

The Humiliation of Christ

Review

We spoke of God's covenant with man—His promise of redemption where He would extend His grace to fallen humanity. We spoke of the Mediator of this covenant—that He (Christ) must be both man and God that He might properly represent men and at the same time (being God) not sink under the infinite wrath of God. We spoke of the offices of this Mediator—Prophet (the mouthpiece of God), Priest (the sacrifice and intercessor for men), and King (the potentate who would bring forth the victory of His kingdom over darkness). Now we will discuss the actual journey of the Mediator.

Humiliation

To humiliate means to “injure the dignity of.” Although we may view humility as a virtue, to humiliate someone would generally be considered inappropriate. This morning we will examine what has come to be known as the humiliation of Christ. What makes the humiliation of Christ appropriate is that it was something He inflicted upon Himself for the good of humanity and the glory of the Father.

Truly I embark upon a daunting task when I endeavor to unveil the nature and passions of Christ's humiliation. By His humiliation I mean His birth, His life and His death. The quick student might readily observe that the resurrection, no small subject for Christianity, is not included in His humiliation. His resurrection (along with His ascension, His reign as King, and His return) belongs to the His exaltation—a subject we will pursue at another time.

The quick student might also observe that birth, life, and death are common to humanity. What's so humiliating about that? Let us recognize that the incarnation (God the Son becoming flesh—John 1:14) is often referred to as the magnificent condescension (to descend below your rank). For Christ merely to become man would be notably humiliating. But in His humanity Christ would not merely descend to humanity...He would descend to the lowest level of humanity.

How does this fall under the category of *Remedial Christianity*? Every child knows of the birth, life, and death of Jesus. So for some this may merely be elementary Christianity. But it has been my observation that the presentations of the birth, life, and death of Jesus have been reduced to a sentimental nativity scene; the vapid recitations of a *What Would Jesus Do?* Christendom which has become a catalyst for pacifism, liberalism, and antinomianism (anti-law), and the numerous lengthy dramatizations of how much the nails in the cross must have hurt when all four gospels dedicate a solitary verse to the event.

This is not to belittle the cross and its horror. But many were crucified on a cross. So to allow our understanding of the cross to be restricted to the nails, the thorny crown, and the piercing of His side is to stop considerably short of the humiliation of Christ's death.

Three Goals

My goal this morning is three-fold: 1) to scratch the surface of Christ's humiliation in His birth, life, and death. There is no biography more worthy of our meditation. 2) To understand what lessons we are to learn from His humiliations. 3) To understand what assurance belongs to us as a result of His humiliations. How do His active obedience

(His obedience to the law) and His passive obedience (His suffering) bring blessings to His bride.

Much of my material comes from Thomas Vincent's *Family Instructional Guide* which was first published in 1674 to help parents teach their children the Westminster Catechism.

In order to appreciate the humiliation of Christ, we must grasp His glory prior to becoming a man. In His high priestly prayer Jesus reveals something:

And O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was (John 17:5).

Many people would consider it devastating to be forced to move into certain neighborhoods. People generally desire upward mobility. Jesus moved in the opposite direction.

...Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

His Birth

In a Stable

Let us first speak of His birth. Christ's condescension was immeasurable. This self-inflicted humiliation began in what would be considered the lowest possible environment. He was born of a humble woman whose very reputation, arguably, would be at stake. His mother Mary sang,

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant (Luke 1:48).

You could argue that His discomfort began while still in the womb during the journey from Galilee to Nazareth. In the children's movie, *Lion King*, we see the birth of the king accompanied by his being lifted up and honored by all creatures. The birth of Christ was quite the opposite. Even though He was heralded by angels (Luke 2:14), Jesus was born in a manger (which amounts to a type of food trough for animals).

As God's providence would have it, there was no room for Him to be born among even the most rustic setting of humans—no room in the inn (Luke 2:7). Christ's humiliation would see Him born in obscurity and insignificance.

His Life

Law

In His life Christ humbled Himself in many ways. First, he humbled Himself by subjecting Himself to His own law. Paul writes,

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4).

At first glance this might not seem significant. After all God's law is an extension of His own character; why would it be humiliating for Christ to obey His own law? Because He is now obeying it from the perspective of a man! It would be impossible, for example, for God to steal because He owns everything. It would be impossible for

God to murder because everyone deserves His wrath. But Jesus would relinquish these privileges.

And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head” (Matthew 8:20).

Parents have rules for their children. They disallow their going into the street. They must all enter the car from the sidewalk. The fact that the parent is a grown-up who can see cars coming and who can be seen by cars extinguishes this rule for them due to their nature as grown-ups. It is not necessary for dad to impose his own rule upon himself and crawl over mom to get to the driver’s seat. The humiliation of Christ involves Jesus entering into humanity and subjecting Himself to all of God’s ordinances.

Miseries of Life

Christ’s humiliation also involves His undergoing the miseries of this life. These miseries did not merely include things like hunger (Matthew 4:2) and fatigue (John 4:6). His anguish was much deeper.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls (Hebrews 12:3).

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

It wasn’t as if Jesus were born in Malibu in 2003 enjoying all the privileges and freedoms of America. He was born under the oppressive Empire of Rome at a time when God’s own people were living in evil and bitter rebellion (Matthew 11:22-24). He only lovingly spoke the truth—which found Him deserted by all and persecuted to the point of a torturous death.

It is one thing to condescend to humanity. It is quite another thing to be reproached and rejected by the very humanity you’ve come to redeem--“**He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).**

We are all so guilty, so often of so much. Yet if we are once falsely accused we caterwaul for justice. We shriek, “How could you...?” Yet Jesus was silent before His accusers (Matthew 14:61).

His Death

His Arrest and Trial

Christ’s humiliation extended to His very death. This involved His betrayal by a close friend (John 13:27) and His denial by perhaps His closest friend (Matthew 26:74). It involved His submission to those who arrested Him even though He could have brought twelve legions of angels upon their heads (Matthew 26:53). It involved people spitting on Him, buffeting Him, mocking Him, scourging Him, and other painful humiliations (Matthew 27:27-31).

His Dying

In the very act of dying Christ was stripped of His dignity. It was the death of criminals. It was a lingering death. It was a public and naked death (Matthew 27:28, 35). And it was death designed for those deserving of death and accursed of God.

If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,²³ his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23).

Truly His death was designed for those forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46).

His Death

Christ's humiliation extended past His dying to the surroundings of His death. He was laid in a borrowed tomb (Matthew 27:59, 60) and He would continue under the power of death until the third day (Matthew 12:40). In His death He was forsaken by the Father and bore upon Himself the due penalty of sin—the wrath of God. Humiliation hardly seems a strong enough word to express this sacrifice.

Lessons and Assurance

Though I may not have accomplished my initial goal of scratching the surface of Christ's humiliation in His birth, life, and death, hopefully we are all aware of the nature of His humiliation and can appreciate it in our own reading. Let us move on now to examine the significance of His humiliation in terms of the lessons found in them and our assurance as a result of them.

What Do We Learn?

So what are Christians to learn when they examine the humiliation of Christ? If I may gently submit that the *What Would Jesus Do? What Would Jesus Eat? And What would Jesus Drive?* paradigms are lacking (in terms of the usage depicted by New Testament writers) regarding just what it is about Jesus we are to imitate. Being born under the law there are certain things about Jesus we should not imitate (His diet, circumcision, adherence to the Mosaic ceremonial economy, etc.). As God there are other things about Jesus we should not imitate (His call to be worshipped).

Our imitation of Jesus (the emphasized *What Would Jesus Do?*) generally revolves around His response to temptation and attack. Our lesson will run deep if, and only if, we begin to appreciate His humiliation.

We learn that we are to be humble like Christ. Remember the passage we read earlier where Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:5-8). The Apostle Paul begins that passage by stating **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).**

There is a disposition within Christ's law-keeping which should serve to transform us at a deeper level.

We read Hebrews 12 which informed us of Christ's endurance against hostile sinners. The reason the author brings this to bear is clearly seen:

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls (Hebrews 12:3).

In Romans 6:5-11 Christ's death serves as an example of how we are to be dead to sin. Again this presents a disposition rather than a restatement of the law.

Peter uses the example of Christ to admonish us to avoid retaliation.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²²“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Again this is an attitude or a mindset which Christians are to imitate in their efforts to obey the law. Christ has set a context for law-keeping which should both humble and encourage us. The context is of a man unjustly persecuted, enormously tempted, yet righteous in all His ways.

Of What Does His Humiliation Assure Us?

Christ's suffering assures us of our redemption through the merit of His sufferings.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

That Christ became a curse means those who trust in Him will escape that curse. His passive obedience (dying on the cross), whereby the Father's wrath was poured out (1 Peter 2:24) assures us that His wrath will not be poured out on us. His active obedience (His lifelong obedience to the Father) is freely imputed (credited) to us thus assuring us of the Father's pleasure, our inheritance, and our righteous standing.

For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What is more humiliating than to be identified as sin? The Truth, the Life, and the Light of men is here designated as being sin. And it is through this utter humiliation that men can be ascend to the unfathomable designation of the righteousness God—to whom be the glory forever.

Questions for Study

1. Give a quick review of God's covenant with man, the Mediator, His offices, etc. (page 1)?
2. What is and is not included in Christ's humiliation (pages 1, 2)?
3. What was Christ's estate prior to becoming flesh (page 2)?
4. In what way did Christ's birth contribute to His humiliation (page 2)?
5. In what way did Christ's law-keeping contribute to His humiliation (page 3)?
6. Discuss the miseries of Christ's life (page 3).
7. Discuss the different aspects of Christ's death and how they contribute to His humiliation (page 4).
8. What do you think was the greatest aspect of Christ's humiliation?
9. What are some things we learn from Christ's humiliation (pages 4, 5)?
10. Of what are we assured as a result of Christ's humiliation (pages 5, 6)?