

**The Transformation of Jesus**  
**April 14, 2019**

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**Philippians 2:5-11**

Since last fall, we have talked about transformation. We have focused on our need to be transformed from who we were apart from Christ to who we are in Christ. Every person here needs transformation. If you are a Christian, you have entered a lifelong journey of transformation. We need to be changed from broken and God-defying people to whole and God-glorifying people.

Our theme verse for 2018/19 talks about this possibility. You can find it on the front page of your bulletins from 2 Corinthians 3:18. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." So when we see or behold the Lord's glory we are being transformed. Just as Moses face glowed after he was in the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai, seeing the Lord's glory today transforms us. One place we see God's glory is in the Bible. We talked in the fall about how we can see the glory of the Lord in His Word. We considered our own view of the Bible and why people don't believe or trust the Bible. We saw our desperate need to hear from and see God in His Word.

After Christmas we've talked specifically about the need for the transformation of our hearts. We see this in the book of Proverbs. We have looked at the wisdom from Proverbs regarding our hearts, desires, temptation and emotions. Recently we have looked at our need for transformation from the 7 deadly sins. Don't worry, I haven't forgotten #7 – Lust. We'll pick that one up after Easter.

But none of us could experience transformation without Jesus Himself undergoing a transformation. His was very different than ours. We need transformation from a broken and sinful heart to a whole and righteous heart. Jesus always has a whole and righteous heart. But He underwent a profound transformation so that we could experience transformation.

Today we will look at Jesus' transformation in the New Testament book of Philippians. The Apostle Paul writes to this relatively new church. He instructs them about healthy community interaction. He teaches about how they are supposed to treat each other as Christians. He talks about attitudes and actions. The Christian community is supposed to be overwhelmingly different than other communities that do not have Christ.

So Paul will paint a picture portraying this alternative community. Then he will tell them what's necessary to experience such a community. But he not only tells them , he shows them what's necessary by looking at the

transformation of Christ Jesus. From Jesus' example we will see the attitudes we must have to experience a loving and unified Christian community. This text will also lead us into Easter week as we prepare to remember Christ's suffering, death and resurrection next weekend.

I would invite you to participate in this message today in 3 ways.

1. Recognize that Jesus went through this transformation for you. Maybe you're here today unsure about God's love for you. Well, take this opportunity to hear what Jesus went through for you.
2. Look for the glory of the Lord in this passage. It contains some of the deepest theology and reality about Jesus that we find anywhere in the New Testament. So look and behold his glory.
3. Realize what God calls from us through this passage. We have adopted Vision 2025 asking God to bring people here who don't know Christ. We want to grow spiritually as much as we can in anticipation of their coming. We hope and pray they will discover a loving and unified Christian community. So each one of us needs to take to heart what this passage calls forth from us.

Our text today is Philippians 2:1-11. (Page 832 in the Bibles in the pews).

### **Philippians 2:1-11 (ESV)**

**2** So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul writes this letter from prison. He's there because he's a Christian. Yet, he is not consumed with his own situation. He is concerned about this community of believers yet very hopeful about them. So though he can't be with them physically, he wants to bolster them up with this letter. He reminds them that a community of believers can persevere and get stronger when they come together. So in verses 1-4, he paints this picture of a strong, loving and unified community.

**What kind of people make up a loving and unified Christian community?** People who are of the same mind, same love, in full accord and of one mind. That's four different ways of talking about unity or oneness. But we see growing factions and divisiveness in our world. Is such a community even possible?

Yes, if the people in the community **do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit**. Yes if the people **count one another as more significant than themselves**. Yes if the people **not only look to their own interests but also to the interests of others**. These characteristics describe what the community of God's people is supposed to look like. Yet this picture goes against how a lot people engage with a church today.

For many, church has become a place you go to once a week to hear some good music get some inspiration. Then you leave. Whether you interact with anyone sitting around you or in that church community is of secondary importance. As long as you enjoy the music and get inspired, church has fulfilled its purpose.

When church is like that, it's not much different than going to a movie or a hockey game. You might say hi to the people who sit around you at the theater or in the arena. You might chat a little about something that happens. But when you leave you go your separate ways. That's a very common type of community in our world today. Sadly, it's becoming a more common type of church community.

But that is not the community Paul talks about here. Christian community is supposed to be profoundly different. The people sitting around you right now are not just people you go to church with. They are supposed to be people you love; you work with; you walk beside and hold up when they need holding up. They are supposed people who will hold you up when you need it.

But in the age of the self, this kind of community might be harder and harder to find. Because of the sin in our hearts, we will naturally do the opposite. When sin rules we do everything out of selfish ambition and conceit. We count no one as more significant than ourselves. We look out only for our own interests and not for others. So if we're honest with ourselves, this kind of community will not just happen. It will not come naturally. It will not be something we can just pull off in our own strength.

Paul realizes this. He doesn't just move on from this topic hoping they will be able to produce this type of community. I think he wants them to understand the depth of what's involved here. I think he wants them to see that such a community will not happen with a couple of surface changes. So he goes to Jesus' life to show them **What is**

**necessary to experience a loving and unified Christian community? We must have the same mind or attitude as Christ Jesus.** Verse 5 – “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” We have to adopt the same attitude that Jesus had or the same thinking He thought which will lead to this kind of community.

Now we’re not sure if Paul means for his readers to imitate Jesus’ attitude or if he’s calling forth this attitude from within us because we have Christ in us. He writes, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Do we follow Jesus’ example or does living in Christ mean we simply have to rely on Christ and the Spirit’s power to live this way. Both are possible interpretations. In fact, if you have an ESV Bible, it will footnote the end of verse 5 and give you an alternative translation – “Have this mind among yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” So if that’s what Paul meant, he’s instructing us to follow Jesus’ example. But if he means you already have this mind which is yours in Christ Jesus, he instructs us to depend on Christ for the power to live like this. Both are possible and both are right. Yes, we can follow in Jesus’ example. But we must also depend on the Holy Spirit to overcome our sinful nature so we can live this way. This then leads to another question.

**What attitude did Christ Jesus have?** It starts in verse 6. Most Bible scholars agree that verses 6-11 may be one of the first Christian hymns ever written. Paul may be quoting this hymn here to prove his point.

So have this mind which is yours in Christ Jesus “Who, though he was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” This verse reveals that we’re talking about Jesus before He came to earth. This consistent testimony of the New Testament is that the Son of God existed before the creation of the world. What was Jesus like? Christ Jesus was in the form of God according to verse 6. This does not mean that Jesus was kind of like God or looked like God but really wasn’t. “Form” here means “the true and exact nature of something” or “possessing all the characteristics and qualities of something.” One commentator puts it like this: “To say that Christ existed in the form of God is to say that outside his human nature Christ had no other manner of existing. He possessed all the characteristics and qualities belonging to God. This somewhat mysterious expression appears to be a cautious, hidden way for the author to say that Christ was God, possessing His very nature.

Verse 6. “Who though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.” (This is the attitude piece.) What does that mean? Well it surely talks about Christ being equal with God. But then the verse says He did not do something with that equality. It has to do with that word “grasped.” It could mean to seize or

snatch or even rob. So the old King James Version translates the verse “He did not consider it robbery to be equal to God” meaning He did not snatch or steal equality with God because He was equal with God. But the problem with that interpretation is how do we have the same attitude? Because we’re not equal to God.

But ESV translation possibly gets closer to what was meant here. **He did not grasp tightly to the privileged position of equality with God in heaven.** He didn’t hold so tightly to that status He had that He refused to budge from it or refused to lower his status or refused to give up His status to help others. With that type of thinking in mind, we see how we could have this same mind.

We’re called not to grasp or hold on so tightly to the privileges and status we have. Instead as Christians we must refuse to trumpet our status and superiority. We must resist using our status as an excuse to avoid caring about someone else who might have a lower status than we may have. So if we get good grades, we don’t look down on those who get lower grades. If we have some wealth we don’t look down on those who have less. We do not consider our status or privilege as something we hold so tightly to that we refuse to get involved in the others’ lives.

I have seen this attitude lived out many times in our church family. I remember one time there was someone in the church that wanted to build a deck. They shared this at a gathering of some people from the church. There was someone at this gathering who had a lot of experience building decks. They noticed that there were some potential problems with the plans the first person had for their deck. So this experienced deck builder could have said “You’re not seriously going to build your deck like that? There’s design flaws. How stupid are you? I have years of experience in building decks. You better let me take over before you build a disaster.” That response is holding tightly to privilege or status.

But instead this person said something like “Oh, I see you’re planning to build a deck. Tell me about it.” After the first person shared a little about it, the expert said “I wonder if you’ve thought about the width of the floor boards you’ve chosen. Are you pretty sure they’re strong enough to hold up a person.” The person who wanted to build the deck said “I don’t know. What do you think?” Then the expert deck builder said “I see how you’ve got these supports planned for the deck floor. Do you think that they are close enough together to support enough weight for what you want to put on the deck? The person said, “I’m not sure. What do you know about this?” Then the deck expert humbly shared some of their knowledge yet encouraged the person wanting to build the deck. They refused to grasp tightly to

the status they had because of their experience. Instead they gently worked with the person to help them ensure their deck would turn out right. That's the kind of attitude Jesus had. That approach builds a loving and unified community of people.

Another piece of Jesus' thinking is found in verse 7. "But He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." So Jesus in some way emptied himself. Now what question do we immediately ask when we hear that? What did Jesus empty himself of? Did He empty Himself of some of his God attributes? Did He empty Himself of His glory? Christians have been debating this for 2000 years.

But maybe we're asking the wrong question. It may be right here for us to see. In the fact the verse points us to it. "But emptied himself by taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of man." Notice the word form again. In verse 6 – though he was in the form of God." Verse 7 – He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant or slave. So does mean Jesus emptied himself of the form of God to take the form of a servant?

No. Emptied can also mean poured out. This phrase "he emptied himself" is found nowhere else in ancient Greek. And it's an awkward phrase in Greek perhaps indicating that it is translated from another language maybe like Hebrew which is the language of the Old Testament. What do we find in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 53 which talks about a servant who gives up His life for others? Isaiah 53:12 – "He poured out his life unto death." So maybe "He emptied Himself" means **He poured himself out for others**. He did it by taking the nature of a servant or slave – not a position of status or honor. He became human which was several steps down from equality with God. But He poured out himself for others.

So we also need to have this attitude which was in Christ. We are called to pour out our lives for others. Now think about that image – pouring out our lives by thinking about full to the brim pitcher of water. It's one thing to slightly tip the pitcher so a few drops spill over the top and dribble down the side. It's quite another to take the pitcher and pour out the water inside of it.

We can be like that full to the brim pitcher of water. We can help others out of the accidental overflow from our lives. So when we've got time and we're well rested and we've got resources and things are going well in our own lives – then we can help others. That's not pouring out our lives for others. That's spilling a couple of drops, still good but there's not much self sacrifice involved. But often we don't have time and we're tired and we could be working for our

own causes. But we hear of someone in need. So we go help them and pour out from our lives. When God's people pour themselves out for one another, you see a community of love and unity.

The final piece of Christ's thinking is found in verse 8. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." **He humbled himself.** He did not strive for some pinnacle of earthly achievement. His whole life was characterized by self-surrender, self-renunciation and self-sacrifice. Jesus did not only humble himself by taking up a humble place in the world. He humbled himself and became obedient to death. As human beings, we aren't obedient to death. We simply have to accept it as part of life. But Jesus had the power to prevent His death. He had to agree, obey and allow Himself to be killed.

But he not only humbled himself to the point of death. It was even death on a cross. This was the most striking element of Christ's humiliation. Crucifixion was borrowed from the Persians and perfected by the Romans. It was an unusually cruel and humiliating means of capital punishment. It was generally reserved for slaves, robbers, assassins, rebels and the like. Jews abhorred crucifixion not only because of its pain and shame but because anyone hanged on a tree was considered accursed by God. Yet Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

God's call on our lives involves humbling ourselves. We don't naturally like to be humbled. Yet the Scriptures speak again and again that God hears the cries of the humble. God works through the humble. For when we humble ourselves, we have a right view of God and us. He's God. We're not. Yet He chooses to work with us. So when we carry out God's work, He gives us the strength. It's all about Him. So we give Him the glory. Then we're not doing anything out of selfish ambition or conceit. We're living with God's ambition for God's glory.

So this hymn shows us in a pretty detailed way, the transformation of Christ so that we might have life and experience transformation ourselves. Though being in the form of God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. (Top step). But emptied himself (Step 2), by taking the form of a servant (Step 3), being born in the likeness of men (Step 4). And being found in human form, He humbled himself (Step 5) and became obedient to the point of death (Step 6), even death on a cross. (Floor). It shows us the same attitude we need to adopt towards one another if we will experience a deeply loving and unified community.

But God didn't leave Jesus there. From verses 9-11 we see the rapid ascension of Jesus to the Highest place.

Verse 9. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given to him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Notice we don't have a step by step commentary of God raising up Jesus. It's not He was resurrected, appeared to the witnesses, ministered for 40 days and then ascended from the Mount of Olives. It's just one massive swoop upwards to be highly exalted position. And that's what will happen one day when we get resurrected or Jesus returns.

Until then, we need His Spirit and power to live the same way with one another.

Maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian. But the community described earlier is something you would like to explore. Do you want to experience and contribute to this kind of community? You need Christ in your life – we can't have the same attitude as Christ without Christ in our lives. We can't produce these attitudes because they go against the grain of our natural human desires. We need the transforming work of Christ in our lives to change our hearts. Then we will grow in wanting to act like this. But first you must receive Christ. Then we all, having Christ's mind among us can contribute to and experience a more loving and unified Christian community. May God make it so among us.