

# **THE SELF-GIVING**

A meditation on Philippians 2: 6 – 11

## **THE SERVANTHOOD OF JESUS**

'He took the nature of a servant' (v.7)

It is clear from the reading of the Gospels that Jesus had pondered deeply on the Old Testament Scriptures. The book of Isaiah was influential in determining the nature of his ministry. This was especially true of the passages known as the Servant Songs. In these passages the Servant is depicted as living in a very close relationship with God, receptive to his word and deeply influenced by the Spirit. He is entrusted with a message not only to Israel but also to nations beyond and preaches that message with a tenderness of love. He undergoes insults and suffering of an appalling kind and is stricken on behalf of the people to whom he was sent. Here was a figure, not of power as people understand power, but of service which led to agony and death.

Jesus became the Suffering Servant, and pointed out to his followers that their discipleship would involve not the trappings of majesty but a cup of suffering and a baptism of tribulation, perhaps leading to death – 'for the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and give up his life as a ransom for many.'

## **THE HUMILITY OF JESUS**

'He was humble and walked the path of obedience' (v.8)

The book of Deuteronomy clearly states the need for the people of God to be obedient. The people are called upon to be obedient to God, his laws, to the leaders of the community and to their parents. 'If you listen to these commandments and obey them faithfully, then the Lord your God will continue to keep his covenant with you and will show you his constant love.' 'Make certain that you do not forget the Lord your God; do not fail to obey any of his laws.' Obedience and love are inseparable. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love one another. Humility, obedience and love are inseparable. Humility is self-giving, self-emptying. It is being ready to see good in others and being willing to suffer and die for others. Jesus was humble and his life was an example of the power of humility and obedience. His disciples found it a difficult example to follow. Humility leads to the cross, but it also leads to resurrection.

## **THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST**

'All will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord' (v.11)

The earliest confession of the Christian faith that we possess is the words 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. It is the heart of the Christian creed. Paul says 'If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved. The Greek word for Lord is 'kyrios' and it has very wide meanings. Often it meant nothing more than our 'sir', but at the other end of the scale, it is used for the very highest form of address. It is used very frequently in the Old testament for God. This Lordship does not have the trappings of power, but the self-emptying nature of a

slave. It is a lordship seen in human form and death on a cross. It is a Lordship seen also in the resurrection and ascension. It is Jesus named Lord.

Jesus, Crucified, risen and ascended is the One who receives universal acclamation as Lord. He is the Lord of Creation and there is no part of creation - in heaven, on earth, and in the depths, over which his dominion is not supreme.

## **THE GLORY OF CHRIST**

'To the glory of God the Father' (v.11)

Isaiah spoke of God as the glory of humanity - 'I, the Lord, will be your eternal light; the light of my glory will shine on you.' Paul said, 'God made the light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ.' It is difficult to know what the word 'glory' means. In the Old Testament it is a description of God. God is enthroned in glory in the heavens, but his glory is also found in the Temple. When God's glory is seen, his presence is felt. Glory, then is something that God gives to his people. But glory is also something that the people give to God. When God's light shines in the hearts of people, and when they know God through Jesus Christ, then God is glorified and his Kingdom has come. The humility, servanthood, suffering and death of Jesus glorifies God.

Jesus Christ is proclaimed Lord, but this does not take anything away from God. When Christ is Lord, God is glorified because the whole aim of Jesus is not his own glory but God's. God's glory is seen on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus. In Christ, pre-existing, incarnate, humiliated and exalted, God and the world are united, and a new order has been brought about.

## **THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES**

'God gave him the name that is greater than any other name' (v.9)

The Greatest name in all of Heaven and Earth is Jesus. The vision of the hymn in Philippians is a vision of the whole created order bowing down before Jesus and worshipping him. The lamb who was slain has become worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength, honour, glory and praise. Worship is a proclamation of the Lordship of Christ and gives glory to God.

## **PRAYER**

Jesus, thank you for living your name,  
for taking the role of Saviour to your inmost being  
for living and breathing justice and compassion.  
Thank you for your human birth  
and your standing beside us in repentance for sins.  
Thank you for the searching of the heart in the wilderness  
which led you to see what God had called you to do.  
Thank you for the miles of road you walked  
in search of those who would not listen and follow.  
Thank you for the anger which blazed against the self-righteous,  
who thought they knew the way to God  
but blocked the road for others.  
Thank you for wearying yourself in healing the sick

and listening to problem upon problem.  
Thank you for feeding the hungry  
and sending the rich away empty.  
Thank you for your despair and agony, your suffering and death  
for opening the way to the Kingdom.  
Thank you for your resurrection and ascension  
which has given new life to your world.  
Now I take to myself the Christian name  
by which you know me as your own  
and say again that I will follow you,  
glad to be in your family and to carry your name,  
Lord, Jesus Christ.

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