

“The Greatest Model of Humility”**

A year and a half ago we took our daughter Julie to a summer class at college and participated in a parent-student orientation. One of the sessions began with an interesting exercise. The parents watched as the professor divided the students into four groups. He then gave each group a jigsaw puzzle to put together and at his command, each group started assembling their puzzle. It was fun watching the young men and women learn how to work together in accomplishing their task. Something interesting happened. Three of the groups finished at about the same time, but one of the groups finished far ahead of the others. It became obvious why. The professor had given one of the groups the box-top for the puzzle that showed a picture of the finished product. While the other groups had to guess what the finished product would look like, the group with the picture knew exactly what their work was supposed to produce.

Is it possible to assemble a puzzle without the box-top picture? Sure. It just typically takes longer. But it sure makes the process easier if you can picture the intended outcome.

We've been working on a project for the past month or so. We're seeking to become a church made up of individuals who are exhibiting humility by the grace of God. *God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6).

We've attempted to define and recognize pride and how to get rid of it. We've also investigated God's Word to understand what humility is and mapped out a daily routine for developing it. In the past two weeks we've looked at biblical examples of humility, first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament. Today, to conclude our series, we're going to ponder the *greatest model* of humility the world has ever seen. Indeed, He is the *perfect model*. I'm speaking, of course, of Jesus Christ.

We learn two lessons as we ponder the model of Christ.

I. Lesson #1: As the perfect model Jesus shows us that we need a Savior.

Peter, a man who spent three years watching Jesus up close, said this about the Lord:

1 Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

Some people define a Christian simply as a person who follows Jesus. Granted, a Christian does follow Jesus but the act of following is the consequence of something. The fact is, we are sinners and as sinners we lack the capacity to follow Jesus in a way that will please God. Before Jesus can be our model, He must be our *Savior*.

That's Peter's point here. Christ *bore our sins on the tree*. Because of Adam's sin every human being enters the world with a fundamental problem. We are sinners who are cut off from God, who lack a proper relationship with God, and who are incapable of reaching God. Simply put, even though we have a perfect model to follow, we lack the ability to stay in line.

A couple of weeks ago the Awana cubbies class took a “field trip” and came from their room to visit me in my

study. The biggest challenge was getting the group to walk from their room to my office. One of the leaders led the way with the three, four, and five year olds following her in a line. Or that's the way it was supposed to work. But along the way one child would dash out of line to get a drink, another would veer off course to do some exploring, and so on. Children have an innate desire to "get out of line." Consequently, children (and adults) need more than someone to show them the way.

Where did that desire to "go our own way" come from? We inherited it from Adam. But Adam isn't solely to blame. The Bible teaches three very basic truths...

A. We have violated God's Law.

I have. You have. *Every person* willfully chooses to go his own way in God's world.

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

We have fallen short. We cannot reach God. That's why a model of humility isn't enough. We've already stepped out of line and lack the ability to get back in line. But what we lacked, God in His mercy provided in His Son.

B. Jesus fulfilled God's Law perfectly.

Listen to Jesus' own claim:

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them *but to fulfill them.*"

And that's what Jesus did. He lived a perfect life, thereby fulfilling God's righteous standard. He never sinned, not once. He always did what was right, every time.

C. God forgives sinners who accept His Son.

Even if I could "get back in line and stay in line" (which I lack the power to do, but let's suppose for illustration sake I could), I would still be in trouble. Why? Because I've already broken rank in the past and according to God's Law, the penalty must be paid. "The wages of sin (getting out of line) is death (Rom. 6:23)." A holy God cannot overlook sin. Sin requires a just payment. A sinner's debt must be paid, and the payment required is eternal judgment.

But in His mercy, God provided sinners with a way of escape. His Son went to the cross and on that cross Jesus took the penalty of sin in the place of every person who would accept Him as Savior. Because Jesus died and rose again, God forgives sinners who place their faith in His Son.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

God grants forgiveness to any sinner who will accept the provision He made for them at the cross.

I'll say it as plainly as I can. Until you know Christ as your Savior you are still in your sins and heading for eternal judgment. What's more, you lack the ability to live the kind of life that pleases God. But once you confess the Lord Jesus as your Savior, God forgives you for “getting out of line” and gives you the righteous merit of His Son which will enable you to “stay in line” and please Him.

That's the first lesson. As the perfect model Jesus shows us that we need a Savior. We might feel pretty good about our “good deeds,” but once we look at Jesus’ spotless life we’re confronted with our sinfulness and need for a Savior.

II. Lesson #2: As the perfect model Jesus shows us how to live.

Once in a while I'll hear the question, “Do you believe in once saved always saved?” It's usually a loaded question so I typically respond, “What's your reason for asking?” And often I hear, “Well, do you believe a person can get saved and then live however they want and still go to heaven?” To which I answer, “Absolutely not. When God truly saves someone that person does not WANT to live the same way any longer, and a person who doesn't WANT to live in obedience to God's Word indicates he was never saved to begin with.”

To put it another way, once you come to know Jesus as your *Savior* you gladly want to follow Him as your *model*. In fact, this is your calling...

1 Peter 2:21 “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, **that you should follow in his steps.**”

A century ago Charles Sheldon wrote his classic book, *In His Steps*, based on this verse. Jesus is our example. We are to live our lives in such a way that if people follow us they will end up following in His steps.

That raises the question, “*How did Jesus live?*” In a word, the answer is *humblly*. Everything about Jesus speaks of humility. Let's look at the footprints He left behind, and in so doing we'll discover four primary ways in which He demonstrated humility.

A. He exhibited humility in His birth.

It's impossible for our finite minds to appreciate the change in living conditions the Son of God experienced when He came to earth. He left heaven—the loving presence of His Father, the praise of the angels, conditions of absolute bliss and total comfort. He left all that and far more, and came to earth—where there's sickness, suffering, pain, disease, sin, and man's greatest foe, death itself.

But He didn't just come to earth. This was no casual, impersonal visit. He whom angel hosts adore entered this world as a human being. The Maker came as a mortal. He robed Himself in human flesh.

I've tried to ponder this before by examining an anthill. I've bent over to observe those tiny creatures scooting along at frantic pace. If those creatures were in danger and I could rescue them, would I do so *if it required me becoming an ant?* No way. Yet in a very real sense, it would be less a step down for me to become an ant than for the Son of God to become a man, for the human to ant transition is a move from being one kind of created being to another kind of created being, whereas in Jesus' incarnation, the infinite Creator actually became a creature!

How can that be? It's beyond the capacity of our tiny minds to fathom the fullness of this demotion.

But there's more. He didn't just become a *man*. He chose to enter humanity in the lowliest of human circumstances. You know the story.

Luke 2:7 "...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

He chose the home He would enter, but He bypassed the splendor of the Roman Emperor's palace, the dignity of the High Priest's dwelling, and went down, down, down the line. The King of kings chose a family so poor that his first bed was a cattle trough. Think of the stale smells in that stable, the sounds, the sights.

And think of Peter's charge again, "To this you were called," Peter said, "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, **that you should follow in his steps.**" This is our calling, beloved, to approach life humbly as did our Savior. Paul emphasized the same point...

Philippians 2:5-7 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

Without question, Jesus demonstrated humility in His birth. That was just the beginning...

B. He exhibited humility in His life.

He did so in countless ways but for time sake I'll merely mention five.

1. It's seen in His attitude towards authority.

Who was Jesus Christ? He was and is God Himself (John 1:1-2), the Creator of heaven and earth (Col. 1:15-16), the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16), and the One who sits on the throne of heaven and receives the worship of heavenly beings (Isa. 6:1ff). All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him (Matt. 28:20). That's what makes the following so amazing. When He came to earth, He submitted Himself to other authorities. Yes, He chose to place Himself under authority. I'll give three examples.

a. He submitted to sinful parents.

Some time ago I was counseling a young boy who had an anger problem, due in part to a bad home environment. He didn't have a dad in his life and he was quick to point out his mom's faults. I took him to this passage which describes Jesus' childhood...

Luke 2:51 "Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them..."

That certainly got my young friend's attention! His parents weren't perfect but he wasn't either. But Jesus was! He was a perfect child with imperfect parents. Joseph and Mary struggled with anger at times, failed to get all the facts before they made decisions, and committed other blunders that sinful parents like us make. They were *sinners*.

Since they were sinners, how did Jesus respond to them? Luke says he was *obedient* to them. It's easy to obey good authorities that make decisions you like, but Jesus submitted Himself to sinful parents (with their faults and all). That's humility. So is this...

b. He submitted to sinful government officials.

It's not uncommon these days to hear people (including Christians) taking verbal potshots at our president and other government officials. Jesus didn't do that, not because the leaders of His day were good, for they were terribly self-absorbed, quite frankly. But Jesus willingly placed Himself under their authority. He once said this to critics who were trying to get Him to speak against the civil authorities.

Luke 20:25 "He said to them, 'Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'"

That's amazing! The Ruler of the universe giving deference to a peon earthly emperor. That's humility, and keep in mind, *to this you were called*.

c. He submitted to divine authority.

Just because Jesus Christ is the King of kings doesn't mean He is not under authority, for He is. Not just *was*, but **IS** and **ALWAYS HAS BEEN**. As the second person of the trinity, the Son of God always submits to His Father. Listen to two statements that Jesus made...

John 14:31 "...the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

Though all-knowing, Jesus never did “His own thing.” Rather He always did exactly as His Father commanded Him.

Answer this. Why did Jesus die? The truth is, He died because His Father told Him to do so. Jesus had that thought in mind when Peter tried to prevent the soldiers from arresting Him...

John 18:11 “Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”

Jesus demonstrated humility in the way He viewed and responded to authority. How about you? You too have authorities in your life: parents, government officials, bosses, teachers, church leaders, coaches, and policemen. Are you known as a person who submits to authority? Is that your reputation? *To this you were called...* In His life, Jesus exhibited humility in a second way...

2. It's seen in His relationships.

Who did Jesus spend time with? Luke made this observation about the company Jesus kept...

Luke 15:1 “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him.”

The down-and-outers came to Jesus. In our day it wouldn’t be “tax collectors.” The text might read “drug dealers” and “pimps.” Why did they come? Because Jesus loved them. No, He didn’t endorse their sin, for sure, and called for radical change. But He humbled Himself, spent time with them, and made it possible for them to change, even though spending time with them meant the “good” crowd slandered His reputation. Why did He take the risk? Because that’s what humility does.

By the way, don’t forget that He spent time with up-and-outers too. He went to the home of a Pharisee, for instance. Jesus exhibited humility in *all* His relationships. He who is truly good wasn’t *too good* for any sinner.

3. It's seen in His prayer life.

The fact is, the Son of God doesn’t need anything. As the Creator He is certainly all-sufficient. That’s what makes this statement so significant...

Mark 1:35 “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

It was Jesus' regular practice to begin His day in prayer, seeking His Father's face and will. He didn't want to do anything without first consulting His Father. Nowhere is this illustrated more vividly than in His Gethsemane prayer.

Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet **not my will, but yours be done.**"

4. It's seen in His view of material things.

A few years ago, while scanning a magazine, an article title caught my attention. It read, "If Jesus lived today, would He drive a BMW?" Since they didn't have automobiles in His day, we can only speculate about His would-be car choice. But there's no speculation about this...

Matthew 8:20 "Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'"

Jesus lived His life as a traveling teacher. He didn't own a home, so consequently He had no furniture, no closets full of clothes, no kitchen cabinets with a stockpile of food. It's not that He was *anti-material things*, for He wasn't. The gospel accounts tell us that He had some rich friends and even enjoyed fine meals at their homes.

There's nothing wrong with having material things. The problem is thinking you *have to have them*. Jesus didn't and when He died He left practically nothing behind except for the clothes on His back.

Here's where our pride gets in the way. We tend to think we *deserve* a certain standard of living. Jonathan Edwards observed:

"Pride is the main handle by which Satan grabs hold of Christian persons and is the chief source of all the mischief he introduces to clog and hinder the work of God." --Jonathan Edwards[\[2\]](#)

Perhaps nowhere do we see Jesus' humility more clearly than in this...

5. It's seen in His response to mistreatment. 1 Pet. 2:22-23

How do you respond when your boss takes advantage of you because you're a hard worker; or when your child sits the bench even though he's a better athlete, simply because the coach has his favorites; or when your neighbor trashes your yard just for spite? Life is full of such injustice. Here's how Jesus responded:

1 Peter 2:22-23 “‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

So we see humility in His birth and in His life. But nowhere do we see His humility more plainly than in His death.

C. He exhibited humility in His death.

Philippians 2:8 “And being found in appearance as a man, *he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*”

I know you know the story. We say the words all the time, *Jesus died for sinners*. But ponder anew what really happened in our Savior’s death. Ponder the humility, indeed, the humiliation of it all. I’ll mention three evidences of humility seen at His death...

1. He refused to exercise His rights.

The fact is, Jesus could have prevented His death, as evidenced by what happened when the soldiers came to arrest Him...

John 18:4-6 “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he,” **they drew back and fell to the ground.**”

All Jesus had to do with speak a word and thousands of angels would have smote that sword bearing mob and taken Him home to heaven. After all the good He’d done for people, the sick He had healed, the blind He had restored, the love He had shown, He had a right to better treatment than this. Yes, He had *rights*.

But He didn’t claim His rights. He laid them aside for the good of others and the glory of God. That’s what humility does. *To this you were called.*

2. *He chose to die in the place of sinners.*

I know it doesn’t make sense, but it’s gospel truth...

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”

We weren't a "good catch" for God. We were His enemy, guilty of cosmic treason, living in His world as though it existed for us.

But Christ died for us. He didn't wait for us to get our act together, for we couldn't. He chose, in obedience to His Father, to take our place and to die our death. But that's not all...

3. He willingly paid the debt of undeserving rebels.

How would you feel if the following happened: Suppose a man who had raped and murdered a young child appeared before a judge for sentencing, and suppose he cried out, "Oh Judge! I'm sorry! Please forgive me!" To which the judge responded to the sob story of the murderer-rapist, "Well, since you feel sorry about crimes you've committed, I've decided to forgive you. You can go free."

How would you feel if that happened? You'd say, "No! That's a perversion of justice. That criminal's crime deserves a penalty!" And you would be right. In order to be just, a Judge cannot simply overlook a violation of the Law.

Beloved, God is the ultimate Just Judge. He cannot overlook the transgression of His Law. The wages of sin is death. Your sin and my sin demanded payment. God could not just say, "Oh well, since you're sorry, I'll forgive you." That would be a perversion of His justice.

So what did God do? He turned to His Son and said, "I want you to go and take the place of undeserving criminals. I want the universe to know of my grace, so I've chosen to rescue unworthy rebels, and to do this I'm going to punish You in their place for their sins. You will pay their debt. Afterwards, they will belong to You, for your praise, for your glory.

And that's what He did.

Isaiah 53:4-7 "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

There's never been a greater demonstration of humility, brothers and sisters. Never. But there's more. You say, "How could there be more? Jesus conquered death, didn't He? He's exalted in heaven now, isn't He? He's going to set up His kingdom in the future, isn't He? So He'll never exhibit humility again, will He?" Yes, Yes, Yes, no. There's one often-overlooked demonstration of humility that Jesus will yet demonstrate.

D. He will exhibit humility in His response to personal glory.

We read about this in 1 Corinthians where Paul tells us how God's plan for the ages will culminate...

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 “Then the end will come, **when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father** after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. **When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him** who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”

Picture this future scene. The Risen Christ is going to return and establish His kingdom over the world. He’s going reverse the curse brought on the world by Adam. He’s going to destroy every foe, including death. And then, with His people praising Him for His accomplishment, He’s going to turn to His Father and say, “ Mission accomplished. This is for You. It’s all for Your glory! I’ve served You as You asked, and I will always do so. I gladly place Myself in submission to You!”

That’s humility. And remember, followers of Christ, *to this you were called.*

Make It Personal: In light of Jesus’ Model...

We have a choice to make. Charles Spurgeon believed that “every Christian has a choice between being humble or being humbled.”^[3]

1. Make sure you know Jesus as your Savior.

You cannot follow Him as your example without first receiving Him as your Savior. You lack the power to do so. Is He your Savior? If so, this follows...

2. Resolve to walk in His steps.

Every day, in every situation, in all things. *To this you were called.*

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[2] Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility*, p. 111.

[3] Taken from Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility*, p. 24.