

February 13

Scriptures: Read Philippians 2

Key Verse: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:5)

Overview

At first reading in the context, it looks a bit like over-kill. Paul was concerned about petty personal quarrels which were disrupting the Philippian church (2:1-4). He certainly needed to give a fatherly word of correction. Instead, he breaks forth into one of the most eloquent and powerful bursts of theological poetry in all of written work. Why? Maybe because, in Paul’s thinking, attitude was vital to Christianity. It wasn’t enough just to think correctly about Jesus, you also had to think the way He thought. And Jesus thought in a radical way — He thought in terms of downward mobility. Jesus was disturbingly and refreshingly self-forgetful.

A discussion of the theological implications of this passage is far beyond the scope of this little commentary. I wish only to make a few brief observations. First of all, verse 6 speaks of Jesus in His pre-incarnate state: “being in the form of God.” or, as the NIV translates, “being in very nature God.” Greek thought saw “form” in two ways: 1. shape and appearance, as when a shadow takes the form of a monster on a child’s bedroom wall; 2. the expression of what really is. Paul is thinking in terms of the latter. He is saying that Jesus was essentially and substantially divine — He shared the divine nature. Secondly, in verse 7, Jesus “made Himself nothing” (NIV), that is, He unilaterally limited or emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives. Only power has the power of self-limitation. In Jesus’ case, He limited Himself to the point of death as a human on a wooden cross (v. 8). He became, literally, a “slave” (v. 7).

Remember the context. Paul is addressing pettiness in the Philippian church. He is challenging his readers to rise above feuds and jealousies. The inference is that a desire for the upper hand, for ascendancy, is at the root of these squabbles. Paul is saying, “rise above littleness and strive to serve rather than command.” Follow Jesus’ example. Be downwardly mobile!

Prayer

Lord God, help us to rise above all pettiness, feuds, and jealousies. We yield to You and deliberately let the mind of Christ be in us. Make us more like our Saviour.