

“A CHRIST-LIKE ATTITUDE”

Philippians 2:5-11

IN THE NAME of Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross; fellow redeemed:

Each Lent we reflect on what Jesus Christ suffered to redeem us from our sins—how He was betrayed, mocked, spit upon, beaten beyond recognition, flogged, dressed in royal purple, crowned with thorns, and finally crucified; and all this while carrying the weight of the world’s sins. As Isaiah wrote of Him: **“And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,”** Isaiah 53:6.

If we truly understand Christ’s suffering; if we truly understand who died on that cross, namely, the sinless Son of God; and if we through faith truly picture Jesus on the cross, bleeding, dying, struggling to breathe, yet still looking down on us with infinite love and compassion—how can we not be changed? How can the cross of Jesus not change our lives, priorities, behavior, and attitude?

Two thousand years ago, the cross of Jesus was firmly planted in the rocky soil of Golgotha. However, since that time, it has been planted in rocky human hearts through the preaching of “Christ crucified”. The cross that was so central to our eternal salvation is still central to our Christian lives—to the way we think, the way we act, the way we speak, the way we treat others.

And this is why the New Testament repeatedly presents Jesus Christ as the Model and Motivation for Christian behavior. We are to love as Jesus loved. We are to give as Jesus gave. We are to serve as Jesus served. We are to forgive as Jesus forgave. Even marriage is empowered by the example of Christ. For Paul wrote to the Ephesians: **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her,”** Ephesians 5:25. A self-sacrificing love.

In today’s text, Philippians 2:5-11, the apostle Paul presents Jesus Christ as the Model of and Motivation for the right Christian attitude. He wrote: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, 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.”**

“Made Himself nothing. Took the nature of a servant. Became obedient to death. Humbled Himself.” Of course, humility is of no value to the world. The world views humility as weakness and reserves its loudest praises for the strong, the relentless, the people willing to do whatever it takes—lie, steal, cheat, betray, backstab, even kill—in order to succeed in life. The world desires fame, not anonymity; power, not meekness; connections, not relationships; Julius Caesar, not Jesus Christ.

This attitude was the same two millennia ago. Many, if not most, of the people who lined the streets on that first Palm Sunday, shouting “Hosanna” and waving palm branches, thought that Jesus was riding into Jerusalem to establish an earthly kingdom; to oust the hated Romans; to implement social programs—free food, free miracles, free healthcare; and to restore Israel’s national pride and glory. And when Jesus did not do these things, the shouts of “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday became shouts of “Crucify Him” on Good Friday—what analysts on CNN and Fox News would refer to as a real shift in public opinion polls.

The following quote is from an article in Forbes Magazine titled Why Jerks Get Ahead: “As much as we’d rather not admit it, jerks often get ahead in our world—usually at the expense of a lot of other people along the way...A study published in the journal *Social, Psychological and Personality Science* indicated that the ruder someone acts, the more convinced observers become that he or she is powerful, and therefore does not have to respect the same rules the rest of us bow to.” Interpretation: ‘Act like a jerk and you’ll get what you want.’

And we’ve all seen people with this type of attitude. Attitude is an interesting word. It comes from the Italian ‘attitudine,’ which in the Seventeenth Century was a technical term used to describe the artistic pose of figures in paintings and sculptures. Later it came to mean more generally ‘a pose or posture that reflects attitude.’

And attitude is reflected in posture and body language. The set of the shoulders or the jaw, the tilt of the head; the thrust of the chest; the pace of the walk—characteristics which may lead us to say, “See that guy? I can tell already that he has a real attitude.” It’s no coincidence that the Old Testament often refers to the stubborn, faithless Israelites as “stiff-necked” people. Body language for people who had a real attitude toward God and His Word.

But true humility is of great worth to God. In fact, throughout the Old Testament and the New, the Bible tells us exactly how God feels about pride and humility, and the inevitable consequences of each. Consider the following Bible passages. Psalm 51:12, **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”** The Hebrew word translated as “broken” in this verse is used

elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe a ship broken and battered by wind and waves.

Or the familiar words of Proverbs 16:18, **“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”** Or Isaiah 66:2, **“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word.”** Or James 4:6, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Then there are these sobering words of Jesus, spoken at a wedding reception at which guests were selfishly taking the seats of honor, Luke 14: **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

God wants us to have a humble attitude. But how do we change attitude? We can change oil, change lightbulbs, change direction, change the TV channel. But how do we change something on the inside—attitude toward a spouse; attitude toward God’s Word; attitude toward serving, helping, forgiving, and so on?

For a Christian, the answer is obvious. Paul points to Jesus as the Model of and the Means to change attitude, saying, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,”** Philippians 2:5. Our attitude should be Christ-like. So, what kind of attitude did Christ have?

First, Christ’s attitude was one of selflessness. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:5-6, **“Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”** In a section of Scripture that defines Christian attitude, why would Paul first remind us of Christ’s deity? **“In very nature God.”** Many religions are willing to call Jesus a good man or mighty prophet or even a ‘son of God:’ Mormonism, Islam, Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a multitude of other religions and isms. But they are not willing to call Jesus truly and fully God. Perhaps partly God. Perhaps some sort of God. Perhaps God with training wheels, but not true God.

Many of the people who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday undoubtedly felt the same. As reported by Matthew 21:10-11, **“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.’** Some saw a good man. Others saw a prophet. Still others saw a miracle-worker. But how many saw God riding on a donkey; a lowly beast of burden? Yet, this is what was happening.

Some years ago I watched a segment of the Bill O’Reilly show on Fox News, in which a Jewish rabbi and Roman Catholic priest discussed the existence of a real devil, and by extension, the existence of a real God. In the process the subject of Jesus

naturally came up. And afterwards, O'Reilly summarized the segment this way; and I'm paraphrasing: 'Folks, it doesn't matter what religion you are, what God you worship, or what you believe about Jesus Christ. We all need to put aside our religious differences and be more ecumenical.'

Could a statement be more wrong or have more disastrous consequences? It does matter which God we believe in. It does matter what we believe about Jesus Christ. The historical Jesus of Nazareth was and is true God, of whom we confess in the Nicene Creed, p.22 in the forepart of our hymnals: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God."

An abundance of Scripture verses testify to this great truth, including the one in today's text, Philippians 2:6, "**Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God.**" Or Consider Romans 9:5, "**Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised.**" Or Colossians 2:9, "**For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.**" Or Titus 2:13, "**Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**" There are many other passages too; but how many do we need?

Understanding who Jesus was and is, namely, true God, enables us to better understand the extent to which He humbled Himself for our sakes. Jesus did not consider—consideration refers to attitude—equality with God "**something to grasped,**" wrote Paul; that is, something to be held onto at all costs to the exclusion of everyone and everything else, even though that equality with God was fully and rightfully His.

How different from the attitude of sinful mankind, where our focus by nature is first and foremost on ourselves and not on others; on getting what we earn and deserve and that to which we are legally entitled. "Get up. You're sitting in my seat." "Come on, there are plenty of other seats." "Yeah, I know, but this is my seat." Or, "Move your car. This is my parking space. Can't you read? Did you miss the sign? It says, 'Reserved for Mark Weis, employee of the month. This will be my space for the next twenty-nine days, two hours, and three minutes.'"

Outside of Mark Twain's fictional story, *The Prince and the Pauper*, how many factual rulers and dignitaries would be willing to lay aside the glory, fame, and wealth to which they were rightfully entitled in order to selflessly serve others? A president? A senator? A famous celebrity? Yet, Jesus did. And Jesus is God. His attitude was one of selflessness.

Second, Christ's attitude was one of service. As Paul wrote of Jesus in Philippians 2:7, He **“made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”** Or as Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”**

Search, but you will not find even one instance in the Gospels in which Jesus Christ placed His own needs before the needs of anyone else. Instead, you will find Jesus going tirelessly about towns and villages, healing, proclaiming the Gospel of God's Love and Forgiveness.

You will find Jesus on His hands and knees, like a servant, washing the filthy feet of His “disciples—then telling them: **“Do you understand what I have done for you? You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you,”** John 13:12-15. His attitude was one of service.

Third and finally, Christ's attitude was one of humility. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:7, **“He made Himself nothing;”** and in verse 8, **“He humbled Himself.”**

When we read the Passion History, we can mistakenly conclude that the horrible things that happened to Jesus were unforeseen and uncontrolled—phrases like **“Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him;”** and **“The officers struck Him with the palms of their hands;”** and **“Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him;”** and **“The soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head;”** and **“They saluted Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews;”** and **“They spit on Him;”** and **“Then they crucified Him.”**

But in today's text the apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus ALLOWED all these things to happen to Him. No one humbled Jesus; He humbled Himself. No one forced Jesus to the cross; He went there willingly. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, saying, ‘If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread;’ Jesus could have done so. When the scribes, Pharisees, and even the thieves crucified with Jesus reviled Him, saying, ‘If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross; save Yourself and us;’ Jesus could have done so. But He didn't. And He didn't because in order to save us He had to willingly humble Himself from incarnation to crucifixion. And He did. His attitude was one of humility.

There isn't a single person in this building today who hasn't at least once in life—more likely many times—wondered, “Does God care about me? Does God understand my circumstances? Does God love me? Is God involved in my problems?”

Friends, God cannot get more involved in our lives than this: **“Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”** So, how can you and I stand at the cross of Jesus, the Savior who willingly set aside the full use of His rightful power and majesty as God in order to share in our humanity and suffer our punishment, and yet not be changed? How can we doubt His love or involvement in our lives?

What was Christ’s attitude? Selflessness. Service. Humility. He did not insist on what was rightfully His. He did not come to be served but to serve. He did not place His needs before the needs of others. And He spared no expense in doing what needed to be done. **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,”** said Paul.

Can you imagine what a Christ-like attitude would do for our marriages, ministries, relationships, and confidence. And yes, I did say confidence. Because when we humble ourselves before God and in service to others, God will lift us up too. As Simon Peter wrote in his First Epistle, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”**

Isaac Watts wrote his beautiful Lenten hymn, #175 in our Lutheran Hymnal:

“When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.”