

The beginning of Christology - Adam Heather

Phil 2v1-11, esp vv5-11

The hymn in v6-11 is almost certainly the oldest text in the New Testament, predating Paul, and gives a “new understanding of God.”. Thomas à Kempis defines our imitation of Christ as “**Love to be unknown and considered as nothing.**” (From “The Imitation of Christ”- the world’s no 2 book behind the Bible).

Philippi was a “miniature Rome” which promoted Caesar as lord and Paul, writing from prison, encouraged the fledgling church to declare Christ as Lord. But the hymn (v6-11) is set in context of v 5 *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.* Paul is bringing big theology into small pastoral issues! For Paul, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus informed how he was to live. The teaching is practical: **Theology done right gets dirt under your finger nails.** We’ll use 3 Greek phrases to explain:

Isa Theo - equality with God (v6)

Jesus was and is God. Not half God/half man. Not mostly God/a bit human. Not a “divine spark” in a human. But Fully God and Fully Human. **Why is it important to understand that Jesus is equal with God?** Jesus chose to become a servant/slave. Compare with Caesar who focused on upward mobility. Compare with Adam/Eve who wanted to become like God (Gen 3v5ff). Jesus didn’t empty himself of, but into.

Har-pag-non - grasped (v6)

Jesus didn’t consider his divine position something to be grasped (stealing/ exploiting for own agenda). Caesar was exploiting others for his own benefit. The Goblin in Spiderman says that the masses exist for the sole purpose of lifting the few exceptional people onto their shoulders. - That’s Har-pag-non! And we all do it to some extent! We exploit others’ for our own benefit. **What examples can we give of people grasping power or position? How do we feel about them?** Not so Jesus, he chose to give up his position....

Kenosis - made himself nothing/emptied himself (v7)

This is the opposite of Har-pag-non. Not pushing your own will, but allowing others to flourish. It’s not complicated Christological theology. This is about seeing a kenotic God who came not to be served but to serve and to strive to live life with that posture. Paul added “*Obedient to death even death on a cross*” into the original hymn (It breaks the cadence). It emphasises the direction of Jesus from Honour to Shame in a society that promoted from Shame to Honour. No Roman citizen was crucified (except for treason) as too shameful. But Jesus was crucified.

When 2 disciples (and their mother!) ask Jesus about greatness (Matt 20v20-28) Jesus doesn’t respond with greatness but about his death. The cross is not just about eternal life but a way to eternally live.

NT Wright says: “*The decision to become human, and to go all the way along the road of obedience, obedience to the divine plan of salvation, yes, all the way to the cross - this decision was not a decision to stop being divine. It was a decision about what it really meant to be divine - his progression through the incarnation to death must be seen, not as something which required him as it were to stop being God for a while, but as the perfect self-expression of the true God.*”

Jesus is like God. But: God is like Jesus! To the Philippians, Paul reminds them that their relationships must reflect Jesus. Being accountable to Jesus, he might ask: “**Do people around you do a bit better because you were there? Do they flourish a little bit more because of you?**” This is a radical redefinition of success which isn’t about status but about service. **What do we think about this definition of success? How would life change if we applied this to our relationships?**

This is Thomas à Kempis’ prayer: **Love to be unknown and considered as nothing.** Or do we use others for our own aggrandisement?

Jesus’ relationship with us is this: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Matt 11v28-30

Speak the words of Phil 2v5-11 over one another and pray for each other

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