

A Call to Christ-Centered Missions:
Missions Modeled After the Example of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 19, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ It was January 12th, 2007. It was a Friday morning right before 8 o'clock during the morning rush hour. A man emerged from the metro at L'Enfant Plaza station in the heart of Washington, DC. He was wearing jeans, a long-sleeved t-shirt, a baseball cap, and holding a small case. He positioned himself against a wall, next to a trash can, and opened up the case revealing a violin. He placed the open case at his feet, faced it towards the passersby, and began to play. For the next 43 minutes, the man played six classical pieces while 1,097 people walked by. Most were busy just trying to get to work.
 - What they didn't realize is that they were listening to "*one of the finest classical musicians in the world, playing some of the most elegant music ever written on one of the most valuable violins ever made.*"¹ It was Joshua Bell, the internationally acclaimed virtuoso, playing on his 3.5 million dollar, 18th-century Stradivari. This was a social experiment devised by the Washington Post.
 - And what was the result? In those 43 minutes, only seven people stopped to listen and only one recognized Bell for who he is. Twenty-seven passersby gave him money for a grand total of \$32.12 (\$20 of which came from the one woman who did recognize him). **A thousand people were blessed by the presence of greatness in their midst but were too busy to notice.**

- ❖ When I consider this morning's text I wonder if many of us fall guilty of the same mistake. We are constantly blessed by the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, but he can come across so meek and mild, so plain and ordinary, that we pay him very little attention.
 - This was definitely the case in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. **The prophet had predicted that the Christ would be remarkably ordinary.** He would have "*no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*" (Isa. 53:2) Of course, some did take notice and some followed. But others were baffled by the fact that he could garner a crowd. "*Is this not the carpenter's son?*" (Mt. 13:55) That's just Mary's son. He's nothing special. What's all the fuss about?
 - **Friends, are you going about the busyness of your life – even showing up here on Sundays – but oblivious to the glory and greatness in your presence?** The Apostle Paul says in this very well-known passage that the Greatest Greatness once donned the equivalent of jeans, a t-shirt, and a ball cap and humbly stepped into our world to bless us with greatest gift to meet your greatest need. Please don't miss it.

- ❖ This morning, in continuation of our Missions Month emphasis, I want to exalt the glory and greatness of Christ as manifest in his Incarnation, his Crucifixion, and his Exaltation. And I want to tie it in with our approach to global missions. **I believe what we find in Philippians 2 is a Christocentric hymn that supplies a beautiful picture of humble servanthood that looks to the interest of others and not to the self.** Jesus offers a great example of self-emptying instead of self-exaltation.

¹ See online: https://wpo.st/5_6c2

- ❖ And the reason I want to draw your attention to it is because I believe anyone considering to get involved in the task of missions needs to embrace this same attitude (mindset). **The missionary that's going to make a difference for the cause of Christ is the missionary who humbly serves after the likeness of Christ.**
- ❖ That's what we mean by Christ-centered missions. So far we've seen that Christ-centered missions is missions fueled by the glory of Christ and rooted in obedience to Christ. Today we're talking about missions modeled after the example of Christ.
 - We're going to focus on vv6-11, which commentators recognize as an ancient hymn sung by the early church. We're not sure who wrote it. It could've been Paul himself. But the reason why, in the middle of a letter, he starts quoting song lyrics is because they capture the kind of mindset he's hoping will permeate the church in Philippi.
- ❖ Let me give you some context before we get into the hymn. **Here in the letter, Paul is calling church members to maintain their unity in Christ because he's acutely aware of the dangers of division in the body of Christ.** He starts off chapter 2 encouraging them to be "*of the same mind*" and to be "*of one mind*". To do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility to consider others more significant and to look not to your own interests but to the interests of others (vv3-4). And then he goes on to say in v5, "*Have this mind among yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*"
 - So three times he mentions having the same *mind*. Today we might call it having the same *mindset*. The NIV translates it the same "*attitude*". **And then Paul goes on to quote this hymn which demonstrates the mindset of Christ – the mindset that can foster unity and heal divisions between fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.**
- ❖ But here we have to figure out a sticky theological issue. **How is Paul presenting the mindset of Christ? Is he presenting Christ and his servant mindset as an example for us to copy?** Should we be reading vv6-11 as an ethical statement?
 - If so then Paul is instructing us to be humble in our relationship with other believers because Christ was humble. And here's a hymn that expresses his humility. This reading of the text is captured in the NIV translation where v5 says, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*" Jesus is the ultimate example of humility.
- ❖ That's true and not a bad way to read the text, but it's insufficient. This is not just an ethical statement but a theological one. We can see it better in the ESV translation, which says to be humble in your relationship with other believers **because in Christ Jesus you all have the same mind as Christ.** "*Have this mind among yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*"
 - That means I'm not just trying to copy Jesus in his humility. **He's not just my Example. He's my Savior – with whom I have been united by faith.** I am in him and Christ is in me. He transforms my mind (mindset). He empowers my humility. That goes for all of us who are in Christ. **Yes, Paul is offering Christ as the perfect example of how to humbly treat other believers, but he's saying this kind of humility is only possible because together we share a union in Christ Jesus.**

- ❖ If you turn over to chapter 4:2, you'll see him apply this to an actual case within the church of Philippi. He's entreating two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord (lit. to be of the same mind). How are these two sisters going to resolve their conflict? **By changing their mind (mindset) towards each other to more accurately reflect their shared mind (shared union) in the Lord.** They're going to get along once they start behaving like the new creations they are – having the same mind which is both theirs in Christ Jesus.
 - I'm stressing this point because we're about to talk about modeling missions after the example of Christ. Approaching missions with the humility of Christ. **But don't interpret that as a call to muster up the strength of your own character to imitate Christ.** Because in you, you don't have what it takes. But in Christ (in your union with Christ) – in who he is and what he's done for you – all things are possible.

- ❖ This is why I want to dig into vv6-11. I want to study this hymn because it's all about who Christ is and what he's accomplished for you. **So I am offering a missionary example in this text, but it's an example you can only imitate if you're in union with this Savior.** If you're *in him*. So I've divided this into three parts. 1) I want us to see the heights from which Christ came (v6). 2) See the depths to which Christ stooped (vv7-8). 3) See the highest heights to which Christ was exalted (vv9-11).

The Heights From Which Christ Came

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the heights from which Christ came when he took on flesh. When he became incarnate. Let's read again starting in v5, *"⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"*.
 - So before he came down to earth, before he was born, Christ Jesus pre-existed. In v6 it says he existed in the *"form of God"*. But what does that mean? The Greek is the word *morphe*, and it refers to a visible form or shape. So does "being in the form of God" mean he just looked like God? He had the outward appearance of a god?
 - No, because notice how, in the same verse, Paul parallels being in the form of God with being equal with God. *"Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"*. **So existing in the form of God is not something less than being God.** It equals the same thing.

- ❖ **This idea of God having a form has to be understood from a Jewish worldview.** Ancient Greeks had no trouble imagining God in visible form. Gods and goddesses could take on a myriad of forms in the likeness of humans or animals. But to a Jew, that would be blasphemous. It would be a violation of the second commandment: Thou shall not make any graven images of God (Ex. 20:4).
 - **So Jews like Paul would've understood the form of God as referring to the visible, outward glory of God (Shekinah).** There are plenty of examples in the OT where people could see a visible manifestation of the glory of God (cf. Ex. 16:10; Lev. 9:23; Ezk. 44:4). They saw the form of God. It's what Moses was asking to see when he said, *"Please show me your glory."* Please, God, show me your form.

- ❖ So back here in v6 when Paul says that Jesus (in his pre-incarnate existence) was in the form of God, **he's implying that Jesus is equal with God and manifested the visible, outward glory of God.** The writer of Hebrews says the same thing in chapter 1:3, "*He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*".
 - Think about this. If you look up at the sun (which you shouldn't do!), you're actually not gazing at the sun itself. You're seeing the radiance of the glory of the sun, which has travelled 92 million miles to reach your eyes. **We never see the actual sun but only the radiating glory of the sun.** So it makes sense to distinguish the glory of the sun from the sun itself. But in the end, they're equal. They're the same thing.

- ❖ This is the point: **Prior to his incarnation, Christ Jesus existed in eternal, heavenly glory.** He was one with the Father and with the Spirit. In Christ was all the white-hot, blinding glory of God. In Christ was all the power and authority and majesty of God Most High. He was in the form of God. He was equal with God. The exact imprint of his nature.
 - And yet he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. That word *grasped* in v6 is not suggesting that Jesus refrained from grasping after equality with God as if he didn't already have it. And it doesn't mean he was asked to forsake his equality and he obliged without greedily grasping onto it.
 - **No, Christ always was, always had been, and always will be equal with God.** When Paul says he didn't grasp onto that, he means Jesus refused to exploit his equality with God to his own advantage. **In other words, he didn't view being the Son of God as an excuse to not serve and suffer on behalf of others.** Rather he saw his unique power and position as uniquely qualifying him for that very task.

- ❖ Jesus reverses all worldly assumptions of power and position. The rulers of this world lord their authority over others. To the world, being great and godlike involves grabbing after power and grasping tight to whatever position or privilege you obtained. **But Jesus turns it around by expressing godliness (godlikeness) not in terms of grabbing or grasping but giving.** He refused to exploit his equality with God and use it to excuse himself from humble service. Rather he saw it as the reason why he was qualified to humbly serve.

- ❖ Think about how this relates to missions. **Christians don't share equality with God, but as sons and daughters of God, we certainly are a powerful and positioned people.** And then considering that we're American Christians, relative to the rest of the world we truly have immense power, position, and privilege – in terms of money, education, and opportunity.
 - **Some might argue that we would be wasting the blessings of God, wasting all that power and position if we were to renounce our privilege to go serve the nations.** I remember my last year of college, arguing with my parents over the prospect of me becoming a missionary (who had to raise support), and they tried to dissuade me by suggesting that with my grades and my degree I could do more good by getting a "real job" and making lots of money to support other missionaries.

- ❖ Don't get me wrong. I do believe God has called many of his children to do just that. **And through their careers, he blesses them materially that they might be a material blessing to the nations. I believe that's a calling.** But I also believe that we too quickly assume that's *our* calling or that's God's calling for our children.
 - **We need to be reminded that godliness (godlikeness) is expressed by giving and not grasping.** By serving and not being served. So if a fellow believer (if even our own child) expresses a willingness to renounce power, position, and privilege for the sake of serving the good of others (especially to bring the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world) – let's not dissuade them. Let's disciple them in that direction. Praise God because there's nothing more godly (godlike). Jesus modeled that for us.

The Depths To Which Christ Stooped

- ❖ So we've seen the heights from which Christ came, but to fully understand the Incarnation – to fully appreciate how he served us – let's consider the depths to which Christ stooped. Let's look at what he became when he took on flesh.
 - Let's start back in v6, "*6who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*"
 - So to understand the depths to which Christ stooped in order to humbly serve us, we have to understand what it meant for Jesus to empty himself. There's been plenty of ink spilled over the centuries trying to explain this.
- ❖ **Some have argued that Jesus emptied himself of his divinity.** That he emptied himself of whatever makes him equal with God. His omnipotence, his omniscience, his sovereignty. He laid these divine attributes aside during his Incarnation – only to reclaim them later in his Exaltation. But the problem with this view is that it offers us a Jesus that cannot say, with a straight face, to be one with the Father (Jn. 10:30). **He is less than the Father if he had to give up any attributes.**
 - I think what this view fails to recognize is that v7 sufficiently explains for us what it means for Jesus to empty himself. Look back at the verse. It says he emptied himself by *taking* and by *becoming*. Jesus emptied himself (not by laying aside any attributes) but by taking on the form of a servant and becoming a man. **So this is an emptying by means of addition and not subtraction.** He emptied himself not by losing something but by adding something.
- ❖ He added the form of a servant. **Just as being in the form of God meant he really was God, taking the form (*morphe*) of a servant meant he really became a servant.** He didn't just dress up like one. He wasn't playacting. He truly became a servant.
 - Again, he didn't lose his divinity. **But by taking on the form of a servant, he did make himself powerless and insignificant in the eyes of others.** Most of us care way too much about what people think to empty ourselves to that degree. But Jesus didn't. He didn't care. He didn't even count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

- ❖ Some commentators think Paul was making a contrast here between Adam and Jesus (the Last Adam). **The irony is that “equality with God” was exactly what Adam tried to grasp in the Garden.** He was tempted to be like God (cf. Gen. 3:5).
 - For that, he incurred a curse that was passed down to every generation, to every person, in every people group on the earth. **We’re all guilty of trying to be like God, to be the god or goddess of our own lives.** So the curse is on each of us. It’s the curse of death, of body and soul (cf. Rom. 6:23).
 - But this is why the Last Adam came. He came to do the opposite of the First Adam. **Instead of grasping for glory, he grasped and took hold of our sins, as he took up the cross.** And “⁸*Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

- ❖ I think our view of the cross today is much too sanitized. It's treated like jewelry. But in Jesus's day, the cross was an object of derision. It was the most shameful way to execute. Scripture warns of a curse upon anyone who is hanged on a tree (Gal. 4:13).
 - So this is how the King of Glory humbled himself and served you. **He redeemed you from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for you.** He now offers to you salvation without a cost. He gives you an infinitely valuable gift that you could never repay, which is why he doesn't ask you to.

- ❖ Just think back to Joshua Bell. This is a brilliant, world renowned violinist yet he empties himself and takes on the form of a street performer in order to give ordinary people a free gift. A ticket to hear him play would normally cost you hundreds of dollars. But he graciously offered it free of charge.
 - That's what Jesus did – but on an infinitely grander scale. He was in the form of God. In him was all the glory and majesty of God. And yet he stooped down. He humbled himself and served us a free gift. ***Have you received his gift of salvation?*** Perhaps that's why God brought you here this morning. Don't miss it like all those people in the subway station who were too busy going about their lives. Jesus is here, offering you a glorious gift without cost.

- ❖ Now think about the connection to missions. If missions is about going to the lost, about entering their world, taking on their form, humbling yourself to serve those who may even reject you and even kill you – **then Jesus was definitely a missionary.** The Incarnation was a form of missions, the first Christ-centered missions.
 - Are we willing to follow in his example? ***Are we willing to incarnate ourselves into the world of others?*** To empty ourselves? To take on the form of servants? If you are, then focus on the mind of Christ. If you're a Christian, then you have it. It's yours in Christ Jesus. So humble yourself with the mindset of a servant. Renounce any selfish ambition and vain conceit. Because they have no place in missions.

The Highest Heights To Which Christ Was Exalted

- ❖ So we've seen the heights from which Christ came, the depths to which he stooped, and now let's consider the highest heights to which he was exalted. Because of Christ's obedience to the point of death even death on a cross, we read in v9, "*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

- ❖ **Jesus stooped to the lowest of lows in obedience to the Father, and therefore he was exalted to the highest of highs.** Just follow the arc of his life and ministry. Having emptied himself taking on the form of a servant, having lived a life of perfect obedience, having died a death for the atonement of sin, having defeated death itself after initially submitting to it, having purchased a people for himself (with his precious blood) from among every nation, tribe, and tongue – Christ Jesus is deserving of the highest praise.
 - So God bestowed on him the name above every name. And we're promised that one day every knee will bow to that name and every tongue will confess that name as Lord. Jesus is Lord. That will be a universally recognized truth. Notice it says every knee (and every tongue) in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

- ❖ You might be thinking, "If everyone is going to acknowledge him as Lord, then why do we need to take great risks in going to hard places to tell them what they'll one day confess themselves?" Why? Because notice the mention of "under the earth".
 - **I take that to mean even knees in hell will reluctantly bend and tongues will begrudgingly confess that Jesus is Lord.** There will be no doubt or skepticism in anyone. So yes we can be sure that every tongue will confess but we want them to confess with joy and with us in glory. That's why we need to go! To the billions of lost people in the world, most of them living under a shroud of idolatry and darkness, in lands hostile to missionaries and resistant to the gospel. **More of us need to go and the rest of us need to send.**

- ❖ Let me say a word to those of you considering to go. **If you want to be a missionary, just accept the fact right now that you will not make a name for yourself on earth.** Most Christians can only name a handful of missionaries, and if you asked the average person on the street, they couldn't name a single one. They could probably name a few famous preachers. But they don't know the name of any missionary. So if you want to make a name for yourself, don't go into missions.

- ❖ Now that doesn't mean you shouldn't care about your name, but just do what Jesus did. **He let the Father make a name for him instead of trying to make one for himself.** He was willing to be a nobody on earth trusting that God would exalt him at the proper time. That's what we read in 1 Peter 5:6. "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.*" That promise is what keeps a missionary from despair. It's your answer to the discouragement you'll inevitably face.

- ❖ **It reminds me of a story about a missionary couple who, after decades of faithful service overseas, were returning back to the States.** Their desire was to stay on the field, but their age and failing health forced them to come home. So with heavy hearts they boarded a steamship bound for New York.
 - Also traveling on the same ocean liner was a well-known dignitary and his wife. Over the weeks at sea this elderly couple observed this man's behavior. His drunkenness, womanizing, and foul language. It was a complete contrast to the life they had been living as missionaries.

- ❖ Now when upon their arrival in New York, the dignitary and his wife were greeted with great fanfare – a brass band, reporters, photographers, and bouquet of flowers for the wife. And then the aged missionary couple – with their health broken after years of labor in the service of Christ – walked off the gangplank and through the crowd, unmet and unknown. And as they walked, a tear trickled down the husband's cheek.
 - “What's wrong?” his wife asked. He said, “Our whole lives have been given to the cause of Christ. We've spent ourselves for the sake of the gospel. And now we come home, but there's nobody here to greet us. There's no bouquet of flowers for you.”
 - His dear wife held his hand tight, looked him gently in the eyes and said, “But honey, we're not home yet.”

- ❖ **They weren't home yet.** Now on that day, when they finally cross the threshold of their true home, the Lord will be waiting with all the host of heaven. He'll tell them, "Well done my good and faithful servants!" And he'll bestow on them a brand new name.
 - As we read in **Revelation 2:17**, "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers ... I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*" Amen.