

# Why Not?

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a four-part series

November 18, 2018

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*John 3:16 (CEB)*

<sup>16</sup> God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

*Matthew 9:9–13 (CEB)*

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus continued on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. He said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup> As Jesus sat down to eat in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and his disciples at the table.

<sup>11</sup> But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard it, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means: *I want mercy and not sacrifice*. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners."

*Philippians 2:5-8 (NRSV)*

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

*Is our giving a reflection of God's love, sacrifice, and self-emptying?*

Imagine that . . . Jesus walks up to a despised and certainly rich tax collector and demands that he drop everything to follow Jesus. Give it all up and simply walk away with Jesus. And he does!! I half-wonder if Matthew might have muttered to himself, "Why not?" If so, he would soon find out that he had little to give compared to what God had and would give him.

So what exactly did God give Matthew, and, in turn, us? I can think of no better place to turn than the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2, so we'll dig in a bit. After urging the Philippians to always put the interests of others ahead of their own, in v.5 Paul tells the Philippians, "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Eugene Peterson renders it this way: "Think of yourselves the same way Christ Jesus thought of himself." So, the obvious question is -- how did Jesus think of himself?

Paul answers this question by using the glorious Christ-hymn of v. 6-11. That it is a hymn, sung or not, is widely accepted. Thus, it gives us a peek into the proclamations about Jesus that were made by some of the earliest Christians. Whether Paul composed it or simply used it in his letter, this hymn, this "Christ-hymn," was written before any of the gospels.

Philippians is filled with Paul's teachings about how the disciples of Jesus Christ are to live – be selfless, stay humble, pray about everything, be content in all things, think about what is true and good and honorable and excellent, and so on. Yet, in this Christ-hymn there seems to be no moral teachings at all, no "do's and don'ts." We are ready for Paul to tell us why we ought to be selfless – and all we get is verse after verse of

theology. Jesus was “in the form of God” . . . Jesus “emptied himself” . . . Jesus was “found in human form” . . . all this theology. But this is Paul’s way. When Christians brought Paul a practical question, he was likely to give them a theological answer. The Corinthians came to Paul with questions about eating meat sacrificed to pagan idols – and he began his answer with this “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and from whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:9). Paul understood that we cannot separate what we believe from what we do. He forces us to hold together our theology and our morality. We seek the truth about God and ourselves, but always in the service of discipleship. So after calling the Philippians to selflessness, Paul reminds them of Christ’s selflessness and all that he willingly surrendered for us.

Jesus certainly enjoyed rights and privileges that you and I could not imagine. He was God . . . all-knowing . . . all-Good – however, we might choose to phrase it, Jesus had it all. But he gave it all up. He didn’t cling to his inherent rights and privileges, he instead “emptied” himself, taking on the “form of a slave . . . in human likeness.” He gave up the privileges of God so that he might be obedient – obedient all the way to an excruciating and humiliating death on a Roman cross. He gave it all.

Sometimes, Christians get off track with this. We get too consumed with trying to tease out the meaning of “form” or “emptying,” wondering whether Paul is talking about Jesus’ surrendering his omniscience or omnipotence. But this is not Paul’s point. As Morna Hooker wrote, “Christ did not cease to be in the ‘form of God’ when he took the form of a slave, any more than he ceased to be the ‘Son of God’ when he was sent into the world. On the contrary, it is in his self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like.” God is love (1 John 4:16b). Love is selfless sacrifice. How do we know this? Because “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9 or see John 3:16). If we want to know what God is like, we can look to Jesus. If we want to know what love is like, we can look to the cross.

If you know much about God’s work in this world for the last four millennia, you know that God has given much, endured much for our sake. God loves us so much that he

### The Humiliation of Christ

We often consider that Jesus gave his life for us, but we probably don’t reflect sufficiently on the humiliation he endured. Rome ruled the New Testament world and did so with the most rank-and-status-conscious culture ever known. Frankly, life was little more than a relentless quest to gain status and honor. Even wealth was desired only for the status it might bring.

Philippi, in Greece, had a unique history and was the most Roman city outside Italy. When Paul arrived in Philippi, we can be sure that he felt like he had stepped into another world. The Roman obsession with status and honor was every bit as evident in Philippi as it was in Rome.

Yet in today’s passage, Paul calls upon two images to portray the selflessness of Jesus Christ. First, he uses “slave” (v.7) – the most dishonorable *public status* one could have, and then “cross” (v.8) – the most dishonorable *public humiliation* one could suffer.

It is surely impossible for us to really grasp the shocking nature of Paul’s claim that Jesus, God himself, had taken on the form of a slave, been crucified, and then exalted so that all creation might bow before him. Indeed, the average Philippian was probably less shocked than simply amused. The Roman world scoffed at the very idea.

The humiliation of Christ turns the world upside. Power is weakness. Honor is humiliation. First is last. Victory is death on a cross. And for whom did Christ turn the world upside-down? For whom was he humiliated? For you and for me. Surely, this ought to stagger us, to drive us to our knees as we throw ourselves before such a God and sing praises to his name.

gave his son for us. Jesus was faithful to the Father and to us all the way to death, even death on a cross. Jesus gave it all and the natural question then is; “What should be our response?” Should we give out of gratitude for God’s boundless love, mercy, and grace? Of course! This is something that God’s people have always understood, even when they (we) have failed to act on it.

Humiliation, surrendering our rights and privileges, obedience, death – who wants that? We want to win, achieve, triumph, succeed. We want more rights, more privileges. We’ve earned them. We deserve them. We want it here and now.

This is the sin of the so-called “Health and Wealth gospel.” Prosperity preachers promise full bank accounts and healthy bodies in exchange for belief (and a large donation). Yet, Paul points us in a completely different direction. The Christian path is about obedient faithfulness and we should expect that faithfulness to take us down the way of suffering. Perhaps this is why wealth in the gospels is not about reward but warning.

So, the question to us is whether we will welcome Paul’s challenge to have the mind of Christ. Will we strive each day to be obedient? Will we seek to learn what God desires from us? Will we rise to the challenge of our own God-given vocation? Will we regard others, all others, as better than ourselves, putting aside selfish ambition and conceit (2:4)? Will we put the interests of others ahead of our own, even if it means we “lose” (2:5)? Will we embrace the humility of obedient faith? Will we give sacrificially even as we so gladly receive?

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

In the verses immediately preceding today’s passage from Philippians, Paul says that we are privileged to believe in Christ and we are privileged to suffer for him. Paul binds together our theology and our ethics. On the one hand, we confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior, and with the other hand, we put others before ourselves, living in humility and selflessness. We cannot ignore the demands of the Gospel and still proclaim its truth. Discuss what this holding together of theology and ethics means for our lives as Christians, as we strive to be better disciples. You might make a list of key beliefs and then consider the ethical implications of those beliefs. Or turn it around. Make a list of what we are called to do, and then discuss the theological implications of those practices. Why do we do what we do? Only because Jesus said so? . . . or ought we to look a little deeper?

## Daily Bible Readings

*More on Jesus and sacrifice*

**Monday, Colossians 1:15-20** Another Christ-hymn from one of Paul’s letters.

**Tuesday, John 13:3-17** Jesus washes the feet of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion.

**Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 8** Paul appeals to the Corinthians for a collection of money and uses Jesus’ humbling of himself as an example(v. 9)

**Thursday, Galatians 4:1-7** Paul reminds the Galatians that they are heirs of the kingdom because God’s own Son was born of a woman and under the law.

**Friday, Isaiah 45:23 & Romans 14:10-12** To whom will every knee bow and every tongue confess? What does it mean to proclaim that Jesus is Lord?

**Saturday, Mark 8:34-9:1** Gaining our life, but not the world.

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

**Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

**Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center**

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *The Virtues*

For Advent: Discovering the Good News in *A Christmas Carol*