

Essays in Philippians- The Messiah Poem

Philippians 2:6-11

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In last week's essay, we considered Paul's instructions to the church at Philippi to be united. He highlighted the blessings we have from God to aid us in becoming like-minded. In addition to what God provides, we must develop a humble spirit towards one another. We must set our minds on serving others. Humble service is how unity is gained and strengthened. Paul states that the mindset of humble service is exemplified in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

Now, Paul describes the humility of the Messiah in verses six to eleven. These verses are a poem. There is a rhythm to them. They describe the fall and rise of the Messiah. The lyrics capture the message of the Gospel. The poem fits the theological dynamic of the Messiah, who was prophesied to be set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). In the remaining space, we will consider this poem line by line.

Philippians 2:6

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Paul wrote that the mindset of humility was in Christ Jesus. His humility was proven when He left Heaven to come to earth. The first line of this poem indicates the Messiah's equality with God. The Messiah is eternal, divine, and supreme; yet, He did not allow His high status to dissuade Him from coming to earth. Rather than view His divine status as something to grip tightly, He relinquished this and came to earth in human form.

Philippians 2:7

But emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The divinity of the Messiah makes His coming to earth all the more astonishing. While Jesus had status with God, He emptied Himself of this status and took on human form. The humility of the Messiah was proven through His lowly birth. He was born into poverty. He possessed no earthly advantage in life. He was not born into wealth or power. He was born into the servant class. The word "servant" in this text comes from the Greek word "doulos." The term is more accurately translated as "slave." The saints of Philippi were likely to have been citizens of Rome. This was a special status with privileges slaves could never enjoy. What a surprising and humbling truth for the saints at Philippi to know that their Savior was a slave.

Philippians 2:8

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

As this poem reaches its middle, our Savior demonstrates humble obedience by dying on the cross. He descends from Heaven to the depths of death. The poem leads to the cross. The cross brought the greatest form of degradation to our Savior. The cross meant humiliation and suffering. In the Roman Empire, crucifixion was a punishment reserved only for slaves and foreigners, not citizens. However, the cross was the means whereby the Messiah served as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). In time, the cross was recognized as the greatest evidence of the Messiah's self-giving love for humanity.

Philippians 2:9

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

After reaching its lowest point, the Messiah poem begins an ascent. The dark, depressing mood of the poem dramatically changes. In response to the Messiah's humble obedience by the cross, God highly exalts Him to a preeminent status. He now becomes supreme to everything earthly and human.

Of course, this lyric describes the resurrection and ascension of the Messiah. While He descended to the depths of death, God raised Him from death. Sin, death, and the powers of evil were defeated by the resurrection of the Messiah. By the Spirit, God gave the Messiah new life.

Philippians 2:10-11

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

But, what do the Messiah's dying and rising mean? The poem concludes by declaring what the Messiah means to the world: Jesus is king. Therefore, everyone must submit to Him. The humble obedience of the Messiah to God is an example to us. Like Jesus, we must humbly submit to God by obeying the Gospel.

God does not force our submission to Jesus. The Gospel is designed to compel us by love to obey. Awareness of the Messiah leaving Heaven, coming to the earth in the form of a servant, dying by crucifixion, and being raised from death is intended to change us. The Gospel is intended to stop us where we are in life and cause us to reevaluate ourselves.

After becoming aware of the Gospel, we cannot continue to live as if Jesus is not king. This is our choice to make; however, there is a day coming in which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord (Rom. 14:11-12). Sadly, if we wait for Judgment Day to make this confession, we will not be welcomed into the kingdom of Heaven. Like Jesus, we must humbly obey God in life to be saved in death. As Jesus once said, "So everyone who

acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-33).

Conclusion

The Messiah leaving Heaven, coming to earth, dying on the cross, and being raised from death is truly a humbling account. Jesus proved His love for us by condescending to our level. Unfortunately, this poem has been the subject of much debate. Divisions have occurred regarding this passage and the divinity of Jesus. The irony of this centuries-old schism is that Paul used this poem to illustrate the kind of humility needed for saints to become united.

Unity will always be challenged by pride. As identified at the beginning of the second chapter of Philippians, pride can rear its ugly head through conceit and selfish-ambition. There was nothing self-serving about what the Messiah did for us. He epitomized self-giving love.

Self-giving love defies human comprehension. We tend to act in our best self-interest. Most pursue unity through a divide and conqueror mentality. Most crave power and position. Jesus both challenges and condemns this convention. By leaving Heaven and coming to earth, Jesus shows us the power of self-giving love to unite the human family.