

The Humility Of God
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Today we're talking about humility
Humility is a big deal for the Christian...AND sometimes its easy as we think about humility to become proud about how humble we are. As someone once said,

"If I only had a little bit of humility, I'd be perfect."

But no word describes who Jesus was for us better than the word humility
Augustine said that, for those who would learn God's ways,

Humility is the first thing, the second thing and the third thing.

Eleven hundred years later, Martin Luther, when asked to name the three greatest virtues replied,

"First, humility; second, humility and third, humility."

What is humility? It is not a poor self-image, nor a denial of one's gifts, abilities and accomplishments.

C.S. Lewis describes humility, not as having a low opinion of one's talents and character but rather

**Humility is self forgetfulness....
for the purpose of being able to live in the world in a way that allows you to give love sacrificially.**

There isn't a whole lot of talk about humility these days

People don't pursue humility...they don't work toward the goal of being last...they work for the goal of being first.

People don't like going down ladders. They like going up ladders...

Going up a ladder means pursuing **pleasure, knowledge
Success, status, recognition, power**

In fact companies spend millions of dollars coming up with logos that represent pleasure, knowledge and success
Things we think of as being at the top of the ladder...

For instance, the **NIKE Swoosh – it means success...**
Nike is a greek word meaning victory...taken from the winged goddess victory

You can think about the logo for

Apple Computer..that apple in silicon valley...
Represents knowledge...information

MacDonalds...golden arches
Pleasure, joy...

Mercedes Benz logo....dominion...that logo came from the
Three pointed star...to show that motors could have dominion in the earth, sky and water

Companies spend millions
To make logos that stand for things that people want *at the top of the ladder*...knowledge,
success, pleasure, victory, status power...
Our world says these things are important
Our world says, live to attain these things that are at the top

Now what is
The most famous logo of all time?...bar none?

Greatest emblem in the history of the world?
See on tombstones, t-shirts, dangling off of people's earlobes and necks
On greeting cards, on plaques and
On churches...what is most famous LOGO in history of the world?

The cross!
And it is so common
People look at it in our day w/out thinking about what is behind this LOGO

Let's just be very clear on this as next week is holy week
The cross was a way to kill people

Developed in Persia...used a lot by Alexander the Great
Romans perfected it...made it an excruciating, humiliating way to die...
The word excruciating came from the Latin word for crucifixion

Why would the early church – it was a kind of a start up back then...
Use a symbol..or a logo ...that has nothing to do with success?
Pleasure, knowledge, the pursuit of happiness, victory, status – Nothing about climbing UP
the ladder.

Why would they use a logo..or a symbol that was at the bottom of the ladder that ws all about
Scandal, failure, pain and death

Who in their right mind would choose a means of execution as a primary logo?
Representation of themselves?

It would be like PG&E...choosing an electric chair...for their symbol...using the byline "the
power is on"

Its because **the God we worship....didn't set an example**
That was about climbing up...a ladder...to get pleasure, knowledge, success,
recognition and power

Jesus did precisely the opposite he went the other way
He went down the ladder....as far down as you can go
And he did it for us.

Kiara read you the scripture from the book of Philippians.
Philippi where this church was – to whom Paul wrote this letter
Was named
Philippi after Philip of Macedonia
Who created the town of Philippi as a place to keep his gold...

Philippi was like a La Jolla, – a very rich, elite town (I was there recently – never saw so many Rolls Royces and Ferraris in one place)

PHILIPPI WAS FULL OF LADDER CLIMBERS

The elite people in Philippi were Roman Citizens

Roman culture was vertical, and hierarchical; all about climbing ladders

So **Philippi was extremely preoccupied with Status, recognition, power, success**....*aren't you glad we don't live in a culture that values those sorts of things today?*

In Rome there was a social system that was all about climbing up ladders just like this ladder...

Up at the very top you had people called **Senators**...in Rome...600 men...very wealthy

Equestrians...at one horse into battle...sort of like knights

The Decurians...high status folks

Citizens...vote...own property

Freedmen...liberty...not citizens...could not vote

Slaves at the very bottom...they had no rights...masters could dispose of them...slaves had to offer obedience

In Philippi, Honor meant going up the ladder!

And even within these classes of people there were ladders
And goal was to get to the top of the ladder in your particular class
It was so bad that even

When people were buried in Philippi... they had their titles on their tombstones!!
So even in death you were ranked!!!

Going down the ladder... was to be avoided at all cost!!

The idea of anyone humbling themselves did not exist

Tim and I wanted to go see Hamilton. Until we went on line and figured out that the cheapest tickets were \$900 a seat. If you want a really good seat however, you have to spend 3,000 a seat.

The more you pay the better your seat! But we soon realized we couldn't even afford something in the back row behind a pillar.

Back in Phillipi in Bible times...you weren't seated according to what you paid for a seat...
When people went to a feast...they were seated acc'd to their status
If you were to the right of the host...you were first...Left you were second
And public arenas had areas marked off for your status... this lower group goes to this section and this higher group to a better section...and you better not get your sections mixed up

Clothes reinforced this too...
what you wore, said how high up that ladder you were

One historian wrote that **Rome was the most status conscious society in the Mediterranean**

So here comes Paul

And guess what Paul knows? He knows that most of the early church start up were made up of the people down here...on the bottom of the ladder...the people nobody cared about

How could Paul describe to these people...down here...that God loved them?

In this status conscious area, where your worth was dependent on what rung you were on... how could Paul get across to them that they had value and worth that they were still God's children..and didn't matter what rung of the ladder they were on...huge challenge

I am going to read the Philippians passage which is our text this morning...and watch this downward mobility that Paul describes... ..what God in Christ is willing to do for us...(**CAN THIS GO ON BACK SCREEN? I AM ON LADDER**)

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (What! In complete contrast to the Roman culture!)

⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Really?)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God, (I am at the top of the ladder – can't get any higher than God)

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (goes back to that self-forgetfulness that CS Lewis talked about out of love for another)

⁷but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, (remember "servant" was the lowest of the low in Roman culture – I go down to bottom rung – then go back up)

being made in human likeness. (I go down one)

**⁸And being found in appearance as a man, (I go down one)
he humbled himself (I go down another rung)
and became obedient to death— (I go down one)
even death on a cross! (I go down one)
(STOP BACK SCREEN)**

Jesus starts way up here...no higher could he be on the cosmic ladder...he was in very nature God

And the Jesus starts to come down the ladder
Lower and lower....Still lower

Remember...No one humbled themselves in Philippi...no one did that
Then it says Jesus became obedient...to death...**that obedience to death was slave language...**
And then...what?

Even death on a cross....gone as low as you can go
Cause **Death on a cross was particularly reserved for slaves...to make it as excruciated and shameful as possible... Citizens were not to be crucified Jesus could go no lower than this.... Jesus went As low as the lowest person who ever lived had ever gone**

Jesus did that for you and for me. And now there is a happy ending...Lets read together

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Your benefactor, in Roman culture, if you had one
Could honor you and lift you up out of one status category
And put you way up at the top
If Ceasar was your benefactor it was a great thing cause you'd be exalted very high....

But this was God...who was higher than Ceasar...and Jesus was exalted to the highest place
No one higher than this
That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow
In heaven....and earth and under the earth...and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord

Jesus is Lord
Jesus is Lord...not a CEO...Not president of US
Not a rock star...movie star...not Caesar
Jesus alone is Lord
Because Jesus alone reveals to us
Who God is...

And we find that as we look at Jesus

In this tremendous act of downward mobility
That it is the nature of our God to serve and sacrifice himself for us...
And that...like it or not...is who we are called to be like...who we are called to follow

Paul writes to Philippi and says...c'mon...Give up on spending your life exalting yourself

How does Paul refer to himself in this book at the beginning
Paul starts this letter diffently than most of his letter...usually he writes at the beginning Paul an
apostle of JC...here he writes

Paul and Timothy...servants/ slaves of Christ Jesus
He is identifying fully with the nature and purpose of Christ

Later he says “**we are citizens of heaven**” playing off the idea that we are not “citizens of Rome”. We have a different goal.

Its not ladder climbing.

Paul says, “**act like citizens of heaven where the playing field is all level**”

No one is superior to anyone else...and
Citizens of heaven know that there is
No task too humble for them to do..

Servants focus on others, not themselves. **This is true humility: not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less.**

—Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 265-266.

I am sure that today wherever you work
Or go to school, or train, there are ladders to climb
We even climb ladders in church and decide in subtle ways who is in, who is out, who is a better Christian...

In this congregation there are a lot of gifts
You've got intelligence, resources, you're networked in

But if you use what you've got to ladder climb for your own gain
It won't work out for you in the end
You'll become obsessed and preoccupied...you'll be a citizen of this world
Citizens of heaven do the opposite
they go down down, down the ladder
until they
Find someone who is suffering and they lift their burdens in Jesus name...When we do this....our own hearts are lifted up...

That's what this community WVPC s all about...that's why our logo, our symbol, our focus is not on pleasure, power or success or what good people we are....our symbol, our focus is the cross....the excruciating cross way down at the base of this ladder...

It reminds us that we follow a God who will go all the way down to save us...a God who is not afraid to be hurt for our sake
Not afraid to be vulnerable...because Love always is....

Not afraid to take on our burdens for us, our sins, our darkness...

And a humble God who says to us "citizens of heaven...who are not of this world.....servants/slaves of the most high God...go and do likewise.

As we celebrate communion today we take the body and blood of Christ into ourselves, remembering his death in abject humility and recognizing that our salvation has happened because of God's desire to go down all the way down the ladder...That's the humility of God

Let us pray... Move into communion....