

The Higher Path: Jesus Our Model

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Talking with our older farmers, it is not unusual for them to describe how they learnt to farm from their fathers. It is a part of human nature to imitate. From our earliest moments, God has created us to imitate what we see & what we hear.

But as you know, the Christ-life is filled with paradoxes, right? How do you get life? You die to self. How do you get to be first? You place yourself last. Who is mighty in the eyes of God? The one who is contrite and broken.

Now, the world system is telling you that the way to scale the heights is to gain all the worldly pleasures you can, gain all the power and influence you can, gain all the thrills you can, gain all the money and possessions you can. But that's not what Jesus said. That's not what Jesus modelled.

That's how Jesus lived, right? When you read the accounts of His life you can't arrive at any other conclusion than He lived a life of humility and service. So-- if we call ourselves Christ-followers, guess what? We must imitate, model the life of Jesus. Christ followers. Christ-imitators. Christ modelers.

One of the great Christological passages is this one we'll study today. It's called "The kenosis" passage because the key word in it is kenosis: to empty.

If Christ is our model, how shall we model Him?

1. We are to model His attitude vv.5-7a

"Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself"

So what was His attitude? It goes to that word I said a while ago: kenosis. He emptied Himself. What does that mean? Well think about who Jesus was before His incarnation. Don't think for a minute that Jesus didn't exist until 2000 years ago. As the second member of the Triune God, Jesus has always been. Jesus is eternal. John the Apostle wrote in his account of Jesus' life: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1). The last book of the Bible, Revelation has Jesus saying, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty."* (Revelation 1:8). Alpha the 1st letter of the Greek alphabet; Omega is the last letter. Jesus is saying that everything began in Him; everything will wind down in Him. He's eternal.

So before His time here on earth as a human being, He lived in the glory and splendour reserved only for God Almighty. Think about that: before the incarnation, Jesus existed with all the best there is in the universe—without limitation. All power. All glory. All beauty. All comfort. All importance. All pleasure. It was His without limitation. He was God and possessed all the rights and privileges that accrued thereto.

But what attitude did He display?. V.7 "Instead". Underline that word. As God, He had every right to have all that God had and treated the way God should be treated. But **INSTEAD**, what did He do? "Instead He emptied Himself" He emptied Himself of His rights and privileges as God. He didn't divest His divinity; He was still God. But He divested Himself of His rights and privileges.

I sat under some teaching on this passage that helped me immensely then and still does to this day. You know why I get irritated at Sue? Because I feel she has not treated me right. I have the right to be treated a certain way and when I'm not treated that way, I get angry, I get irritated, I get hurt.

Let me drive this point home: Every pride we have, every anger we experience, every irritation we notice, every injustice we endure, every hurt we feel—can be traced to a right that we are clinging to.

We live in a country that is big on rights and what we deserve. I certainly believe deeply in human rights and treating all people with dignity because every person is bears the image of the living God and therefore deserves respect and compassion.

But in our personal relationships—the reason that we struggle with others is because we are holding on to a right. Marriages fall apart because one or both cling to their rights. Friendships are strained because we cling to our rights. We lose our inward peace because we're clinging to a right. Jesus modelled just the opposite: Even though He was God with infinite rights, He emptied Himself of those rights.

2. We are to model His actions vv.7b- 8

Have you ever noticed as a parent how your children model your actions? When kids would fall, if I was close, brush them off, “You’ll be ok” And most of time, you know what, they’d sniff a bit and continue on. If they fell with Mum around, she’d pick them up with this panic look on her face and panic in her voice, “Are you ok?” Immediately start screaming!

Often in our youth, we try to imitate the behaviour of the cool people. If the cool people shuffled their feet, so we imitate that and often 50 years later, we still shuffle our feet and trip all the time!

As Christ followers, we are to imitate the attitudes/actions of Jesus. How did Jesus act? “By assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”

Remember in the Upper Room at the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples? It’s found in John 13. Because people in ancient times walked barefoot or in sandals, and they would walk on the same roads and paths that sheep and cattle and goats did, their feet were filthy. When they arrived at a house, they’d wash not just their hands, but especially their feet. And if they were coming to dinner, that was really important because Middle Eastern tables were about 45 cm high and you’d lean on your elbow and eat with your feet slid right behind the person next to you or with our legs crossed. Either way, stinky feet would be offensive to everyone there. So Jesus is having His last supper with His disciples, and not one of them was humble enough to wash the other’s feet. So what did Jesus do? He got up, poured water in a basin, and began to wash and dry the disciples’ feet.

When Jesus showed up on this earth, He showed up as a servant. It says that He acted like slave (*doulos*): totally devoted to the interests of someone else This mission He was on, was in obedience to the Father. And His actions of humility and service, cost Him His life: “obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”

Is anyone here acting out in such humility and obedience and servanthood that you’re dying? I doubt it. Yet that’s what Jesus modelled for us. As God’s people, one of the strongest values we can have is serving. A Christ-follower is the one who is modelling, acting like Jesus by being a servant.

Genuine humility shows up in how we act. Are you acting like a servant to your family members? Your class mates? Your work mates? You are if you’re a Christ-follower.

3. We are to model His path vv.9-11

“For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here’s the thing about God: when we are obedient to Him and serve others, there will be a time of exaltation. The exaltation of Jesus of course was one of a kind; infinitely unique: At His name, every knee that has ever existed and every tongue that has ever been will bow and declare that Jesus is who He said He was.

Our exaltation will not compare in magnitude. But it still will be stunning. One day the servant of Christ will hear these words, *“Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!”* Matthew 25:23 Can you imagine how wonderful it will be to experience the unhindered, unmitigated, unblemished joy of God? NO! Can’t grasp it. But that’s what awaits those of us who model Jesus.

Listen my dear people: You want to know how to fly high? Then bend low. Andrew Murray was an amazing man and writer in the 19th century. He writes in His book, *Humility*,

“The highest lesson a believer has to learn is humility. Brethren, here is the path to the higher life. Down, lower, down!” Andrew Murray, *Humility*

This is the path of Jesus. And while you empty yourself of pride and rights, He will fill you with joy and peace.

AMEN