



# Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No. 1305-6  
Philippians 2:3-11  
Justin Buzzard  
March 18, 2007

## Gospel Movement

*SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel*

---

Do you ever open up the Bible, read a few verses and think “impossible...there’s no way that I could live like that, there’s no way I could obey that command, there’s no way I could do that”? Does that ever happen to you? It happens to me. It happened to me this week in preparing this sermon as I looked at the first two verses of today’s text. I think they sound impossible. Let me read these verses for you, Philippians 2:3-4. **“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”**

I read that, I look at my life, and I think “impossible.” “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, count others more significant than yourselves, look out for the interests of others.” That’s not the movement of our lives. That’s not how we do relationships—counting others more significant than ourselves.

If the only verses we had today were these two verses, there’d be no hope. As individuals and as a church, we can’t just walk out of here and put Philippians 2:3-4 into practice. We’re too insecure. Our lives don’t move *out* to look to the interests of others; they move *in* to look to the interests of ourselves. For me to stand up in public here in the Bay Area, in one of the most self-centered places on earth, and say “count others more significant than yourselves” is kind of ridiculous. It’s like telling my four month old son to walk. It can’t be done. It’s impossible. My little son doesn’t have the strength to walk. And we don’t have the strength to walk in line with these two verses. We’re too insecure.

It’s not until we know that someone else, that someone great, is looking out for us, for our interests, that we can begin to move in a different direction and look out for the interests of others.

### I. The Possibility of Philippians 2:5-11

The good news is that as Christians, we believe that someone great has in fact gone to great lengths to look out for our interests. We believe that someone great has counted us significant, curing our insecurity and enabling us to count others as more significant than ourselves. Philippians 2:3-4 is impossible until we read Philippians 2:5-11. Philippians 2:5-11 turns everything

upside down or, should I say, turns everything right side up.

A lot of ink has been spilled over these seven verses. This passage gets more attention than any other passage in Philippians and it’s among the most important passages in the whole Bible. This passage is often referred to as the “Carmen Christi,” which means “a hymn to Christ.” Most all scholars believe that this passage is a hymn, a song, that the earliest Christians sang to Christ. These seven verses are poetry. And just like with any poem, these lines are rich and densely packed. There’s a lot for us to unpack, see, and savor in these seven verses. One scholar, Ralph Martin, has written a 364 page book on these seven verses. I don’t have 364 pages for you today—I’ve got about 40 minutes. But with these minutes I’ll give you the best exposition I can give you of this incredible text.

I’ll tell you, I count it a huge privilege to get to preach this passage. This passage gives us unprecedented access to the mind of Jesus Christ—to his decision making, to his movement from heaven, to earth, and then back to heaven. Only two other passages, John chapter 1 and Colossians chapter 1, give us similar exposure to the mind of Christ. But those chapters don’t expose us to the heights and the depths of who Christ is like this chapter does. We’re standing on holy ground today friends. God is here and he has much to show us as we look at the mind and movement of his Son.

Verse 5 is the introduction, the preface, to our poem. Don’t open your Bibles yet, let me just read this verse to you. Verse 5, Paul says, **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,”**

This is the third command in Philippians. This is a command for the Philippian church to be a people who have the mind, the mindset, of Christ. And this command, like all biblical commands, is preceded by and accompanied by grace. Paul is telling this church to have the mind of Christ which, in fact, they’ve already received in Christ—Paul says that this mind of Christ is already “yours in Christ.” Yet again Paul’s using his favorite phrase, “in Christ,” to remind the Philippians of what they already have through their union with Christ. The sense of this command is the same as the command we looked at last week: “exercise the heavenly citizenship that Christ has already given you.”

And what Paul now goes on to do here is give us a poetry reading. He sings us a song. He leads us in a hymn that shows off the humble mind and movement of Christ. Essentially what Paul's doing here is coloring in for us what he means by this word he keeps repeating, this word "gospel."

In a moment we'll open up our Bibles together and we'll have this passage up on the screens, but for now I want you to just listen to the Word of God. I'm convinced that the Bible was written primarily to be listened to. When this letter first showed up at Philippi, it came as a single scroll, a scroll that one of the leaders in the church would've read aloud while the congregation didn't read along but simply listened. So for now, just listen to the Word of God. Listen to the poem of all poems, the hymn of all hymns, Philippians 2:5-11.

**"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**

This text can be broken down into three stanzas, three stanzas that present us with the three movements in the life of Christ. Let me give each of these to you. We have, first, Christ's Pre-Earthly Existence (vv. 6-7a). Second, Christ's Earthly Existence (vv. 7b-8). And third, Christ's Post-Earthly Existence (vv. 9-11).

## II. Christ's Pre-Earthly Existence (vv. 6-7a)

First we're looking at Christ's Pre-Earthly Existence, verses 6-7a. In his pre-earthly existence, from eternity past, Christ dwelled in perfect equality with God—with the Father and with the Spirit. Christ sat equal with the Father, high on his heavenly throne. Yet from his throne, Christ made a startling decision. Verse 6, Christ decided to "not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." Christ decided to not grasp, to not clutch onto, his divine status. Now that's the opposite of what we do. We grasp after divine status. We want it. We live in a place where people are spending their lives grasping after the highest status possible. It's been this way since the garden of Eden. Remember what the serpent told Adam and Eve? He told them that if they ate from the tree they'd "become like God." And Adam and Eve decided to grasp the fruit as a grasp after divine status, as an attempt to become like God. This verse tells us that

Christ decided to not grasp what humanity has always grasped after.

I'd underline this phrase in your Bibles that Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." The only reason we're here this morning is because of this decision. Jesus Christ made a decision to not grasp after his divine status, to move off of his throne and, as the text says, make "himself nothing," or, as some translations say, he "emptied himself." These words were a storm center for heresy in the early church because some took these words to mean that Christ emptied himself of his divinity and came to earth as a mere man, rather than as fully God and fully man. This is why it's so important for you to love God with your mind and get your theology straight, because if you believe that Christ emptied himself of his divinity in coming to earth, well, then you don't have a Savior. You just have a man who lived a good life and died a tragic death. You don't have a God-man who lived a life and died a death that can save you from the wrath of God.

So, what does it mean that Christ "emptied himself," that he "made himself nothing"? Well, the text doesn't tell us that Christ emptied himself of anything. It says that he emptied himself by taking, he made himself nothing by taking. The first line in our next stanza says "taking the form of a servant." Christ made himself nothing by addition. Christ added humanity to his divinity. The second person of the Trinity was so humble as to add frail humanity to his divine nature. I know this is really heady stuff, but it's incredible stuff. It's worth your effort to go for a walk later today and just ponder that the Son of God chose to become incarnate, he chose to add humanity to his divinity and come down to us.

This is one of the realities that makes Christianity entirely unique among all other belief systems. Only Christianity has incarnation. Only Christianity gives you a God who left his throne for a manger. This was unheard of in the 1st century world. This is a God who is completely unlike the gods who were worshipped in and around Philippi in the 1st century. In the 1st century Roman world, the world worshipped gods and idols and figures who grasped after divine status, who conquered and achieved and made themselves great. Nobody worshipped someone who made himself nothing. This hymn flips everything around. It's revolutionary. God comes down to us! He becomes one of us, he lives for us, he dies for us! What kind of a "god" is this? Christ, in deciding not to grasp after his divine status, in choosing giving over getting, is giving us a portrait of what the one true God is like.

### III. Christ's Earthly Existence (vv. 7b-8)

Let's look now at the second movement in the life of Christ: Christ's Earthly Existence, verses 7b-8. Christ took the "form of a servant." We try to climb the corporate, social, and economic ladder. Christ climbed down the ladder. Christ moved from his heavenly throne down to an earthly manger. He was "born in the likeness of men," fully God and fully man, and placed in a dusty manger. His earthly parents gave him the name "Jesus," which means "God saves." And at first glance, Jesus looked like a mere man. By all appearances, he was just another male among thousands of other 1st century Jewish males living in and around a narrow strip of land known as Palestine.

Now, let me ask you, what kind of an image comes into your mind when you think about what Jesus looked like? Unfortunately, because of the paintings and movies we've all seen, most of us envision Jesus as having blue eyes, long, feathery hair with plenty of moose in it, soft blush cheeks, a frail, unmuscular body, and wearing a white, freshly ironed robe/dress thing—the kind of outfit that would make for the perfect summer dress for many of you ladies here. We've got to replace this false image with the true image of the earthly Christ.

Jesus Christ was born into the world as a Middle Eastern Jew. He would've had darker colored skin, dark eyes, dark stubble on his cheeks, and dark hair that was un-feathered, un-moosed, and when he went in for a haircut, he got a man's haircut. Jesus would've also had a fairly muscular, in-shape body. He worked as a carpenter. He lifted wood and swung hammers. And the gospels show us that he was constantly walking from city to city, mile after mile, in the hot Middle Eastern sun. Jesus didn't wear outfits. Guys don't wear outfits. He wore the clothes that men of his day wore, and he got them dirty with sweat and dust. I'm convinced that one of the reasons there's a significantly higher percentage of women who are Christians in America than men is that we have a very warped image of what the earthly Christ looked like. Most men think he looked like Michael Bolton in a wrinkle free dress. Men just aren't going to follow someone who looked like that. Men and women need to realize that Christ came to earth as a Jewish looking, hard working, masculine servant.

Verse 7 tells us that Christ came as a servant. Our hymn tells us that Christ's earthly life was a life of humble service. Christ left his throne to serve the very people who had rejected his throne. The ruler of all became the servant of all. This is what Mark 10:45 says, "**For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

It's really important that you get what it says in Philippians and what it says in the gospels about Jesus

coming to earth not to be served, but to serve—to be our servant. Many people misread the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and miss the significance of verses like Mark 10:45. Many Christians read the gospels as though they're mainly about being like Jesus, about following his example. Though the gospel accounts certainly are about that, they're mainly about how Jesus is our Servant-Savior. Jesus must be our Savior before he can be our Example. You can't be like Jesus, you can't follow his example, your life can't move in the direction that his moved, until you know him each and every day as your Savior.

I urge you to read your Bibles with this understanding. Approach your Bible reading like a hunting expedition. Be on the lookout, first, for how Christ is presented as your Savior and then, second, for how he's presented as your Example. I think W.W.J.D. bracelets, What Would Jesus Do bracelets, are asking the wrong question. The better question is W.D.J.D.—What Did Jesus Do? Asking this question focuses our attention upon this hymn, upon the reality that Jesus the servant-Savior has done what nobody else could do.

Adam's sin in the garden, Moses' sin in the desert, David's sin in the palace, and the nation of Israel's sin in the Promised Land, can all be understood as a failure to humbly serve God. God had always been searching for a humble servant who would obey him perfectly. Nobody fit the bill. And so Christ came and did what Adam and the others failed to do. As verse 8 says, Christ "humbled himself," lived a life of complete obedience, and served both God and us.

About 1600 years ago a man approached the great Saint Augustine and asked him to list the central principles of Christianity. Augustine replied: "First, humility. Second, humility. Third, humility." What Augustine was getting at with this answer wasn't primarily the humility that God asks of us in Philippians 2:3-4, but he was highlighting the humility exhibited by God for us in Philippians 2:5-11.

In great humility, Christ moved off of his throne to be born in a manger and... to wear a towel. In John 13 we see Jesus serving us with a towel and it's a great illustration of today's text. Let me read a few verses from John 13 to you: "**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to**

**wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments [he] resumed his place...** (John 13:3-5,12).

The movement of these two texts is the same. Christ left his seated position of authority, took off his divine robe, wrapped himself in a towel, moved down to his knees to humbly serve, and when he finished his work, he moved back up, put on his robe, and resumed his seat.

Have any of you felt really low this past week? Well, Christ has gone lower. Has God called you to serve in a pretty low place? Know that Jesus has served in a lower place than you will ever be called to serve.

Jesus not only left his throne for a manger; he not only left his throne for a towel; he also left his throne for a cross. The climax of Christ's movement comes at the lowest place—the cross. Dying on a cross was as low as you could go in the 1st century world. Jesus died the lowest, most shameful, most humiliating and excruciating of 1st century deaths. The word "excruciating" literally means "from the cross." These Christians in Philippi would've never had to worry about an excruciating crucifixion because, as Roman citizens, if they ever were convicted of a crime and ever were sentenced to death, the worst they'd get is a quick decapitation. Roman citizens could not be crucified. But Jesus, the heavenly citizen, moved from the highest place to come down to the lowest place: "becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Christ did this to atone for our sins. Our sin is so great. The story of sin in my life could be put together into a power point presentation, posted on this screen, and the presentation would run for several years, one slide after another: "Justin Buzzard sinned against God and his neighbor by..." fill in the blank. Next slide: "At the age of 15, Justin sinned against God by..." fill in the blank. And on and on it would go. Imagine your sins posted on this screen. That's why Christ left his throne for a cross.

Our sin is so bad, God's wrath was so hot against the sins of this world, that God the Father took his sword by the hilt, he drew back, and thrust his sword towards a world of sinners, but Christ stepped in between you and the sword. Since before the beginning of time, this had always been the plan between the Father and the Son. This had always been the mind of Christ. The sword came down for us, yet Jesus stepped in between and hung on the sword—his arms nailed to the hilt. That's how low Christ moved from his throne. That's how sharp the cross is. Christ was stabbed and we were saved. Christ did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped so that he could grasp you. I hope we never grow numb here to the sharpness and the sweetness of Christ's cross.

#### **IV. Christ's Post-Earthly Existence (vv. 9-11)**

We now come to the third movement of Christ, his

Post-Earthly Existence, verses 9-11. Verse 9 begins, "therefore God." Up until this point, up until verse 9, Christ has been the subject of our hymn. Christ is the one who decided not to grasp, made himself nothing, and humbled himself to the point of death. Now God, God the Father, is the subject of our text. And God does three things for his Son.

First we see that God has exalted his Son. God has exalted Christ to a greater throne. Christ left his heavenly throne only to be exalted back up to a greater throne. Jesus, in coming to earth, didn't purchase a one way ticket. He bought a round trip ticket. His humility and incarnation was always to lead to his glory and exaltation. And on the return trip, Christ came back different. God has now exalted him in heaven, as fully God and as fully man. Christ has now brought human nature to where it's never been before. Since the Fall, human nature had been prevented from going to where it was designed to go—the heavenly presence of God. And now, resurrected from the dead and exalted to heaven, the incarnate Christ sits on a greater throne than ever before because he's brought human nature into heaven. Do you realize that Christ's incarnation continues from his heavenly throne? Jesus still has, and always will have, his human nature.

This is good news. The fact that the incarnate Christ has been exalted to heaven is our guarantee that one day we can go where he is. But until then we have the astonishing comfort that Christ's incarnation on our behalf continues, right now, in heaven. Christ is still serving us—in heaven. Listen to what Hebrews 7:25 says, Jesus **Christ "is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."** If you're a Christian, right now, Christ, the incarnate and exalted one—who knows what it means to be tempted, to be weak, to be broken, to suffer, even to die, he is, right now, interceding for you. He's praying for you, right now. We also need to make ourselves W.I.J.D. bracelets—What Is Jesus Doing? This is what he's doing: right now, the exalted, still incarnate Jesus is continuing to serve us.

The second thing that God has done for his Son is give him the name that is above every name. In the ancient world, a name could convey power. It's the same way today. You hear a name, a title, like "president" or "prime minister" and you think, "power," "influence," "might." Verse 11 says that God has given Jesus the name "Lord." When Paul wrote this letter, this name "Lord," this title, was reserved for the Roman Caesar. When 1st century Romans heard the title "Lord," they thought of Caesar exalted on his throne in Rome, holding ultimate power. Paul is making it clear who really sits on the throne, who really has ultimate

power. Jesus is Lord. The humble one, the one who was completely obedient, is now completely obeyed.

The third thing that God does for his Son is ensure that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Knees from all three realms: heaven, earth, and under the earth will bow not to Caesar, not to some other lord or idol, but to Jesus. Every tongue will confess his Lordship. Right now, thousands upon thousands of people on this Peninsula are bowing their knee to all sorts of other lords and names. What this text tells us is that one day, every single kneecap on this Peninsula will hit the dirt before Jesus. On that day, some will bow the knee with great joy, because they're bowing the knee to Jesus in joy right now. Others will bow the knee in sorrow, because they refused to bow before.

Christians are people who bow the knee to Jesus right now. We bow the knee to the one who has bowed the most, who has gone the lowest and now been raised the highest. And I hope that as we do ministry on the Peninsula, we keep in mind *both* the lowness of Jesus (his incarnation) and the highness of Jesus (his exaltation). We need to tell our neighbors that Jesus is Lord, that he alone is exalted above all things. But we better approach our neighbors humbly, on our knees, because that's how Christ approached us.

Like I said before, many people call this passage the "Carmen Christi," the hymn to Christ. That's a good title. This hymn exposes us to the mind and movement of Christ like no other text in the Bible. But, although this hymn began with Christ, it doesn't end with Christ. The ultimate purpose of Christ's movement from heaven, to earth, to heaven can be summed up in one word, the final word of our poem: Father. Our poem has moved from Christ to the Father. What Christ's movement has done is give us a Father. This passage is right on par with Luke 15, the Parable of the Prodigal Sons, in revealing what our heavenly Father is like. Here we see that we have a humble Father who spared no expense to look out for our interests.

Fathers look out for the interests of their children. I'm a brand new father. I've been doing it for just four months now, but I'll tell you what, I'm intensely attuned to the needs and interests of my son. I'd lay down my life for him in a second. But in this hymn we encounter a Father who did something different, who laid down the life of his one and only beloved Son in order to make *us* his sons and daughters. And this, my friends, changes everything.

## CONCLUSION

Philippians 2:3-4 now becomes possible. Because we have a Father, we can carry out verses 3-4. The movement of our lives can now change. Now that we know that we have a Father who has loved us like this, who has looked out for our interests like this, who has counted us this significant, we now have the security and the ability to look out for the interests of others and count others more significant than ourselves. Now that Christ has moved to us, we can move out to others. Christ's movement changes our movement. The mind of Christ changes our minds, and we can now live our lives for others. That's the great command of our passage—for us to have the mind of Christ, for us to, in our families, with our friends, at school, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, humbly live our lives for the benefit of others.

This is what we were created for. We were created by God to serve others. This is why when your mind is off of yourself and you're throwing yourself into loving and serving others, you feel so good. Because this is what you were created to do. We are most ourselves when we're moving out to serve others. Knowing that you have a Father like this and a Christ like this is what enables you to move like this.

I need to have this movement of Christ and this poetry of the Father preached to me daily, otherwise there's no chance that this selfish guy will serve others. Fortunately, I get to see a living reminder of this passage every day. My wife knows this poem very well. She knows what kind of a Father she has, she exercises the mind of Christ, and so she's always looking out for my interests. Taylor seems to always be getting down on her knees to serve me, counting me more significant than herself. She's always moving down so that I can move up. What can I say? I married up. And after 3 & 1/2 years of experiencing my wife's humble movement, I'm finally beginning to move *in* a little less and move *out* a little more.

And what my wife has been doing for me, we can do for the Peninsula. Right now the vast, vast, vast majority of people who populate this Peninsula are moving towards destruction, death, and hell. But the trajectory of these lives, the trajectory of this place, will change when they encounter a community, a church, that's been infected by this poem, that sings this hymn. There's more poetry waiting to be written here on the Peninsula as we move outside of ourselves and count our neighbors as more significant than ourselves. Poetry like that, churches like that, can't help but change the movement of the world.