



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Series: REJOICE! In The Lord • Study Title: Jesus Christ the God-man •
Philippians 2:5-11 • For use by groups 9/01 through 9/07/2019

Main Point

In order to affirm a biblical view of who Jesus is, we must embrace the totality of what Scripture teaches about both His divine and human natures.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What comes to mind when you think of the word mystery?

What are some examples of mystery that we take for granted and live with on a daily basis (i.e., light existing as either a particle or a wave; the cohesion/adhesion of molecules; the relationship between the mind and the physical world, etc.)?

Why is it necessary for us as humans to accept mystery? Why is mystery all the more appropriate to accept when it comes to God's nature and His works?

The incarnation—God the Son becoming a man—is the mystery that stands at the heart of the Christian faith (John 1:14; Col. 2:9). We simply do not know how the infinite second Person of the Trinity can take on a finite human nature while remaining identical and equal with God. Nevertheless, we have no option but to confess this wonderful, incomprehensible truth because the Bible clearly teaches it. Not only does Scripture obligate us to confess the mystery of God incarnate (see 1 Tim. 3:16), but also Christians from the early centuries of the church have testified to both Jesus' uncompromised deity and His genuine humanity (e.g., the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Definition, etc.). With respect to His divine nature, the Son is equal with the Father from eternity; with respect to His human nature, He is God's submissive, obedient servant. Hence, as we will attempt to do in this study, we must reckon with the complexity of the biblical data that speak of Jesus in the form of God and also the

form of servant. In diverse forms and ways, the person of Jesus Christ is identified with Yahweh, the God of Israel, and all the while presented as authentically (yet not merely) human.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Philippians 2:5-11.

In what some believe to be among the earliest Christian hymns, the Carmen Christi, Paul summons believers in Philippi to exercise humility because Jesus Himself is the greatest example of humility. Parabolic in form, the passage breaks down into three movements: 1) the Son's pre-existence and equality with God (v. 6); 2) the Son's voluntarily taking on a human nature and becoming an obedient servant (vv. 7-8); and 3) the Son's reception of exaltation and worship as a result of His messianic work (vv. 9-11). In view of this passage and others, theologians sometimes categorize Christ's experience into three estates: pre-existence, humiliation, and exaltation. In this study, we will pair Paul's broad narration of the work of Christ with key statements about His two natures in the historical books of the Gospels and Acts.

What is the context for Paul's description of Jesus' humility and exaltation?

What does this context tell us about the relationship between right doctrine and right living?

| Ask two volunteers to read Philippians 2:6 and John 5:16-18.

How does Philippians 2:6 refer to Jesus' identity with God? How is this confirmed in the same verse? (Note the parallel between "form" and "equality.")

How does John 5:16-18 illustrate that Jesus is God, yet also distinct from the Father?

| Ask three volunteers to read Philippians 2:7-8, Matthew 26:39, and Acts 10:38.

It is important to know that "emptying" refers to "assuming the form of a slave," the addition of a human nature and not the subtraction of divine attributes.

How did the Son "empty Himself" according to verse 7?

How do verses 7-8 help us to see Jesus in the “form of servant” in addition to “form of God” (v. 6)? Why must we be careful not to confuse these two categories?

What does Matthew 26:39 indicate about a distinction between Jesus’ and the Father’s wills? Why is it important to understand Jesus to have both a divine will and a human will?

Christian orthodoxy has, since the first several centuries of the church, affirmed one will to exist among the three persons of the Godhead and two wills to exist in the person of Christ. Theologians who hold to Christ’s possession of two wills do so arguing the axiom “whatever is not assumed is not redeemed.” If the Son, already possessing a divine will, did not take on additionally a human will, then He could not adequately represent humanity as their Savior and Substitute and thus could not redeem the human will.

What does Acts 10:38 tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry? Why must we never separate Jesus’ redemptive work as Messiah from the anointing work of the Holy Spirit? How do passages like this remind us to keep in mind the doctrine of the Trinity when we read the Bible?

| Ask two volunteers to read Philippians 2:9-11 and Acts 2:32-33.

Why is Jesus exalted according to verse 9?

In what ways does Philippians 2:9-11 identify Jesus with God?

Not only is Jesus’ name elevated to the level of God’s name [e.g., Yahweh], but also Paul alludes to Isaiah 45:23, a passage that teaches that “every knee will bow” and “every tongue will swear allegiance” to Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel. Paul’s application of this prophecy to Jesus is thus highly significant.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does careful study and reflection of the whole Bible’s teaching about the divine and human natures of Jesus honor Him? How does the mystery of the “God-man” compel us to worship?

Why is it unwise to neglect considering what the church has said about the person and work of Christ throughout the centuries, particularly in the form of creeds and confessions? How does our appreciation of Christian creeds and

confessions not necessarily dishonor Scripture as our ultimate authority for truth?

Why must Jesus be both fully God and fully man for the gospel to be good news? Why is the salvation of sinners impossible apart from the incarnation?

Pray

Lord Jesus, You are the God-man and worthy of our worship. We are thankful for Your willingness to become like us in order to save us. May we never move past our wonder of the incarnation and our desire to tell others about You, Your death, and Your resurrection.

Commentary

| Philippians 2:5-11

Paul built his challenge for unity on the reality of Christ within each believer. The apostle gave the Philippians a vivid illustration of the perspective he intended them to have. He showed them Christ. Verses 5 through 8 paint a poignant picture of the humility Christ revealed in His incarnation and His substitutionary death. Paul urged them to exchange their selfish motives for the Savior's attitude. While Christ has all cause for glorying, being God Himself, He willingly surrendered Himself for the needs of others. The Son of God did not seek His own advantage, that is, He refused to ignore others' needs. The passage states that Jesus Christ made himself nothing. The result was that the Savior set aside His glory to minister grace and mercy to those who are most undeserving of such blessings. Assuming the form of a slave, the Lord placed Himself under the authority of His Father. The focus of the Son was to please the Father, and in doing so He sacrificed Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

| John 5:16-18

5:16–18. These verses represent the formal introduction to the controversial scenes of the Festival Cycle. The focus is on Jesus' identity and his relation to the Sabbath. The man's report to the authorities is pictured as transferring the investigation committee's hostility from the paralytic to Jesus (5:16). Indeed, the statement that the Sabbath issue was the reason why the Jews "persecuted" Jesus is John's way of formally defining for the first time in this severe way the authorities' relationship to Jesus. But the issue of the Sabbath is transposed into an even more serious charge in the discussion that follows. That charge will become the reason for the crucifixion. As a result, the argument that follows is strategic to Johannine

theology. There is an interesting presuppositional agreement between the rabbis and Jesus. Both recognize the sense of God's constant working in the world (defined by Christian theologians as the doctrine of providence). It is assumed that God continues to work on the Sabbath or the world would collapse. Yet the issue for the rabbis revolved around the fact that humans are not God and therefore must not try to act like God. But here is the point the evangelist was making. The working of Jesus is precisely the Johannine proclamation: Jesus is the Son of God and therefore the representative of God (cf. 20:28). So (a) if God can continue to work positively in creation on the Sabbath and not totally rest, and (b) if one can recognize that the works of Jesus are the works of God, then the question follows: Why are not the works of Jesus on the Sabbath legitimate?

The battle was thus joined. In fact, it was moved to a more intense level when Jesus called God his Father (5:17). The Jews recognized the argument immediately and from that point pursued him not merely for Sabbath breaking but also for blasphemy (5:18). They understood that he was not merely claiming to be a child of God in the general sense but in a very special way. Accordingly, they charged him with "making himself equal with God" (5:18). Jesus' claim would violate their understanding of monotheism and would surely have reminded them of the serpent's temptation to "be like God" (Gen 3:5). Such a claim, therefore, would undoubtedly be categorized by the rabbis as sinning with the high hand (a direct challenge to God), unless the claim was true. And that was precisely the claim of Jesus and the early church. That claim, however, must be carefully understood. Jesus did not claim to take the place of God or be an alternative to God, which is what the Jews meant by "making himself equal with God" (5:18; cf. the charge at 10:33 and "claimed to be the Son of God," 19:7). What Jesus, as the One and Only Son of God (1:14, 18), claimed was to be sent by God, on mission for God, doing the works of God, obedient to God, and bringing glory to God. That is not the role of one who displaces God but one who is a representative or emissary of God. It is in fact the *pros ton theon* of the Prologue in the context of being *theos* (1:1). Here then is both the equality and the subordination that will be the focus of this chapter.

| Matthew 26:39

26:39. Then, moving just a little further on, the king fell with his face to the ground—a posture communicating desperate entreaty—and prayed to his Father. He prayed if it is possible, knowing that his request could not be granted if he were to remain obedient. But Jesus' model is a comfort to us.

Jesus' request to be spared suffering and death was the desperate cry of a Son's heart to his Father. And his Father accepted it, as a loving Father—but without granting it. And the Son accepted his Father's love, but without receiving his specific request.

This cup refers not only to Christ's suffering and death (Isa. 51:22; Jer. 25:15-16; Ezek. 23:31-34) but even more uniquely to the Father's wrath upon sin. It was an anticipation of Matthew 27:46 and the Father's turning his back on him. Jesus' extreme grief was rooted in the fact that he was about to become the object of his Father's wrath—an experience that many people on earth will encounter in eternity, but which no one but the Son of God could possibly anticipate ahead of time.

The Father's holy wrath was about to crush the Son (see Isa. 53:10), when the Son had done nothing to offend him. Here Jesus was facing more than humiliation, torture, and physical death. He was about to enter hell. We can only begin to imagine how fearful this prospect was to him. He and the Father had always been one. No wonder he cried out in desperation! But we are not to confuse Jesus' honest expression of desire with a willful decision to disobey. In the same breath, Jesus continued, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." As always, the Son remained thoroughly submissive to his Father.

| Acts 2:31-36

2:31–32. Not only did David understand Jesus' coming, he also foretold his resurrection. Standing in the crowd that day were many local residents who were familiar with the events that had transpired in Jerusalem less than two months earlier. Just in case their memories had lapsed, Peter raised again the broad banner of those courageous early Christians: we are all witnesses of the fact.

2:33–36. Peter wanted to proclaim the whole gospel, so he could not stop at the crucifixion and resurrection. In these verses he moves on to the exaltation and the coming of the Holy Spirit, bringing his listeners right up to the moment. Another quote from the Psalms (110:1) surely must have stabbed their collective attention. The humble carpenter of Nazareth was not only the Messiah, but now he lives in heaven and has caused all the Pentecostal commotion which evoked this sermon in the first place. Showing an enormous confidence in his God and his message, Peter used a phrase appearing only here in the New Testament (all Israel) and hammered home his final point: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. In fine homiletical style he returned to his original text (v. 21) and, along with the prophet Joel, extolled the messiahship of his Lord. The one you think dead is your living Lord, Master, and Messiah!

| Acts 10:37-41

10:37-41. You know the events indicated that the basic biography of Jesus was widely known

by now. It was still necessary, however, that witnesses to Jesus' life fill in any knowledge gaps and call unbelievers to saving faith.