

To God Alone Be The Glory

Think with me for a moment about how good we have it right now. Most of us have homes that are safe, warm, and dry. We have beds that are comfortable, more clothes than we can wear in a week (perhaps even in a month). Many of our cars can live longer than 200,000 miles. Our smart phones can bring us the answer to just about any question most of can imagine. Many medical problems can be fixed with replacement body parts, and many health conditions can be managed with medication and therapy. In many ways, life keeps getting better and better.

But then humans have to mess it up with misbehavior. I'm going back only 24 months, even though most of you can remember back decades. Two years ago today we were still in the beginning of shut-down. People didn't like it, but most everyone I knew was coping with it. Then the riots hit, and lots of people got upset about masks and vaccines and who won the election. Now many in the world are wondering how anybody could think that invading another country and destroying buildings and killing civilians could be considered good.

Was there ever a time when people needed Jesus more than today? Yes, he sets us an excellent example on how to show love and heal hurts and make connections, and what not to do. But

what Jesus did to rescue us from all our misbehavior is even more important. That's why I'm glad we get to celebrate Palm Sunday again. In case we have never been introduced to Jesus, here we get to meet him as our King and our Lord and our God. The people of Jerusalem were right to treat Jesus like someone who has won all the awards. But instead of riding up to Jerusalem on a cloud or in a Rolls Royce or at least on an Arabian horse, Jesus chose a lowly donkey. And then the apostle Paul, picking up on Jesus' humility, comes along in today's Epistle Lesson to urge us: *⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

In our day lots of people say that attitude is everything. Jesus would agree, but he would flip the world's attitudes upside down. If Jesus, for instance, did a talent show similar to America's Got Talent, instead of concentrating on who put on the best show—the things that people look at—I imagine Jesus looking into the hearts (1 Samuel 16:7) of the contestants to see who loves the Lord more than anything else, and who loves themselves, yes, but in a way that strengthens them to love their fellow humans at least to the same degree. I imagine Jesus looking into the hearts of people for 'who understands the meaning of sacrifice' because they tried putting themselves out for others and found that it brought them joy.

In other words, Jesus would judge things according to the pattern he himself set down. Just think. He was ⁶*in very nature God*. He still is, just like he always has been and always will be. Jesus never had to be told, “You gotta muster up your courage and feel confident about yourself,” the way our college graduates are told to do when they go out for interviews. As true God he could already do everything just right. But did he strut his stuff? If Jesus were an actress today, what would he wear on the red carpet? He wouldn’t have to visit the designers to wow the crowd—he is already clothed in the bling of his own brilliance and a glory which surpasses all earthly attire and accessories. But did he “flaunt it like you got it”?

Quite the opposite. He ⁶*did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*. He didn’t have to take his world championship trophy with both hands and hold it over his head so that everyone would know he’s the best. Instead, while no one was looking except for the angels, he ⁷*made himself nothing*. That’s a good translation of the original Greek, but the Greek word wants to draw us a picture. Imagine a glass of water, pure water in a crystal clear glass. In your mind, pick up the glass and pour the water into another container. Now the glass is empty. This glass of water may stand for the Son of God in all his glory. When it

was time for the Holy Spirit to cause the virgin Mary to conceive, the Son of God emptied himself of his divine power and glory. He remained true God, just as the glass is still a glass after the water is emptied out.

Now ask yourself “why?” Why would the Son of God not make full use of his power and glory while he was living as true man on the earth? To answer this question, come with me to the time when Moses asked the Lord for a rare privilege because things were going really well between Moses and the Lord (see Exodus 33). ¹⁸*Moses said [to the Lord], “Now show me your glory.”* Pretty gutsy there, Moses! ¹⁹*And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence: ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’* ²⁰*But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”* ²¹*Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.* ²²*When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.* ²³*Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”* Do you get how the Lord was protecting Moses from death? And do you now understand why Jesus had to empty himself of his divine glory before coming to live here

for 33 to 34 years? Who could have survived being his twelve disciples? How would the soldiers have crucified Jesus? For that matter, how could he have even begun his life on earth? If Jesus had still made use of all his glory when he was conceived, poor Mary wouldn't have been able to contain him in her womb for even a second. She would have become a red mist on the walls of her home.

So Jesus set aside his divine glory and did not make full use of it. But then he took it a step further, ⁷*taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*. How would you do as someone else's butler or maid? Would you last even three weeks taking orders from some wealthy person? By God's grace many of us would because the Lord has taught us how to take on the attitude of Jesus. If God himself can become our servant to rescue us from sin, we are willing to become servants to others. And if you're not there yet, hang around with the Holy Spirit for a while longer by reading God's Word daily at home and hearing the Scriptures every week in God's house. The Holy Spirit will help you TAKE ON CHRIST'S ATTITUDE and usher you into an exclusive club, those who know the joy of serving.

But just how far is this servant attitude supposed to take us? Let's check in with Jesus again to see the answer.

⁸*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!* “Do you mean to tell me I might have to die an early death as a Christian?” It's possible. And even if it's unlikely, we should be ready. Jesus taught, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own”* (John 15:18-19). How much longer will people tolerate us for teaching that everyone is depraved to the core from the moment of conception and that our only hope for a pleasant afterlife is faith in Jesus who lived and died for us? As people who bear the name of Christ, who have been confirmed in churches like St. John, we have publicly stated that we are ready to die for following Christ rather than turn away from him. Our death won't be as meaningful as when Jesus died to pay for the sins of the whole world. But our Lord would have us take on his attitude: to humbly follow him as his servants, even if it leads to an early death because of his name.

Now, maybe you are asking, “Why would anyone choose such a path? Why would Christians set aside that most basic of instincts—self-preservation—to stick with a plan that at some point definitely leads to ridicule and perhaps also death?” The answer lies in what's beyond death.

After Jesus emptied himself and paid for the sins of everyone, even for the people who would say, “No thank you, Jesus, I don’t believe in you,” what happened to him? Paul reports: ⁹*God exalted him to the highest place.* Jesus took the pure water from that other container where he set it aside and poured it back into his crystal-glass self—he took up all his glory again. And what’s he doing now? The New Testament is peppered with verses that refer to Jesus sitting at the right hand of God the Father. That’s the place of highest honor and authority. In fact there are Bible passages which reveal that Jesus, not the Father, has the throne right now (see 1 Corinthians 15).

The Father also ⁹*gave [Jesus] the name that is above every name.* How can Jesus’ name be above all the others? Well let’s try a few other names to see if they are greater. “I believe in George as my Savior.” No, that doesn’t work so well. “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12)—except Henrietta. No, that doesn’t work either. Only Jesus is the Savior. Only Jesus is our Lord. Only Jesus deserved that victory parade into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

And when it comes to Judgment Day, it will only be ¹⁰*the name of Jesus* at which *every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹*and*

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Think about that for a moment. This verse basically teaches that sooner or later everyone will have to admit Jesus really is the Savior. So then, just from a logical standpoint alone, why would anyone want to wait until after Judgment Day to join the crowds on that first Palm Sunday to praise Jesus as the one who saves?—[‘hosanna’ literally means ‘save us now’]. Now is the time to believe in Jesus! Now is the time to come to church every Sunday and read the Bible daily. When the trumpet sounds on the Last Day, it will be too late. Those who pushed God’s Word away to the point of rejecting Jesus as their Savior will still have to acclaim Jesus as Savior, but then it will be too late. Now is the Day of salvation.

Today we are being invited by God himself to TAKE ON CHRIST’S ATTITUDE, to empty ourselves of all the glory we might have because of our accomplishments in this life, to become servants toward others like Jesus did, to put ourselves out in order to get along with others and heal hurts and do good to those who have done nothing to gain our favor. Why would we do this? For a chance at glory, as if our deeds can gain a better outcome? No. Jesus took care of the outcome already. He did it by emptying himself and then living for us and then dying in our place. We just want to be like our Savior. He’s awesome.