

## **First Baptist Church, Granite Falls, MN**

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### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Two days ago was the anniversary of the first demonstration of Morse's telegraph in Morristown, New Jersey. For the first time, a message was sent using Morse's telegraph across two miles of wire. The rest is history. Soon telegraph wires would stretch across this land, connecting people from far away and instantly passing messages – some important and some not so important – that would have taken days or weeks to travel by land or sea.

What you might not know is that Samuel Morse wasn't even there at that first demonstration. In fact he didn't even build that particular telegraph. The man who built it was a man named Alfred Vail. Mr. Vail had first met Mr. Morse when he saw him demonstrate a crude, early version of a telegraph that didn't work very well. He was so excited about it that he wanted to work with Mr. Morse to improve the telegraph.

In return for a minor share in the venture, Mr. Vail signed an agreement with Mr. Morse to develop a working telegraph – at his own expense. And that's exactly what Mr. Vail did. When it was ready, he demonstrated it first for his father, 173 years ago last Friday.

But soon Mr. Vail became frustrated by Mr. Morse's lack of involvement in the development of the telegraph while publicly taking all the credit. Over and over Mr. Morse slighted him, grabbing at all the glory while keeping Vail in the shadows. Mr. Vail stuck with it for ten years before finally leaving the telegraph behind.

What a sad story of two rivals who cared more about their own glory than about the partnership they shared. Mr. Morse cared more about his own interests than Mr. Vail's. And Mr. Vail cared so much about his own interests that he finally left Mr. Morse behind. If only they had stuck together, they could have made quite a team. They could have made the telegraph better, cheaper, faster, and more reliable, probably in fewer years than it took for others to do it. But they squandered what they had because they cared more about their own fame than about the telegraph.

The same thing happens among God's people when they care more about themselves than about the gospel. If you and I refuse to humble ourselves, if you and I refuse to become servants to one another, then we are nothing but sniveling, stuck-up, selfish seekers of vainglory who care nothing for the real reason we are here – to advance the gospel of Christ. And instead of advancing the gospel, we seek only to advance ourselves.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, is trying to keep the Christians in Philippi from doing. He pleads with them to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. He exhorts them to stand “firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Php 1:27b). And as we saw last week, he pleads with them to humbly serve one another in perfect unity so that they will not wreck everything by arguing and bickering with each other.

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This morning, we're going to pick up where we left off last Sunday, and hear Paul point to the ultimate example of how we ought to humbly serve one another in perfect unity:

Philippians 2:5-8 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Last week, when we heard Paul's plea in Philippians 2:1-4 for us to humbly serve one another in perfect unity, we heard that we must be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. We must do nothing from rivalry nor conceit. We must each in humility count one another better than ourselves. We must each look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.

But like I said last week, it is hard to do this. It is hard to see our own pride, our own failure to think this way. We are so good at comparing ourselves to others, so good at thinking we're doing a pretty good job at all this because, after all, we're better than most people, right? Just think of all those selfish people out there who are so proud, so conceited, so self-centered. At least we're not like *them*. They could learn a thing or two from you and I, couldn't they? That's the way we're tempted to think.

Even if it's just in the back of our minds, we tend to compare ourselves with other people to decide whether we're humbly serving one another in perfect unity. And we pat ourselves on our backs and we don't change a bit. The words that we heard last week in Philippians 2:1-4 go in one ear and out the other without making any difference in our lives.

Paul won't let us get away with that. He won't let us compare ourselves with other people. No, there is one standard that we're held to, and it is a perfect standard – the very Son of God, Christ Jesus. That's what our passage this morning is all about. To see how we ought to be living out everything we heard last week, we need to look at the one who did it perfectly.

Brothers and Sisters, what we need to hear this morning is that Christ Jesus has shown us how we ought to think about ourselves and about one another. What we need to do this afternoon, as we discuss this sermon, is to take a good hard look at ourselves and compare ourselves to Christ Jesus. And what we need to do as we leave this place is to keep comparing ourselves to Jesus, rooting out our pride, casting out our selfishness, and learning to think the way we ought to think – the way Jesus thought when he came to earth to die on the cross for our sins.

What Paul shows us here in vv. 6-8 is that this mind he has been talking about, this humble, selfless, serving mind, is the very mind Christ Jesus had. Here he shows us that the mind of Christ is not even remotely selfish. The mind of Christ is completely selfless. And the mind of Christ is perfectly humble.

## **Exposition**

### **I. The Mind of Christ Jesus Is Not Remotely Selfish**

First, in v. 6, we see that the mind of Christ is not even remotely selfish: "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped."

## **A. He was in the form of God**

Jesus was “in the form of God.” In other words, he *was* God! Jesus always has been and always will be God along with his Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit – one God, in three persons.

Long before the world was created, Christ was God. That’s why he prayed the way he did right before he was betrayed by Judas, when he said, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (Joh 17:5). And when the world was created, Jesus did all that creating as God: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Joh 1:3).

And when, that day the angel Gabriel told Mary she would conceive and bear the baby Jesus, Jesus was God. He was in heaven with God the Father, enjoying his presence as he always had. He was in heaven, enjoying the glory that God enjoys. We can’t even imagine what that is like. But Jesus knew it perfectly. He was God.

Do you know why this matters so much right here in our passage this morning? Do you know why Paul is telling us this? Because everytime we think we are so good, so high, so noble, so wise, so great that we refuse to humble ourselves, refuse to serve another, we need to remember that Jesus was far higher when he humbled himself and became a servant. And we ought to be ashamed.

Jesus was *God!* You can’t get any higher than that. Have you ever been praised by somebody? Jesus was praised by the angels. Have you ever felt like you were on top of the world, maybe while you were on a great vacation, or on the day you got a new job, or on the day you got that thing you always wanted? Jesus was on top of all creation. No matter how rich you are, Jesus was richer. No matter how good you’ve ever had it, Jesus had it better.

Yet Jesus was willing to give it all up, all the praise and all the riches and all the glory he had with his Father, because he was not even remotely selfish.

## **B. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**

That’s what Paul means here in v. 6 when he says that Jesus “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Php 2:6). If you have a KJV, you have to overlook the clumsy translation of v. 6. In the KJV it says that Jesus “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” The translators of the King James missed the idiom that Paul is using here. The point Paul is making is that Jesus was not selfish – he was ready and willing to give up being equal with God when the time came.

Not that he ever *stopped* being God. Jesus was very clear about this when he walked upon this earth. He was so clear about it that once, when he said, “I and the Father are one,” the Jews picked up stones to stone him to death for blasphemy, “Because you,” they said, “being a man, make yourself God” (Joh 10:30,33).

So when Paul says that Christ was ready and willing to give up his equality with God, he doesn't mean that Jesus was ready to give up being God. He could no more give up being God than you and I could give up being human. What Christ was ready to give up was his glory.

If Christ were selfish, he would have held on to his glory. He would have clung to that equality he had always enjoyed with the Father. He would have refused to take on flesh, refused to become the baby Jesus, a mere human.

But Christ isn't selfish. He is not, never was, nor will he ever be even remotely selfish. And when the day came for him to be conceived in Mary's womb as a lowly human baby, he did not look at all that glory, all that comfort and warmth and power and pleasure, as something to cling to for himself.

Jesus was ready and willing to give it up the moment the time was right. He was willing to give up his equality with God to become a man. But this brings us to v. 7.

## II. The Mind of Christ Jesus Is Completely Selfless

In v. 7 Paul says that Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

### A. He made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant

He "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant." In the original Paul says that Christ *emptied* himself. Theologians debate what this means. Some say that it means he gave up the possession of his divinity, which of course is wrong – he never stopped being God. Some say that it means he set aside the use of his divine power, which of course he did. Charles Wesley seems to think this way in his song, "And Can It Be That I Should Gain," when he says that Jesus "emptied himself of all but love."

But there is another explanation, and I think it makes the most sense. Think of emptying something, like a glass of water. What do you do when you empty it? You *pour it out*. That's exactly the way Paul talks a little later in this chapter, when he says, "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all" (Php 2:17). And that is precisely what I think Paul means here, in v. 7 of our passage this morning. Jesus poured himself out, selflessly, taking the form of a servant.

Imagine, the very creator of the universe taking on the form of a servant! Do you realize what this means? It means that he *actually became* a servant! Jesus didn't just pretend to be a servant. He didn't just dress up as a servant. He actually became a servant. Just as being in the form of God was to be God himself, so being in the form of a servant was to be a servant, through and through.

Jesus gave up everything he enjoyed in heaven so that he could serve. Does that sound familiar? That's the very thing Paul has been trying to tell us. We are

supposed to serve one another – and we are supposed to serve one another this selflessly, this completely, at all costs, the way Jesus did.

Do you have to give up something to serve somebody? *Jesus gave up more!*  
Would it cost you dearly to serve somebody? *It cost Jesus more!* Would it humble you to serve somebody? *Jesus humbled himself more!* Do you have to lower yourself to serve somebody? *Jesus lowered himself more!*

## **B. He was born in the likeness of men**

Jesus lowered himself so much, he lowered himself so far, that he was born in the likeness of men. He actually took on flesh.

Jesus had to, you know, to take away the sins of the world. The penalty for our sins had to be paid. The wrath of God had to be propitiated. God would not be a righteous judge if he overlooked our sins. There had to be a punishment. And only a man could pay that punishment – mankind sinned, and no other being in the universe could take the blame. “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).

So the Son of God became a man, a real man. As a little baby, Jesus cried. He had to be weaned. He had to learn to walk and to talk. And he was tempted, “in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

You might think that must have been easier for Jesus. After all, he never sinned. He grew in wisdom and stature. But when he finally faced Satan in the wilderness, when he was tempted for forty days, I think he was tempted so strongly we can hardly imagine it. Satan tempted him with the very things he would have wanted, the very things Jesus would have desired more than you and I have ever desired anything. So yes, he was tempted, well and truly, as a man.

This was what the Son of God walked into when he entered this world as a man. He didn't have to do this for us. He would have been perfectly righteous to let us face our penalty with no hope of salvation. But because he loves us, he humbled himself. He became poor so that we could become rich. He gave up his glory so that we could enjoy his glory with him in heaven when his work on the cross was done.

Do you have any idea how low Christ had to go to do this? Do you have any idea how humbled Jesus was to take on the form of a man, to become nothing but a wailing, suckling child, to be led from one temptation to another by Satan as a mere man?

I don't think any of us can really understand it. All we can do is imagine lowering ourselves. But the lowest any of us can imagine is still just a tiny step from where we are now. For Christ to lower himself was an infinitely huge step from where he was in heaven.

I've told you before about the day, years ago, when I was sitting at a bus-stop in downtown Minneapolis. And while I was waiting for my bus, I watched as a homeless man walked up to a garbage can across the street. His clothes were filthy. His hair had not been cut for so long that it hung raggedly down around his shoulders. Those of us at that bus-stop watched as he reached into the garbage can and dug around for a while. Finally he pulled out a bag from Burger King that somebody had thrown away. He reached back in and pulled out a Burger King cup with water in it. He opened the bag and pulled out a half-eaten burger, and took a bite. He picked up the cup and put the straw in his mouth, took a drink, and then took the lid off the cup and poured some of the water over his head, to try to wash himself a little. His hair was so greasy and matted with dirt that the water ran right off and dripped on his dirty jacket. He ran his dirty hand over his hair, to try to make himself look a little better, but it didn't help. I will never forget the sight of that man.

Can you imagine being lowered that low? I confess that I can hardly imagine it. Yet that poor man was not much lower than any of us. He was still a human being, just like us. For us to be lowered to his level would be just a tiny little step. It would not be nearly as big a step as Jesus took when he lowered himself. Because Jesus took on the form of a different being entirely.

Imagine being lowered to become a lower being, like a dog, and you might come a little closer to the step that Jesus took. But you would have to imagine becoming a very lowly dog, a flea-bitten, mangy mutt, with big, fat ticks filling your ears. Because Jesus not only lowered himself to take on the form of a man, he lowered himself to the lowest possible level.

### **III. The Mind of Christ Jesus Is Perfectly Humble**

That's what we see in v. 8: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

#### **A. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death**

The thought of God taking on the form of a man is hard enough to imagine. But to imagine him submitting to death as a man is mind-boggling. To think that when God told Adam that he would surely die if he ate of the forbidden fruit, Christ Jesus was also saying, "I shall surely become a man and also die, for you" – that is astounding.

Death is part of the curse. It is the consequence of sin. There is no death in heaven – only on earth, where mankind brought death upon himself when he dared to defy God. How then could God become a man to endure the horror, the punishment, the *curse* that belonged not to God at all, but only to fallen man? What kind of person could do such a thing?

A humble person. Not only is the mind of Christ not selfish, not only is the mind of Christ utterly selfless, the mind of Christ Jesus is *perfectly humble*.

And when the day came for him to die for the sins of the world, it was hard for Jesus. He could hardly bear to think of what he would go through. He agonized over it in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was betrayed, praying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luk 22:42). “He humbled himself by becoming obedient [to his Father] to the point of death” (Php 2:8b)

To do this, to die for us, Jesus had to humble himself by forgiving us when we refused to even apologize. To die for us, he had to humble himself by forgiving us when we refused to repent. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8b). “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10b).

This is how we ought to think. We ought to have the mind of Christ. We ought to be so humble that we are willing even to die to serve those who have wronged us.

“Oh,” someone might say, “but you don’t understand. You should have heard what he said! You should have seen what he did! You should have been there when she made that comment! I’m not going to stand for it!” But remember this, if somebody has wronged you: *We wronged Christ more!* If somebody has offended you, remember: *We offended Christ more!*

And it was harder for Jesus to forgive us than it is for us to forgive one another. I think we miss that. We think that it must have been easier because he was stronger and wiser than we are. But it was precisely because he was stronger and wiser than we are that had to make it so hard to forgive us. Jesus hated sin with a perfect hatred. He saw sin as it truly was – an offense against his Heavenly Father, whom he loved with a perfect love.

When you hold a grudge against somebody, when you harbor anger and resentment in your heart, it is only because *you* have been wronged. It seems so wrong to you, yet it is nothing compared to sinning against God. And it seems so hard for you to humble yourself to the point of even looking at that person, much less talking to him, much less serving him.

Yet Jesus, who saw perfectly how vicious and ugly our sins against God really are, *humbled himself* – not only to come to earth and look at us, not only to talk lovingly to us, but to serve us by *dying* for us.

## **B. He humbled himself by becoming obedient even to the point of death on a cross**

But not only did Christ Jesus humble himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, he humbled himself by becoming obedient *even to the point of death on a cross!* We who live in this day and age can hardly imagine how low Jesus had to humble himself to do this.

Today the cross is an ornament. People wear it as jewelry around their necks – even people who don’t believe in Jesus. It is fashionable. It looks pretty. And to some, it is a status-symbol. They wear it to look good.

But in Jesus' day, it was the very opposite. Oh, it was a status-symbol, all right – but it was a symbol of the very lowest status you could ever have. It was lower even than the electric chair or the hangman's gallows are today.

In Jesus' day, the cross wasn't the only way to be executed. Crucifixion was reserved for those who were to be humiliated. It was a public spectacle that lasted for hours, even days. Those who were crucified had to carry their own cross to the place of crucifixion while people spit at them and threw food at them. Then they were stripped of their clothing and nailed to the cross like a bug pinned to the wall in a museum. And then the cross was lifted high so that all could gather and watch as the pathetic person struggled to lift himself for each gasping breath until finally he died of suffocation.

Jesus went through all that. He carried his cross until he stumbled and fell. The soldiers stripped him of his only garment – all those paintings that show Jesus wearing a cloth around his private parts are wrong. He was utterly nude when they pinned him to that cross and lifted him high for all to laugh at him as a fraud, a charlatan, a fool, a deluded psychopath. And the soldiers gambled for his clothing as the crowds jeered at him – and never stopped mocking him until he finally died.

That was how low Jesus humbled himself to become a servant.

### **Conclusion**

How low are you willing to humble yourself to become a servant?

Enough to speak to that person you have been neglecting?

Enough to devote your time to that person who has never made time for you?

Enough to encourage that person in the nursing home, that place that makes you so uncomfortable?

Enough to exhort that person who hasn't been attending church regularly?

Enough to give your money to that person who needs it?

Enough to serve that person who has wronged you or your family or your friends?

Enough to pour yourself out even while others get all the credit and treat you badly?

Jesus did all that, and more.

And his mind is the mind we are to have, my friends.