



Philippians 2:5-8

New International Version of the Holy Bible

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION

“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. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on the cross!” Philippians 2:5-8

“We want deeds, not creeds,” writes one of the renowned ministers of New York. Can you build a house without a foundation or get a car to run without wheels? Neither can you build a moral society or a Christian life without a creed. As a person thinks in their heart, they will therefore become so. That is the truth written for our benefit in Proverbs chapter 23. Just as the horse comes before the wagon so faith must proceed works, for without faith it is impossible to please God. **“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6**

Today we continue our consideration of the Second Article which summarizes what we believe concerning Christ's humiliation; namely, *“Conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried.”*

St. Paul refers to this selfless humiliation in our text. He makes two points: One, Christ was God. He was in the form of God – he thought it not a prize to be grasped at all cost to be equal with God in order to become man. The second point is that Christ made took upon himself the form of a servant for he was made in the likeness of men. Having become a man, he subjected himself to death, even the death of the cross.

We often picture Christ's humiliation to the confirmation class as a ladder with six steps leading downward. The ladder reaches all the way from heaven to death and the tomb. Today let's follow Christ as he goes down those six humiliating steps.

I. THE FIVE STEPS OF CHRIST'S HUMILIATION

1. Step one: *"He was conceived by the Holy Ghost."* Ordinarily it takes two human beings, male and female, to bring about the beginning of a new life which we call conception. No virgin or undefiled, unmarried woman has ever become pregnant. The conception of Christ obviously involved a miracle. The angel that appeared to the Virgin Mary told her: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."** **Luke 1:35** Even though a miracle, Christ's conception in the womb of a woman was his first step down the ladder of humiliation. He who is the Creator becomes a part of a creature. Christ who created all space with its vastness becomes confined in a woman's womb. What humiliation!

2. Step two: *"He was born of the Virgin Mary."* No other event in history has produced one half the numbers of carols, dramas, paintings, and poems as the birth of Christ Jesus. Young and old sing: *"Silent Night,*

Holy Night” while radio and television programs fill the airways with a multitude of beautiful Christmas carols for weeks before Christmas. Christmas Eve programs year after year tell the marvelous story: Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all should be taxed. Mary and Joseph as obedient citizens go to Bethlehem for their registration. Before they arrive from distant Nazareth all the houses and inns are filled and Mary gives birth to her first baby, lays him in a manger and calls him Jesus. Artists have portrayed this event in such colorful beauty and we sing about it with such joy that we almost forget that for Christ this was another step in his humiliation.

When Communism took control in China thousands of freedom-minded Chinese fled to Hong Kong for protection. In one year the population doubled. It was worse than Bethlehem at the time of Christ’s birth because all these refugees came to stay. People slept in garages, under steps, or any place where they could find shelter. Even today you can see shanties on the hillsides tacked together of plywood, cardboard, and discarded pieces of tin – no running water or sanitary toilets with shanty leaning against shanty. How would you like to leave your home and change places with one of these refugee families?

The exchange our Savior made was far greater and much more traumatic. Christ, who was a Spirit, became flesh. Christ, who was God, took on a human form. Christ, who lived in heaven, came down to earth. Christ, who lived in eternal mansions, was born in a stinking barn. What humiliation!

3. Step Three: *“Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate.”* That’s a rather short sentence but represents quite a long step down the ladder in Christ’s humiliation. Christ, of course, suffered long before he was brought before the governor, Pontius Pilate. On the eighth day from birth he shed his blood as he was circumcised. When Herod threatened to kill the

newborn King, Joseph had to take him on that arduous trip to Egypt. As a boy in Nazareth, other children no doubt ridiculed him as “*the Holy One.*” Forty days and forty nights without food or drink in the wilderness was not easy either. Christ himself summarized his life quite well when he explained: **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Matthew 8:20**

Of course, all this was only a prelude to the agony and suffering he endured under Pontius Pilate. Late Thursday night, after his capture in the Garden, he was brought before the chief priests and the church court. It was very humiliating to have these church leaders hire false witnesses against him and to be called a liar and a blasphemer by those who should have proclaimed him Lord and God. After this sham of justice, he was delivered to the Roman soldiers for safe-keeping until morning. For a long time soldiers have been known for an attitude of callous cruelty and this was especially true of the Roman soldiers. During the night they crowned him with thorns, beat him over the head, and bowed their knees in mockery as they greeted him as King of the Jews. Others blindfolded him, smote him in the face and jeered: **“Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?” Matthew 26:68** Still others seemed to think it funny to spit on him. How would you feel if a group of men would tie your hands, jeer at you, spit in your face and you couldn’t wipe their obnoxious spittle out of your eyes and off your face? What humiliation!

Worse was yet to come. Before the governor they stripped off his clothes, tied his hands to a post, and with his back tight in a stooped position they beat him until his flesh was torn to shreds. Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords, King of kings, who could have destroyed them all with one word patiently endured their brutality and abuse. What humiliation!

4. Step Four: *“They crucified Him.”* Crucifixion under the Roman government was reserved for slaves and hardened criminals because of

the shame and cruelty connected to it. To please the mob, Pontius Pilate ordered our Savior to be crucified.

They crucified our Lord. They compelled him to carry his own cross down the narrow streets of Jerusalem and out the city gate to Mt. Calvary. After stretching out his arms and legs, they nailed his hands and feet to the ugly cross. After lifting the cross up, they left him there to die. But this was not all that happened. Adding insult to injury they ridiculed and jeered him: **“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” . . . “He saved others”, they said, “but he can’t save himself!” Matthew 27:40 and 42** What humiliation!

5. Step Five: “He died.” Even in the midst of all the hate and confusion there were a few who still loved him and had the courage to admit it. Joseph of Arimathea, who had a tomb near the Mount of Crucifixion, went to the governor and asked whether he could have Christ’s body in order to give him a decent burial. Nicodemus came forward to join him. Evidently he remembered his midnight visit almost three years earlier when Jesus told him: **“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3** **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:14-15**

Since the Sabbath began at 6PM, these two men wrapped him in linen and spices, hurriedly laid him in Joseph’s tomb, rolled a huge stone in front of the entrance and left. There was no funeral service, no procession, no tolling of bells, no one to speak a eulogy! He received neither the honor nor respect which we give to the very least of our church members. This was the final step down the ladder of his humiliation.

“He was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried.” He had reached the end of the ladder of humiliation.

II. The Blessings of Christ’s Humiliation

Our Catechism asks: *“For what purpose did Christ so humble himself?”* That’s a real good question because the answer to that question gives Christ’s humiliation meaning for our lives.

1. Christ’s humiliation was a part of God’s own plan. Christ’s humiliation wasn’t some publicity stunt by some neurotic. His humiliation did not show that Christ was a victim of circumstances as some suggest. Christ’s humiliation was a part of God’s own plan and a part of Christ’s own plan. Jesus himself said: **“. . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:27** His humiliation wasn’t defeat but the fulfillment of his own plan to redeem the world.

When Christ appeared on Jordan’s bank to be baptized and to begin his ministry, John the Baptizer declared: **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29** After Christ had walked to the bottom of the ladder, John wrote by inspiration of the Spirit: **“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:2** Paul puts it in plain language: **“. . . we are convinced that one died for all . . .” 2 Corinthians 5:14**

That’s why we build colleges and seminaries for the training of pastors, teachers, and missionaries. That’s why we bring our offerings and pray *“Thy kingdom come.”* That’s why we build churches, call pastors, teach children, witness to our friends and neighbors, come to church and bring others to church. Christ died for all. Every man, woman, and child is

redeemed. All of the white, black, red, and yellow people are redeemed. And also, both good and bad people are redeemed. All who are sinners have been redeemed through Christ's awful humiliation.

2. Through his humiliation Christ redeemed me. Luther again gives added meaning when he personalizes and writes: *"He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil."*

During the Lenten season some of our churches drape the crucifix on the altar with a black veil. When worshippers enter the church they are immediately reminded of the tragedy and agony of Christ's suffering and death on Calvary. This may be good if it reminds them also of the life we have through Christ's death. Jesus said in the midst of his suffering to the weeping women: **"Do not weep for me. . ."** **Luke 23:28** Instead of pity, he wants faith in order that we might have life.

The ultimate significance of Christ's suffering and humiliation is that Christ has redeemed me. When you say in your heart: *"Christ has redeemed me."* - then you have grasped the true meaning of Christ's humiliation. Don't cry believers and don't mourn, instead rejoice, for Christ redeemed you.

3. Through his humiliation, Christ has redeemed me from sin, death and the power of the devil. Every grown person, youth, and child knows what sin is. We also know the consequences of sin: alienation from God, a guilty conscience, fear, doubt, and that nagging daily feeling that things are not right. But Christ's humiliation has changed all that. You are redeemed from sin and all its consequences for: **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."** **Romans 8:1** You can now enjoy God's presence, sing his praises, walk

tall before him by day or by night because you have been redeemed from your sins.

Almost two million people die in our county each year. We know that we deserve temporal death and eternal damnation which is the second death, but the apostle Paul writes: **"For the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23 and adds quickly: ". . . but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23** That is why the apostle also writes that when a loved one dies we don't have to cry as the heathen do who have no hope. That's why we can face death without fear and shout: **"Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:55-56**

As one faithful Christian put it: *"It's going to be a great day when I die."* Death for the Christian is the beginning of life - real life without fear, doubt, worry, pain, or any such ills which beset us. Christ has redeemed us from death.

He has also redeemed us from the power of the devil. Make no mistake - the devil is still alive. But Christ humbled himself so that through death he might conquer him who had the power of death, which is the devil. When Christ died he crushed the devil's power forever.

Luther once told his people: When the devil says to me: *"Luther, you are a great sinner,"* I have to answer him: *"You are right."* But then the devil adds: *"Because of your sins you are going to hell."* I just laugh at him and say: *"You just go back to hell for Christ has redeemed me."* Christ has redeemed all of us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.