

# The Christ Hymn, Pt. 1

Pastor Chris Baker // 05.27.18 // Centralia FBC

## Philippians 2:5-8

### Introduction

Many of you know by now that I grew up in East Tennessee. The thing that I miss most—aside from family—about the place I grew up is the Smoky Mountains. **(Slide 2)** I miss seeing them as they change with the seasons and I miss exploring them. I love to hike and still try to find a mountain to hike every time we visit East Tennessee. My favorite mountain is Mt. Le Conte. It's one of the highest peaks in the Appalachian Mountains topping out over a mile high at 6,593 feet, which for a mountain really isn't all that tall. But it's absolutely beautiful and it's crisscrossed by a number of really fun trails that lead you through waterfalls, natural rock formations, or caves on your way to the summit—or one of the summits, as you can see in the picture there are actually five peaks that comprise Mt. LeConte. At the top is an inn that sits at the highest altitude for any lodging in the Eastern United States. It's so rustic that their supplies are carried up each week via llama train.

I've hiked Mt. Le Conte several times via a few different trails, **(Slide 3)** but most of my experience with this mountain isn't from seeing it up close. It's from observing it from a distance. You could see Mt. Le Conte from Dandridge, the town I grew up in. It loomed large in the distance and from every angle it would appear just a little bit different. It took about 45 minutes to drive from my house to the base of the mountain and so the whole way there as we drove to it I'd be treated to a different perspective.

The verses we are studying for the next two weeks in that same way loom large over the entire book of Philippians—and in some ways the whole New Testament. One commentator says Philippians 2:5-11 should take our breath away and cause us to wonder, ponder,

imagine, and sing with the angels, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ (Rev. 5:12.)<sup>1</sup>

These verses are known by many as the Christ Hymn and were probably part of an early Christian worship song or poem. In these seven verses Paul teaches us some of the most important theological truths concerning Jesus in the whole Bible. Now, there is a tendency among some to think that theology isn’t practical and it’s best left to the people who have letters before their name and PhD’s and many leather bound books and that sort of thing.

That couldn’t be further from the truth. Paul plops this intensely theological treatment of Christ right in the middle of a very practical section of Philippians dealing with humility and Christian living. Remember the three things he called the church to in the verses we studied last week: Joy is filled up when you live united, when you live humbly, and when you live helpfully toward one another. The launching point for the Christ Hymn in our text today in verse 5 is an imperative to adopt the same attitude that was on display in Christ Jesus.

Our actions, what we do when we get up in the morning, the way we speak to and treat our families, the way we work, the things we watch on television, the way we spend our money—all those things are outgrowths of our theology. Our actions and our attitudes and even the very way we view this world find their roots in what we believe about God. There can be no disconnect between our practice and our theology.

If we hold a high view of God (as creator of the universe and Lord of our lives) it will affect every area of our lives. If we hold a low view of God (as some disembodied spirit who is unknowable, or a loving grandfather in the sky who just wants to give you a hug and a puppy) it will also affect every area of our lives.

Steve Timmis put it well when writing for the Acts 29 church planting network. He wrote: **“ . . .if evangelical theology is the truth about God in Christ, then all Christians are theologians in every sense that matters. . . theology (is) worked out at street level in the messiness of life.”<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Lynn H. Cohick, sourced at <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/philippians-christ-hymn-lynn-cohick-new-commentary/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.acts29.com/theology-is-for-life-2/>

Your theology impacts you every day. Things are going really well for a lot of you right now. It's Memorial Day weekend, you've been having barbecues or going to the lake or going to the pool. You drive through town and see 300 American flags waving in the breeze. It's a good time to be alive! How do you process that? As we celebrate weekends like this together we should be spurred to be thankful and to celebrate God's glory in creation as we're on the lake or His glory in fellowship as we have that barbecue together.

When Tuesday rolls around and many of us go back to work . . .and really have to pay for this long weekend—because the work doesn't stop just because we're not there. And we are struggling along next week and maybe one or two things don't go the way we had hoped. . .your theology is going to govern how you react. I've been there. I've blamed God for a dead battery. Sure, it was me who left the lights turned on, but if my theology tells me God is supposed to make me happy and comfortable then that dead battery is His fault. But if my theology tells me that God has already given me the means to lead a joy-filled life and that joy-filled life is not tied to my circumstances then I'll know that even though my week doesn't play out like I expect or even like I hope I can still worship, I can still rejoice and I can keep moving on.

If thinking theologically is difficult for you that's okay. It takes time and effort to grow in understanding but it's something that you not only *can* do but I'd submit to you that if you're going to grow in Christ then you *must* do it.

John Calvin knew this truth and stated it well when he said: ***“(Being a Christian) is not a doctrine of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart.”***

It has been my prayer this week that the truths of these verses will find a resting place in the inmost affections of our hearts as a congregation as we study them together.

So, our aim for the next two weeks is to study a text that is deeply theological and to do it in such a way that it is profoundly practical.

Let's read our text for today together Philippians 2:5-8, Paul writes:

**5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,**

**6 who, existing in the form of God,  
did not consider equality with God  
as something to be exploited.**

**7 Instead he emptied himself  
by assuming the form of a servant,  
taking on the likeness of humanity.**

**And when he had come as a man,  
8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient  
to the point of death—  
even to death on a cross.**

### **The Mindset of Christ**

Verse 5 links us back to our text from last week where Paul conveys this same idea of adopting a common attitude twice in verse two when he encourages the Philippians to think in the same way and be intent on the same purpose.

So he's saying we are to adopt the attitude, or the mindset, that was present in Jesus Christ. What he's ultimately calling the Philippians, and us, to be like as we live in unity and in humility and as we seek to serve one another is to take on the mindset of Jesus Christ. In the following verses he explains what that mindset looks like.

But before we jump into that I want to pause for just a moment and note one thing. The imperative here is a call to be like Jesus. But 'be like Jesus' isn't the thing that saves you. Don't read these verses and see the mindset of Christ and think you need to achieve this before you can be saved, or even before you can serve in the church, share the gospel, get baptized, go on a mission trip or anything like that.

Be like Jesus isn't the gospel. If it was we would all be going to hell. None of us are enough like Jesus to be accepted by God—that's why Jesus became flesh in the first place. These Philippians had already recognized that. They, like you and I if you're in Christ, have already cried "I can't" when it comes to being accepted by God. We aren't like Jesus on our own, we have recognized that we can't live the life God wants us to live so we have realized our own sinfulness and turned in faith to Christ and placed all our hope in life and in death on Him.

Be like Christ is not our justification, but it is a part of our sanctification. It's not how we're made right with God but it is how we walk with God day-to-day. We pursue Christlikeness

because in Christlikeness we find joy—and we find it nowhere else. We trust in Christ, not ourselves for joy, unity, fellowship, humility, and self-sacrifice. We aren't saved because we're Christlike, we become Christlike because we're saved. And Paul holds up Jesus as the ultimate example of all those things. Let's see how:

## **Jesus used His position to give, not to grab**

We learn a great deal about the position of Jesus Christ in verse 6. There are two very important points to be made here. We need to see both the **preexistence of Jesus** and the divine nature of Jesus.

First, His preexistence. Jesus is not a created being. He is fully God and has always existed—even before the foundation of creation. There was never a time when Jesus didn't exist. He has no point of origin. John 1:1-4 says

***1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.***

and in case we weren't fully convinced there that John is referring to Jesus he clarifies it in verse 14

***The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

He is Creator, not created. He said so much himself. In John 8:58 Jesus said before Abraham was, I am. Jesus claimed to be God and we believe that Jesus Christ is fully God. We will study the Baptist Faith & Message statement on God here tonight at 6 for those of you who want to dig deeper into this but we see this truth of Jesus reflected there, too. Under the heading of God the Son it states that ***Christ is the eternal Son of God . . . He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man.***

This is an important truth to recognize about who Jesus Christ is. The second truth we see in verse 6 is that not only is he eternally existing but he exists in the ***form of God.***

Paul's word that is translated 'form' in our Bibles is *morphe*. It shows up again in our text in verse 7 so let's talk about what it means. *Morphe* signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it.<sup>3</sup> Meaning in his deepest being Christ is God. Christ was God before the beginning, in the beginning, before His incarnation, during His incarnation, after His incarnation and will continue being fully God for all eternity. *Morphe* doesn't speak so much to the outward appearance of its subject—there was a different Greek word for that. It's not talking about how the essence was visibly manifested. . .because that changes right? Think about your identity. You've always been who you are. You only get one identity. Even if you witnessed some heinous crime and ended up in witness protection, you would get a new name but at your core your identity wouldn't change. Now, the way that identity is expressed changes all the time. You started out life somewhere around 20 inches long and in the neighborhood of 8 pounds. Your outward appearance changed, but the essence of who you are remains the same forever. Jesus was, is, and will always be existing in the form of God.

So to start verse six we need to see the preexistence of Jesus and we need to know that His existence is in the form of God.

Knowing that, we will see that Jesus used his position—as fully God—to **give not to grab**. Though everything we just talked about is true of Jesus, Paul writes that He did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited—literally to be grasped.

Did Jesus deserve equality with God? Absolutely. We've already covered Jesus as fully God. We here at FBC hold a Trinitarian view of God meaning that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, (2) each Person is fully God, (3) there is only one God.<sup>4</sup>

That's a lot to wrap your mind around right now—and it's another thing you can come back tonight to learn more about—but the main truth I want us to focus on for this morning is that Jesus not only had equality with God but He deserved it.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/50-16>

<sup>4</sup>For an extended discussion visit <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-doctrine-of-the-trinity>

His position is such that equality with God is inherent in who He is. Yet, he did not grasp for that. Instead He used His position as fully God to give of himself as we will learn in the following verses.

***The first way we adopt the attitude of Christ is to adopt his giving nature.*** Paul wrote in Romans 15:3 that Christ did not please himself. He had every right to a comfortable existence and was fully within his rights to grab hold tightly of that existence. But instead of closing His hand tightly around His rights He chose to open His hand so that you and I could take hold of it.

I don't know about you but I have a hard time letting go of my rights. I find it hard to let go of my possessions, of my desire to be mad at someone when they do me wrong . . . I find it hard to let go of bitterness over my circumstances sometimes. How different would our lives be if we applied Jesus's mindset to the things we think we deserve? What if we applied it to our marriages, our children, and our workplaces?

Our nature as humans is to grasp. You see it from the very beginning of humanity and I think seeing it this way will help this to really sink in for us. When you were born you received DNA from both of your parents. You have 23 pairs of chromosomes that make up the nucleus of every cell in your body. Of each of those pairs, one was received from your father and one from your mother. As Christians, it's almost as if there are two sets DNA at work inside you. We are all born with a natural predisposition to sin because of the fall of humanity. When you're saved by grace through faith God creates in you a new, redeemed nature. You're brought to spiritual life for the first time but you'll continually fight against your fallen nature for the rest of your life on this earth. Being like Jesus is part of that fight, a part that Paul understood well for he wrote in Romans 7:15 **For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.**

Some of us are there. We say AMEN! to that. I know what I should do but I struggle. It's because of our sin nature that we struggle. And that nature—the one we inherit from Adam—is completely the opposite of the one we inherit from Jesus. Look at the difference:**(Slide 21)**

<b>Adam</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
made in God's Image	was and is God
wanted to be like God	took on human flesh
wanted to exalt himself	emptied himself
was discontent being God's servant	assumed the form of a slave
arrogantly rejected God's word	humbly submitted to God's word
succumbed to temptation	overcame temptation
brought the curse on the world	took the curse for the world

Jesus—because He was fully God—was able to overcome all the results of the curse of Adam through His perfect life and sacrificial death. Romans 5:14 and then 17 tell us ***14 Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a type of the Coming One.***

***17 Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.***

If you belong to Jesus Christ you already possess that gift of righteousness. That's what Jesus won for you on the cross of calvary. How did He do it? That what we'll look at in the rest of today's text. We've looked at who Jesus is. We've looked into the power and authority that He had and now we're going to see what this attitude that Paul is calling us to reflect really means.

**Jesus used His position to give and He gave by emptying Himself.**

This is the opposite of grasping at something. This is the self-emptying of Christ. I want us to understand what this means by first looking at what it doesn't mean. This doesn't mean that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity. He did not lose his God-ness. We can see that in verse 6 that we just looked at. We can also see it in Colossians 2:9 where Paul writes *For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ.* So He didn't empty Himself of His true identity. Jesus retained every bit of power and authority that He always had—but

submitted Himself to life on earth, to the veiling of His glory for a time, to giving up the free use of some of His attributes.

So how, then, did He empty Himself? The text shows us five ways Jesus emptied Himself.

Paul tells us He did so, first, by taking on the form of a servant. Specifically, the word Paul used means a person who was a slave forever. Typically, slaves in ancient Israel were more indentured servants than permanent slaves like we would think of in modern terms. Most served for a defined period of time and then each Jubilee year the servants would be freed—if they were Hebrews. A bondsman was someone who had come to his master and said “Master, I want to serve you forever.” You are such a good master that I know I couldn’t possibly have a better life on my own. Then the bondsman would be taken to the doorpost of the house, and his ear would be nailed to the doorpost to signify his desire to be a permanent fixture in that household, serving his master for life.<sup>5</sup> (Exodus 21:5-6)

That’s the image Paul is conjuring here when we look at what it means for Jesus to empty Himself. The God who owned everything came as a slave who owns nothing.

**He also emptied himself by taking on the likeness of humanity.** This doesn’t just mean He received a body. That means he took on all the struggle, all the pain that comes with living in a fallen world. A perfect God experienced things that are foreign to His deity: fatigue, temptation, pain, nausea, infection, agony, and shame.

So He felt the effects of the Fall without ever knowing or committing the sin of the Fall. He was made like His brothers and sister in all things, Hebrews 2:17, in all things. Why? That He could become a merciful and faithful high priest. He knows what we feel because He’s felt it. He was human in the sense that He experienced all the tests and temptation of men. And that’s why He’s such a faithful and understanding high priest. Yet He never sinned. That was possible according to Hebrews 4:15 because He retained His deity while taking on humanity.

**He emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant, the likeness of humanity, and then, interestingly, Paul add by taking on the image of a man.**

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/fighting-for-joy-growing-in-humility-knowing-christ-and-the-peace-that-passes-understanding-a-study-of-philippians-21-song-of-christ>

Paul doesn't waste words. He's not just restating that Jesus came in the likeness of humanity. He's going a little bit deeper. He used a word that specifically deals with the outer appearance. If likeness of humanity deals with the inner truths of what Jesus did as He emptied Himself then this word deals with the outer realities. Jesus was not a sight to behold. In fact, most people looked at Him and saw someone who was out of His mind. His own family initially dismissed Him as crazy. Think about how hard that would be for God. When they looked on Him as a man, think of all they didn't see. His glory was veiled by his human body and that would have been unspeakably difficult for Jesus.

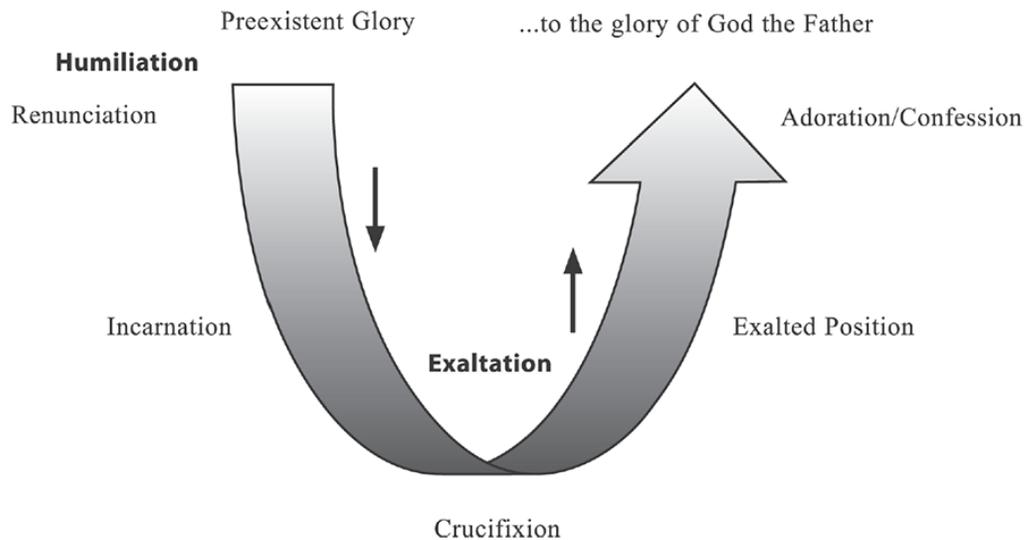
But He still didn't fight for his own rights or reputation. **Paul goes on to tell us that he emptied himself by humbling himself.**

Think about the humility on display as Jesus went on trial. He has already gone from king to bondsman, but He emptied himself even more. Luke 22:63 tells us the men who were holding Jesus mocked and beat him, they blindfolded him and beat him some more. He allowed Himself to be tortured and executed. And none of that caught Jesus by surprise. He told the Pharisees in John 10:17 that **“this is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again.”**

That leads us to the final way Jesus emptied Himself. **He emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant, the likeness of humanity, and the image of a man. He emptied himself by humbling himself, and by being obedient to the point of death.**

Jesus emptied himself by choosing to die. What Jesus made clear there in John 10 is that for Him, dying is a choice. It's not for you and I. We are going to die. Jesus said that only he could lay down His life. No one person and no army could take it from Him. Jesus chose to die as the ultimate example of humility. And He did so in the most humiliating and excruciating way possible. As He emptied Himself He allowed Himself to become accursed. Deuteronomy 21:23 reads for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. That's the humility of Christ. That's the attitude of Christ. That He—in humility considered you and I more important than Himself—so much so that He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, emptied himself by becoming a bondsman, taking on the likeness of humanity, the form of a man, and humbling himself to a cursed death on the cross.

That's the humiliation of Jesus Christ. That's the first peak of this mountain that looms over the rest of this book. And that's the example Paul is laying out for us as the attitude we are to adopt as Christ-followers. There's a fuller application to come when we finish this passage next week. We are only through the first part of the Christ Hymn. This passage plays out like a valley in a lot of ways as you can see on the screen. **(Slide 33)**



\*6

So there is a more complete application to come but allow me to give you just a few things to carry with you this week.

Remember, the goal of Paul's holding up of Christ the ultimate example of humility is that the Philippians would fulfill his joy by having this same mindset. Paul's joy is rooted in the proclamation of the gospel, we learned that in 1:18. No matter what, the gospel is proclaimed and in this I rejoice.

As God's people we are to share God's mindset and the scope of that mindset is actually very narrow. We are—as the Great Commission in Matthew 28 teaches us—to be disciples who make disciples. When we are saved by grace through faith we are to strive for growth as disciples, to spur on other disciples toward growth, and to advance God's kingdom by sharing the gospel message with unbelievers. If that is going to happen, Paul is saying that we have to adopt this mindset because the work we are called to, though narrow, is hard.

<sup>6</sup>Merida, Tony; Chan, Francis. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Location 2078). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

So how do we adopt this mindset? Jesus emptied Himself. He let go of what what rightfully His for the sake of others. Paul is calling on us to emulate Him in this text. We adopt this mindset in at least three ways and this is what I'll leave you with today.

### **For the sake of the gospel, let go of your life.**

Verse 8 tells us Jesus was humble to the point of death. Paul already wrote in chapter 1 that to live is Christ to die is gain. Are you still hanging on to your own prerogatives for life? Are you still dictating your direction? This doesn't mean to just let go and let God. That may sound good and be popular but it's not in the Bible. What we need to let go of is our own agenda and what we need to let God do is tell us how to spend this life He has redeemed for us.

### **Second, for the sake of the gospel, let go of your pride.**

Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. How do we reflect that mindset? By letting go of our own lust for the exaltation of our own name. This means that in the Christian community — though we want to be loved and we want to be understood, and we want to be comforted, and we want to be esteemed and thought highly of, and though we want to be ministered to — we will have as our mindset an attitude that says 'I am not here to be served, but to serve, because that was the way of my Master who saved me by grace.' And though as Ligon Duncan said ***we do want to be loved and understood and comforted and esteemed, following Jesus means that we adopt His mind; and that our first order of business becomes not to be loved, but to love; not to be understood, but to understand; not to be comforted, but to comfort; not to be esteemed, but to think highly of others.***

I understand this would be radical change for many of us. That's why I want to leave you with this third truth. We adopt the mindset of Christ by

### **Third, for the sake of the gospel, let go of your lordship**

Paul refers to Jesus in this text as a bondsman and we discussed already the meaning of that phrase. Too many of us want to have Jesus and still be the master. That's not how it works, folks. There's no Biblical context for following Jesus and still getting to decide what's right and what's wrong on our own. We don't get to look at pieces of the Biblical text and say 'that doesn't fit with my worldview so I'm going to ignore that.' You have been radically saved and your radical salvation demands radical obedience. Being lord of your own life

leads to hell 100% of the time. By crying out to Jesus you have given up the role of master, we now adopt the role of bondservant to God and to one another.

This text should serve to both awe and motivate us. We should be awed by Jesus mindset and inspired to emulate it in all that we do. Just as we can see a mountain in the distance and then go experience it up close, we should look at Jesus' attitude here and be floored. Then we should, with the leading of the Holy Spirit, pick ourselves up off the floor and go live out this mindset the best that we can—humbly, united, and most of all for the glory of God.

We've looked at the mindset of Christ this morning. A poet named Robert Raines summed up well the opposite mindset. Remember in the latter part of John's gospel, James and John have a bit of an argument over who will be greater in the Kingdom of God. Raines played off that attitude and I'll close today with his poem:

I am like James and John  
Lord, I size up other people  
in terms of what they can do for me;  
how they can further my program,  
feed my ego,  
satisfy my needs,  
give me strategic advantage.  
I exploit people,  
ostensibly for your sake,  
but really for my own sake.  
Lord, I turn to you  
to get the inside track  
and obtain special favors,  
your direction for my schemes,  
your power for my projects,  
your sanction for my ambitions,  
your blank checks for whatever I want.  
I am like James and John.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living* (Nashville:Word, 1981), pp. 94, 95.

