

Exploring Scripture Reflection
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Philippians 2:1-13
Rev. Greg Batson

Today we reflect upon a famous scripture from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Paul, along with Timothy and Silas, visited Philippi around 50 CE. It was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia, and Paul founded the church there. He wrote this letter in the mid-50's or early 60's while imprisoned. The letter is in response to the church's prayers and gifts for Paul while incarcerated. Therefore, it is known as Paul's most joyful letter, with the word "joy" used 16 times in the epistle. It also contains one of the most important statements about Christ in the Bible and that is our focus for today.

We can divide this passage into two sections: Paul's appeal to the Philippians to be united in love and humility (verses 1-4) and the basis for the appeal – Jesus Christ (verses 5-11). He begins with an exhortation "If there is any encouragement in Christ, consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, then..." Now Paul focuses on the theme of unity: "be of the same mind, same love." Along with being of one accord, Paul next emphasizes the theme of humility, to look out not for ourselves but for others. This is the bridge to the next section: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," (v. 5).

Bible scholars regard verses 6-11 to be an early Christian hymn that Paul quotes in his letter. It was a liturgy sung or recited by the earliest Christians. It is "V" shaped in structure. Verses 6-8 show how Christ's descent from above/divinity to below/humanity. 'Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself.' The Greek word for emptying is *kenosis*. It is the concept that Christ willingly gave up his divine nature to become a human being like us so that we may be saved. The descent is completed with these words: "and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (v. 8) From this low point, the ascent begins. "Therefore, God exalted him" (v.7) through the power of resurrection and ascension back into heaven. Now Jesus is crowned as the new heavenly king, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v.10-11).

In these six verses, we have the gospel in miniature. The divine Christ humbled himself to become like us, even to the point of death on a cross, and then is raised up to become the new ruler of the universe. It is a theology based on humility and self-sacrifice, in opposition to the earthly rule of the Roman emperor based upon power and oppression.

Reflection Questions:

- 1) When have you felt unified with others in the life of the church?
- 2) How does Jesus humbling himself for us influence your discipleship?
- 3) What words do you associate with Christ's kingship and rule?