

House Church Message Notes May 10th, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 4: The Reality of Christ in Lockdown (Philippians 2:6-11)

• **Introduction: What is God Like?**

- *Who is God? What is God like?* Let's just acknowledge that there have been *many* different answers to this question throughout the world, throughout cultures, throughout history. It's a question your children ask, it's a question philosophers ask. Theologians ask, poets ask, beggars and kings ask—*what is God like?*
 - N. T. Wright said that trying to talk about God is like saying that “we must learn to stare at the sun.”
 - A. W. Tozer suggested that what comes into a person's mind when they think about God is the most important thing about them.
 - What could be more formative and life-altering than our understanding of who God is? And, as people often ask in our present age, can we really even know?
 - When Christians talk about what God is like, we point very particularly to Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus—specifically, Jesus *on the cross*. That's what this week's passage is about.
- Philippians 2:6-11 is the centerpiece of the whole book, and it's actually one of the more important passages of the New Testament, in terms of Christian theology. It contains a poem that depicts the nature and action of Jesus in God's saving plan. It's debated whether or not Paul wrote this poem, or if he is quoting a Christian poem that came from an earlier time, but either way, what we have here is one of the earliest Christian statements on who they understood Jesus to be.
- These six simple, poetic verses contain *massive* ideas on some of the glorious mysteries of the faith: Christ's pre-existence, his incarnation, and his exaltation. These verses form the center-of-gravity for Paul's exhortations to the Christians, before and after this poem—to live in unity, in sacrificial love, and imitation of Christ. Paul shows here that what we believe about God directly affects how we live.
 - If you could pick one passage to memorize from these 8 weeks in Philippians, this would be it: this statement of faith is something we should be repeating to ourselves again and again to shape our thinking about God and to shape how we relate to our families, our fellow Christians, our co-workers, our neighbors, even our enemies.
 - I've found it to be so helpful to repeat and pray on this passage before I'm about to go into a difficult conversation with someone—whether it's about a conflict or a disagreement of some kind, it has often *rescued* me from acting out of arrogance, just by focusing my heart and mind on *who Jesus is*.
 - Let's open up to Philippians 2:6 and walk through this together. But before we dive in, remember that this whole passage is setup by last week's final verse, Philippians 2:5—“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...”

• **Philippians 2:6-8**

- V. 6 *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...*
 - Jesus, “being in very nature God...” It sounds like John's Gospel which begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God...has made him known,” (John 1:1-3, 14, 18). Jesus himself said, “whoever has seen me *has seen the Father*,” (John 14:9) and, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” (John 14:6).
 - *Being in very nature God...this is essential*. Jesus isn't just an exceptionally gifted moral and spiritual teacher, he isn't just an influential, martyred religious leader. He isn't just *like God*. He

is our God and savior. He is, in the words of the Nicene Creed, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.”

- He is, once and for all, the definitive and unparalleled answer to the question, “what is God like?”
- And It's amazing just who Jesus reveals God to be and in what a scandalous way he does this: because, “he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” or to be exploited.
- Unlike Adam and Eve, who grasped for the ability to be like God, Jesus who is God incarnate “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (as some translations say).
- Rather (V. 7) *he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
 - Can we even fathom how radical this love is? The one “who fills everything in every way,” (Eph. 4:10), the one in whom “all things were made,” (John 1:3) the one “who is before all things and in whom all things hold together,” (Col. 1:17) *became nothing*. Emptied himself. Became a servant, a slave, for us. The Creator entered his creation, one old hymn says, “condescended to us,” *to serve us*.
 - What kind of a God is this—who willingly steps down from the glorious throne of heaven to the dust of earth, becoming one of us and giving himself away for a people that despised and rejected him—for *the sake of love*?
 - He didn't arrive in the fanfare of a royal procession, surrounded by glorious angels with fireworks exploding in the heavens for all the world to see—he came quietly to the back-corner of an evil empire, in a small, oppressed people group, living a life of obscurity for his first 30 years.
 - He never wrote a book, he never commanded an army, he never lived in a palace, he never wielded the status of human royalty. “*He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a slave.*”
- V. 8 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
 - It's hard for us today to comprehend how scandalous this was. To die on a cross was a wretched, shameful thing. It was the death of rebels and thieves.
 - People abhorred crucifixion not just because of its torturous cruelty, but even more so because of the *shame* it inflicted on the person, their family, and their people.
 - To be crucified was to be conquered in the worst of ways. You were stripped of everything, down to your last ounce of human dignity, and hung *naked* on a wooden pole, on display, while you died a torturous death. Often times the bodies were left hanging there in prominent places to remind people of what happened when you tried to cross Caesar. You were cursed.
 - “*He*”—the same one who is in very nature God—“*humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*” Jesus did this *willingly* for us, not somehow becoming *less divine* in this humiliating experience—but rather, showing us *what Divine really is*.
 - N. T. Wright comments, “*As you look at the incarnate Son of God dying on the cross the most powerful thought you should think about is: this is the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love.*” (For Everyone Bible Study Guides: *Philippians*, © 2009 InterVarsity Press)
- **Philippians 2:9-11**
 - V. 9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...*
 - This is royal language. And this is also subversive, dangerous language that got Christians in trouble. The ancient people who first heard this message would have imagined powerful rulers like Alexander the Great, who lived 300 years before Christ, and from the age of 20 to 33 (when he died), had conquered the entire known world.
 - That was a ruler for whom it didn't seem like a great leap of the imagination to consider “divine.” Closer to the time of Christ, there was Augustus Caesar who quelled the civil war and brought

so-called “peace” to the Roman Empire—“*now there was a man who was like God!*” Quite literally, people were commanded to worship these men with shrines and offerings.

- Yet, here come the Christians, worshiping a crucified King... who came from heaven to earth and reigns on high once again, waiting to return. It sounds like foolishness to the world, but it is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).
- Jesus once said to his disciples, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)
- V. 10-11 *...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
 - Many rulers come and go in the bloody history of this world’s rising and falling nations. There is only one Ruler who came from heaven to earth, shedding his *own* blood as a ransom for all. He reigns now from the highest heaven, awaiting his appointed day of return, when all things will be set right and made new, when the only possible reaction will finally be to bow and to confess that he is indeed, the Lord.
 - The work he has done is as much greater than the work of all the world’s kings as his name is greater than all their eventually forgotten names. His name is Jesus. He is fully God and fully human, and He is the one true savior of the world.
- **Conclusion**
 - So, what now? When you behold, in Jesus Christ, the breathtaking majesty of *who God is* and *what God has done*, what will you choose? There is a choice to be made, in two directions: first, will you be reconciled to God?
 - Will you choose now, while the choice is still yours to make, to bow your knee and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord? You can accept him or you can reject him, but you cannot forever ignore him.
 - When you think of how beautiful this story is, how glorious his love for you is, in the words of the old gospel song, “how can you refuse him now?”
 - Why wouldn’t we want this to be true? Are we grasping at doubts, guilt, fears, control, when we could let them go and cling to Christ instead? Let’s choose again this day whom we will serve and be sure of it together.
 - But there is another choice to be made as you behold the cross—the second choice is, will you be reconciled *to your neighbor*?
 - Will you continue to grasp the grudges, the envy, the rivalry, the competition, the animosity, the judgement you have towards some other human being Christ also died to save—greater still towards some brother or sister in Christ? Or will you take it to the cross? Will we, against all natural tendencies, forgive, and let the love of God be the only thing between us?
 - Remember the exhortation from last week that flowed into this passage: “*...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.*” (Phil. 2:2-4)
 - What seemed impossible at first now seems like the *only appropriate response* to the reality of who God is—the reality of Christ, the God who was crucified, the Son of God who became like us, who is the King above all kings.
 - So, my friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” (verse 5) and “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” (we’ll get into that next week). Amen.