the praise and approval of others. In our culture, greatness is often measured by how many people serve you rather than by how many people you serve.

Yet when we open God’s Word, Jesus completely reverses that way of thinking. Instead of climbing upward to grasp for glory, Christ willingly stepped down. Though He possessed all the glory and majesty of God, He humbled Himself by taking on human flesh, becoming a servant, and ultimately dying on a cross for sinners. In God’s kingdom, true greatness is not found in self-promotion but in self-sacrifice.

As we turn to Philippians 2:5–11, we will see that Christ does not merely tell us to be humble. He reveals what humility is, He accomplishes our salvation through His humility, and He gives us the pattern and power for a new way of life.

FCF

Our problem is this: we are tempted to seek our own status and recognition rather than adopting the humble mindset of Christ. Left to ourselves, we want to be exalted. We want to be praised. We want to be first. We may not always say that out loud, but our actions and reactions reveal it. We feel overlooked when someone else is thanked. We become defensive when someone corrects us. We serve gladly until no one notices, then we grumble and complain like Israel in the wilderness. Pride is not merely a problem outside the church. It lives in every human heart.

COR / TEXTUAL SITUATION

The believers in Philippi knew pride all too well. Philippi was a proud Roman colony. Roman citizenship was highly prized. Honor and rank shaped everyday life in Rome. Success meant being associated with the right people and occupying the right position in society. Paul’s call to adopt the mindset of a crucified servant directly challenged the Roman culture’s pursuit of power and prestige.

GARDEN LENS

However, this desire to exalt ourselves is not how humanity was created to live. We were made to receive our identity from God, joyfully submit to His authority, and love one another through faithful service. Sin distorted that design. Instead of trusting God, we grasp for independence. Instead of serving one another, we use one another. But Jesus Christ came to restore what sin had broken. In His perfect humility and obedience, we see true humanity as it was always meant to be.

MAIN IDEA

This brings us to the main idea of this message:

Because Jesus humbled Himself on the Cross and was exalted as Lord, we must adopt the mindset of Christ.

That raises a question: What does the humble mindset of Christ look like in those who follow Him? Paul shows us three movements in the life of Jesus: humble service (vv. 5-7), costly obedience (v. 8), and joyful submission (vv. 9-11).

The first main point is this:

MAIN POINT 1: WE MUST ADOPT CHRIST'S MINDSET OF HUMBLE SERVICE (vv. 5–7)

Please look with me at verses 5 through 7. Paul begins with a command: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Notice that Paul begins with our **mindset** before he addresses our **actions**. Christianity is not merely behavior modification.

Paul is not telling us to invent a new attitude by our own effort. He says this mind “is yours in Christ Jesus.” The humility He commands is found in **union** with Jesus. The Christ who gives the command is also the Christ who supplies what He commands.

Verse 6 explains why Jesus is the definitive pattern: “Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” When Paul says that Jesus was in the form of God, he is not saying that Jesus merely looked like God. He is affirming that the eternal Son possesses the very nature, glory, and majesty of God. Jesus is fully God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Yet Christ did not treat His equality with God as something to be grasped; something to exploit for His own advantage. He did not use His divine privilege as an excuse to remain distant from us. He did not say, “I deserve to be served. I am not a servant, so I will not stoop down to serve.” Brothers and sisters, we cannot forget that Christ came down out of love for us and not because we deserved Him. It is by grace alone that we are saved. We must be thankful that the gracious plan of the Father insisted upon Christ's servanthood for our sake. So instead of claiming equality with God, verse 7 says that Christ “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

We must be careful with the phrase “emptied himself.” Jesus did not empty Himself by ceasing to be God. He emptied Himself by taking, not by losing. He took a true, full, and genuine human nature. He took the form of a servant. Jesus did not surrender His deity. He **veiled** His glory and willingly entered servanthood for our salvation.

Think about the wonder of that movement. We have to consider this astounding paradox. The Creator entered His creation. The King became a subject. The Holy One worshiped by angels accepted the weakness of infancy. The One who sustains the universe became hungry and tired. The One who deserves for all to serve Him knelt to wash the feet of sinners. This is the true humility of Christ the Servant.

Our culture often hears the word humility and imagines weakness and insecurity. We may think a humble person has no confidence, no convictions, and no boundaries. Maybe we think of a pushover or

someone who is unsuccessful in life. But Jesus was never weak in this way. Yes He took on the human weaknesses of hunger and fatigue, but He knew exactly who He was. He spoke truth clearly. He confronted hypocrisy. He possessed all confidence in His Father. Yet He used His strength to serve rather than to exalt Himself.

Biblical humility is not pretending that you have no value. **It is refusing to see your value as the reason everyone else must exalt you.** It is receiving your identity from God so securely that you are free to lay down your preferences and privileges for the good of another person, and consider their interests above your own.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID REFUSES TO GRASP THE THRONE

One of the clearest Old Testament pictures of this kind of restraint appears in 1 Samuel 24. David had already been anointed to become the next king of Israel, but Saul relentlessly hunted him and tried to take his life. One day David and his men were hiding deep inside a cave when Saul entered that same cave alone.

David's men whispered that this was the opportunity he had been waiting for. David had the opportunity. He had the ability. Many believed he had the right. One strike, and the throne could finally be his.

But David refused. He quietly cut off a corner of Saul's robe, and **even that** troubled his conscience. David would not seize the kingdom by his own strength. **He humbled himself** under God's authority and trusted God's timing.

David's restraint points us to a far greater King. Jesus possessed infinitely greater glory and authority than David ever did. Yet He did not cling to His visible glory. He took the form of a servant. David spared one enemy, Jesus died for His enemies.

BACK TO THE TEXTUAL SITUATION

Now think back to Philippians 2, Paul wanted the Philippians to see this because they lived in a culture obsessed with rank and recognition. The church could easily reproduce the same competition inside the body of Christ. One believer could seek attention over another. One leader could protect his position. One person could serve only when service made him look good. Paul directs their eyes away from the upward ladder of Roman honor and toward the downward ladder of servanthood with Jesus.

APPLICATION

Where does this meet us in this place? It meets us in ordinary moments that reveal what **we believe we deserve**. How do you respond when your friend receives appreciation that you hoped to receive? What happens in your heart when a classmate earns the highest grade, a coworker receives the promotion instead of you, or someone else is recognized for serving in the church when you did the same service? How do you respond when a friend corrects you? Do you despise wisdom and instruction?

Pride is such a deep sin that can take over our lives in very subtle ways. In order to adopt Christ's mindset of humble service, we must stop keeping score. We must stop measuring relationships by what we "deserve" or can get out of it. We may say that we want God to receive the glory while still feeling irritated when our name is left out. Brothers and sisters, examine yourselves to see if you are defensive when rebuked; if you are irritated by another's success in any way; if you are keeping records of wrongs against another or holding a grudge. **Because Jesus humbled Himself on the cross and was exalted as Lord, we must adopt Christ's mindset of humble service.**

TRANSITION (softer tone here)

Christ's humility was not merely an inward attitude or a single act of service. His humble mindset carried Him down a path of obedience that became increasingly costly. That brings us to the second main point:

MAIN POINT 2: WE MUST ADOPT CHRIST'S MINDSET OF COSTLY OBEDIENCE (v. 8)

Look now at verse 8: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Paul now moves from Christ's incarnation to Christ's obedience. Here we see that the Son did not merely enter our humanity, but also He did all that the Father commanded Him.

The first part of this verse emphasizes that Jesus humbled Himself. No one forced humility upon Him against His will. The Father sent the Son, and the Son **willingly obeyed**. Jesus chose the place of obedience in three ways: through service, suffering, and sacrifice.

His obedience was complete: "to the point of death." Jesus did not obey only while obedience was comfortable or convenient. He did not serve only when people responded with gratitude and praise. He continued when His disciples misunderstood Him (which was often), when the crowds abandoned Him, when religious leaders mocked Him, when soldiers struck Him, and when the cross stood before Him.

Paul then adds the shocking phrase, "even death on a cross." We may hear the word "cross" so often that we **forget its offense**. For the Roman world, crucifixion was not noble. It was public humiliation. It was reserved for those Rome wanted to expose as powerless, cursed, and defeated. Citizens of Philippi took pride in their connection to Rome, but Paul placed at the **center** of their worship a Lord whom their dearly beloved Rome had crucified.

Jesus did **not** die merely to show us how **serious He was** about love. He died as the **obedient substitute for sinners**. The first Adam reached for what God had forbidden and brought condemnation. Jesus, Second true and better Adam, entrusted Himself to the Father and obeyed unto death. He bore the judgment our disobedience deserved.

Our culture often treats obedience as the **enemy** of freedom. We are told that freedom means answering to no one, defining ourselves by our own will and wants, and refusing every claim that limits our desires. Yet Jesus shows us that His freedom is satisfying and does not lead to more want and desire like America's version of freedom does. The freest Man who ever lived joyfully submitted Himself to the Father. His obedience was not a loss of identity or definition. It was the perfect expression of His love for the Father and His love for us.

Christlike humility becomes visible when obedience costs us something (repeat this). It is easy to speak about humility when it requires nothing from us. The test comes when obedience requires us to surrender something or even everything. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"

ILLUSTRATION: THE COST OF SAYING "I WAS WRONG"

I see this in the ordinary conflicts of marriage. There are moments when I can become so focused on proving that my reasoning is correct that I stop listening well to my wife. I can tell myself that I am defending a principle, being clear, or trying to solve the problem. But all of those words are just disguises for my pride to remain hidden and active.

In those moments, costly obedience usually does not look as dramatic as crucifixion. It may look like talking less in order to listen. It may mean saying, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" and leaving it at that without adding any more words.

When we say those simple words, they can **feel** costly. This is what the death of pride feels like. Repentance hurts because it is a kind of death. It's the death of what should not be there. The death of pride hurts us because we have become co-dependent with it.

BACK TO THE TEXTUAL SITUATION

Paul's display to the Philippians of Christ's costly obedience urges them to put to death the flesh and join Christ in His death. The church must not imitate Rome's method of grasping for power. It must follow the Jesus in the way of faithful obedience.

APPLICATION

What is the cost of your obedience? Perhaps you need to admit that you were wrong. Perhaps you need to forgive someone who hurt you. Perhaps you need to keep word when it has become inconvenient, serve someone who cannot repay you, tell the truth when it may cost greatly, or surrender a private sin that you have carefully and willfully protected with much effort. The Jesus of Philippians 2 walked in obedience to the point of death. He calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. **Because Jesus humbled Himself on the cross and was exalted as Lord, we must adopt Christ's mindset of costly obedience.**

For those of you who are repelled or disgusted by this idea, the warning is simple: **admiration** of God is **not obedience** to God. You may **respect** Jesus as a moral example while refusing Him as Lord. You may **appreciate** His humility while insisting on ruling your own life. Christ calls you to repent, abandon your crumbling throne, and trust Jesus, no matter how hard the death of pride in you hurts.

For those of you who hear this and are intrigued but not fully on board with it, hear the comfort of the gospel. Philippians 2:5-11 is not saying that you must reproduce Christ's perfect obedience in order for God to receive you as His child. You cannot. I cannot. Jesus obeyed in the place of disobedient sinners. **His** righteousness is given and applied to all who trust in Him. We obey God out of gratitude for Him, not to earn our salvation.

TRANSITION

At the cross, Jesus appeared to have reached the lowest place. Rome had condemned Him. His enemies mocked Him. His body was laid in a tomb. But verse 9 begins with one decisive word: "Therefore." When you see the word "therefore", you must look back to what was written before. The Father's answer to Jesus's humble servanthood and costly obedience is His exaltation. Our third main point is this:

MAIN POINT 3: WE MUST ADOPT CHRIST'S MINDSET OF ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE (vv. 9-11)

Christ's humble service and costly obedience were not aimless. Verse 9 begins with the word **"Therefore."** **Because** Christ humbled Himself and became obedient to death, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above every name.

This does not mean that Jesus became divine after the resurrection. He has always been the eternal Son of God. Rather, the Father publicly vindicated and exalted Jesus, the incarnate Son who had been rejected, shamed, and crucified. The One whom the world treated as powerless is revealed as Lord over heaven, earth, and everything beneath the earth. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Christ endured His humble servanthood and costly obedience with the joy of what lay beyond them. Hebrews 12:2 says that He endured the cross "for the joy that was set before him." He looked beyond the suffering of the cross to the completion of His saving work, His exaltation at the Father's right hand, and the gathering of a redeemed people who would worship Him forever.

The same eternal perspective must shape us. 2 Thessalonians 2:14 says that God called us through the gospel "so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." We will never receive the divine worship or universal lordship that belong to Him alone. **Yet** because we are united to Christ, we will

share in His glory. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection, and His exaltation assures us that suffering with Him will ultimately give way to glory with Him.

For now, we joyfully submit to God and do the things He has called us to do. We serve, obey, sacrifice, forgive, and endure hardships because we know that present faithfulness is not the end. Like Christ, we must look beyond present sacrifice to the joy set before us.

ILLUSTRATION: THE LADDER REVERSED

Let us return to the ladder with which we began.

The world tells us that the highest place belongs to the person who climbs over others, protects his image, and makes his own name great. Jesus shows us the opposite movement.

He began in the highest place. He descended into our humanity. He went lower by taking the form of a servant. He went lower still by becoming obedient to the Father. He descended even to death on a cross.

But the bottom of the ladder was not the end.

The One who descended to the **lowest position** in love was exalted to the **highest position** by the Father. The world tried to shame His name, but God bestowed upon Him the name above every name. Because our future is secure in Christ, we do not have to climb over others. We are free to come lower in service. We can entrust our reputation, reward, and future to God.

BACK TO THE TEXTUAL SITUATION

As stated, Philippian believers lived in a culture that prized Roman honor, citizenship, status, and public recognition. They would have felt constant pressure to climb the social ladder and defend their place within society.

Paul reminds them that they belonged to the true Lord. They did not need to reproduce Rome's system of self-promotion. Because Christ had been exalted, they could humble themselves, serve one another, and obey God without fearing that humility would diminish their worth in Christ.

Their future did not depend upon Rome's recognition. It depended upon the exalted Christ.

APPLICATION

This eternal perspective changes how we understand the nature of obedience.

We often measure faithfulness only by what it costs us today. We ask whether people noticed, whether our sacrifice produced immediate results, or whether obedience improved our circumstances. But Christ calls us to look beyond the present moment.

Perhaps God has called you to serve someone who cannot repay you. Perhaps He has called you to remain faithful in a responsibility that no one notices. Perhaps He has called you to forgive, repent, sacrifice your interests for another's interests, or continue obeying through suffering.

Do not assume that hidden service is wasted.

Do not assume that costly obedience has a sunken cost.

Do not assume that suffering has no purpose.

Your Father sees. Your future is secure in Christ. There is resurrection, glory, and everlasting joy set before you.

This does not mean that God promises every faithful Christian success, recognition, or comfort in this life. Our hope is **not** that God will make us impressive before the world. Our hope is that we will be **raised** with Christ and **share** in His glory in the age to come.

That future frees us to **joyfully** submit now. We can do what the Lord has called us to do without demanding an immediate reward. We can humble ourselves beneath His hand, trusting that He will raise His people in His appointed time.

Therefore, we must adopt Christ's mindset of eternal perspective. For the joy set before us, we joyfully submit, humbly serve, and faithfully obey whatever the Lord has called us to do.

CONCLUSION

So then, brothers and sisters, what does the mindset of Christ look like in those who follow Him?

It joyfully lays down privilege to serve. It obeys the Father even when obedience is costly. And it lives with an eternal perspective, trusting that present faithfulness is never wasted because our future is secure in Christ.

Some of us need to repent of blatant and obvious pride. Others need to repent of quieter forms of pride, such as keeping score, becoming defensive when corrected, craving recognition, or serving only when someone notices. Others need to stop confusing humility with worthlessness and instead receive the secure identity that is theirs in Christ.

Look again at Jesus.

He did not remain distant. He came down. He did not merely teach humility. He humbled Himself for us. He obeyed where we have disobeyed. He died in the place of proud sinners. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him. The Father raised Him, highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name above every name.

Because we belong to Him, our future is secure as well. God has called us through the gospel "so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." We do not know all that lies ahead, but we know the end of the story. We will share in His glory, not because we have earned it, but because Christ has secured it for us. Therefore, we are free to joyfully submit today, knowing that every act of humble service and costly obedience is seen by our Father and will one day give way to everlasting joy.

Therefore, because Jesus humbled Himself on the cross and was exalted as Lord, we must adopt the mindset of Christ. Let us joyfully serve without grasping, obey without grumbling, and live with an eternal perspective, trusting our Father just as our Jesus did. Amen. Let us pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

