

The Humiliation of Christ

Introduction

Having spoken of the glory of Christ in the previous article ("A Glimpse of the Glory of Christ"), it seemed appropriate to look at His humiliation in this one. **The glory of Christ** is something that we are only capable of appreciating to a very limited degree while we are in these (fallen) bodies of flesh. As the Son of God, He shares all the attributes of the Godhead: He is eternal (He had no beginning and will have no end), omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere present). When our minds try to grasp such divine concepts they become overwhelmed. We cannot truly understand these divine perfections because He is God, and we are not; how can **the finite** comprehend **the infinite**? But when it comes to the subject of **the humiliation of Christ** - the fact that this glorious person, who is God, willingly humbled Himself, then surely our minds are overwhelmed in a rather different way. To think of God, the almighty, sovereign creator, humbling Himself, is surely something that we would not **expect** from the divine being; it is, can I say, **surprising!** And we have to ask the question: "Why? Why would the Son of God humble Himself?" But, before we do that, we will look at the nature of the humiliation of Christ: just what was involved in Christ humbling Himself?

The Nature of Christ's Humiliation

The best place to start must be Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 8: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". Here we read that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who existed from all eternity in the form of God (i.e. He has the very nature and essence of God), and was on an equality with God (i.e. His nature was not inferior in any way to that of God the Father), enjoying the glorious perfection of His existence in heaven with the Father - including the worship of the holy angels, willingly left the bliss of heaven and came into this fallen world, and took unto Himself, while yet retaining His divine nature, the nature of one of His creatures - man. His divine glory was thus veiled in a lowly human body. And the man that He became was not a member of the royal family or of the nobility, but a man of very mean and inferior position: as Ephesians 4:9 puts it, "he... descended into the **lower parts** of the earth". From His birth in a stable, to His execution on a Roman cross, His life was one of grief and sorrow, "despised and rejected of men" (Isaiah 53:3). He who was worthy of receiving the highest esteem, honour, glory and worship from men (His creatures), was, instead, insulted, hated, betrayed, scourged and put to death.

Let's look at some of the details which make up Christ's humiliation.

Jesus' Birth and Childhood

He was born to a poor, virgin, Jewish girl called Mary (who was betrothed to a carpenter called Joseph), in a stable in a little town called Bethlehem, where He was laid in a manger - an animals'

feeding-trough (Luke 2:4-7). When Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem for Mary's purification, when Jesus was forty days old, they could only afford the poor person's offering: "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:22-24; cf. Leviticus 12:8). While Jesus was still a young child, king Herod sought to put Him to death by ordering the death of all boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years of age or younger (Matthew 2:16). Jesus and His parents had to flee to Egypt to escape the king's edict (Matthew 2:13-14). Jesus, the Son of God, as a human child, subjected Himself in obedience to His parents (Luke 2:51).

Jesus' Adult Life

At the age of thirty, He who had the power to baptize in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11), allowed Himself to be baptized in water by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-15); Jesus, who knew no sin, thus identified Himself with the sin of those He came to save, and received the baptism of repentance, though he Himself "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He was then "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1), whose temptations He repelled with words of scripture (Matthew 4:3-11), thus demonstrating His total obedience to the will of His heavenly Father and His dedication to the fulfilling of the mission on which He had been sent: "My meat (food) is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus "never wrought a miracle for his own support" (John Gill: Body of Divinity); He wrought plenty for the aid and support of others, but not for Himself.

Throughout His public life, Jesus had no certain dwelling place to live in: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew: 8:20).

Jesus was frequently treated with contempt and outright hostility. In His hometown of Nazareth He was referred to as "the carpenter's son", and the people there were offended and repelled by His lowly upbringing (Matthew 13:55-58). On one occasion, they were so furious at what He said that they "rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way" (Luke 4:28-30). On more than one occasion, the Jews "took up stones to cast at him" (John 8:59; 10:31).

On a couple of occasions, Jesus was accused of being demon-possessed (John 7:20; 8:48), and the Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) accused Him of casting out demons "by Beelzebub the prince of the demons" (Matthew 12:24): what a horrific thing to say of the Son of God, "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38), and "who went about... preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23)!

Jesus' healing of the sick and afflicted on the Sabbath day, in defiance of the man-made additions to God's law imposed by the Pharisees, was a further cause of the religious leaders' hatred towards Jesus and a further reason to persecute Him (e.g. John 5:5-18); Jesus' response to their accusations - that He was doing the works of His Father, only served to aggravate them even more: "the Jews sought the more to kill Him" (verses 17-18).

At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Son of God came, not in a royal cavalcade with pomp and great splendour, as befitted His true personage, but He came in meekness, “sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (Matthew 21:5, in fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9).

The wonderful miracles that Jesus wrought, and His growing popularity with the people, was a great concern to the Jewish religious leaders, who saw Jesus as a threat to their authority. Their response was to seek to put Him to death (John 5:18; 11:47-53). The religious leaders eventually found a willing helper in Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ “disciples”; this man, like them, was a hypocrite: and he was also a thief who, it seems, would do anything for money, including betraying the one whom he pretended to love and follow (Luke 22:3-6). The chief priests agreed to give Judas thirty pieces of silver (the price of a slave who had been gored by an ox – Exodus 21:32), if he delivered Jesus into their hands (Matthew 26:14-16). If you want a picture of just how low people can stoop, then just look at Judas Iscariot and the Jewish religious leaders, who plotted the death of the kind, gracious, humble Son of God!

So we come to Passover night, the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, and we see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, with His eleven true (though weak) disciples, agonizing in prayer to His heavenly Father, as His human nature shrank from the thought of what He knew was to come. As He thought about having to take upon Himself all the vile sins of His people upon the cross the following day, and having to endure the just punishment of His heavenly Father for those sins (Matthew 26:36-44 - although He Himself was without sin), His inner turmoil caused Him to “sweat... as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Yet, He willingly continued on His path of humble obedience as He prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). And when the crowd of people and soldiers came, with Judas Iscariot, to arrest Him and take Him away to be tried, He manifested the power that He had at His disposal as the Son of God to escape their clutches, if He so wished, by simply uttering the words, “I am” (echoing the words of Exodus 3:14), at which the crowd were sent tumbling to the ground (John 18:4-6). But, instead of making His escape, He willingly surrendered Himself, and allowed the soldiers to take Him and bind Him and lead Him away as a criminal (John 18:12-13).

Jesus’ Trial and Death

During His interrogation and trials, Jesus was struck with the hand by an officer of Annas, who was father-in-law to the high priest (John 18:22); at the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered in a kangaroo court, false witnesses were sought in order to implicate Jesus in some crime (Matthew 26:59-61). Eventually, He was condemned as worthy of death for claiming to be the Messiah, promised in Daniel 7:13, which, of course, He was (Matthew 26:64-66); “Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?” (Matthew 26:67-68). Isaiah, who prophesied 700 years BC, described how Christ would be treated in these words: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6). Meanwhile, in the courtyard of the high priest, Jesus’ disciple, Peter, was denying that he knew Him, with cursing and swearing (Mark 14:66-72). Jesus was then delivered to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who declared, “I find in him no fault at all” (John 18:38). He was then sent to Herod who, with his soldiers, “set him at nought, and mocked him, and

arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate” (Luke 23:11). When Pilate asked the Jews which prisoner, according to custom, they would have him release - Barabbas or Jesus, “the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask (for) Barabbas (a robber, an insurrectionist, and a murderer), and destroy Jesus” (Matthew 27:20). Pilate wanted to wash his hands of the matter (Matthew 27:24), but eventually relented and “gave sentence that it should be as they required” (Luke 23:24). Jesus was then mocked and scourged by Pilate’s soldiers: they “platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, (“and a reed in his right hand”, Matthew 27:29) and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands” (John 19:2-3), “and they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head” (Matthew 27:30). Pilate brought Jesus out to the crowd “wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold, the man!” (John 19:4-5). Despite Pilate continuing to maintain that Jesus was innocent, the Jews continued to call for His death, by crucifixion, and eventually Pilate gave in and “brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat” (John 19:13), and eventually delivered Jesus to be crucified (John 19:16). Jesus was eventually led out, in His own garments (Matthew 27:31), bearing his cross, to a place called Golgotha (John 19:17).

How did Jesus respond to all this cruel treatment? “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

At Golgotha Jesus was given a bitter drink of vinegar mixed with gall (Matthew 27:34), and then nailed to His cross, piercing His hands and feet (as prophesied in Psalm 22:16). He was crucified between two known criminals (Matthew 27:38), as if He was guilty of similar crimes, and was thus “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). The soldiers divided His clothes among themselves in His sight (Matthew 27:35-36). The crowd and passers-by mocked Him, including the vile religious leaders who were responsible for Him being there; even the two thieves who were crucified with Him reproached Him (Matthew 27:39-44). For six long hours Jesus hung on the cross. Even His heavenly Father appeared to have deserted Him as He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). These words are a quotation of the opening words of Psalm 22, written a thousand years before the birth of Christ; verses 1-21 of this Psalm give a prophetic description of what Jesus experienced on the cross: verses 6-7 read, “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip (a gesture of derision), they shake the head”: and verses 14-17 read, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels (within me). My strength is dried up like a potsherd (a broken piece of pottery); and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me”. For the final three hours of His suffering the land was plunged into literal darkness as even the sun hid its face from the awful scene being witnessed below (Matthew 27:45). At the end of it all, Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). Even in death He was not left alone: a soldier pierced His heart with his spear - **just to make sure** (John 19:33-34). And then, because Jesus had no tomb of His own, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, wrapped his body “in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre” (Matthew 27:59-60); and soldiers sealed it and guarded it: **just to make sure** (Matthew 27:64-66).

Thus men treated the holy, humble Son of God; thus they “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

How far someone falls depends on the height from which they fell. We can never fully comprehend the awful depths of humiliation to which Christ willingly submitted Himself, because we can never fully comprehend the infinite heights of glory from which He came. Which brings us back to where we started, and to the question we have yet to answer: Why? Why did the Father send His Son to be treated in this way? Why did Jesus, the Son of God, thus willingly humble Himself? What was it all meant to achieve?

The Reason for Jesus’ Humiliation

Here we see **the amazing love of God**. It was love for sinful man that prompted God the Father to send His Son, and it was the **same** love that moved God the Son to humble Himself to death on the cross. Jesus became a man, lived a perfect life, and died an atoning death, so that sinners like you and me might not have to suffer eternal punishment in hell; He thus became the Saviour that we all need: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain (author) of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10).

We have spoken of the physical sufferings which Jesus went through in His body, but these were nothing compared to the sufferings that He endured in His soul, as His soul was made “an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10). We have mentioned the final three hours of literal darkness that engulfed the land, but who can imagine what darkness Jesus experienced in His soul as He “poured out his soul unto death... and bare the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). The whole weight of His people’s sins were laid upon Christ, and His Father’s wrath was poured out upon Him, as He was punished in our place: “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him (the punishment He suffered brings His people peace); and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

When people ask for proof of the love of God amidst all the suffering that is in the world, then they should look at the humiliation of Christ in His birth, life and death. **We** suffer in this fallen world as the result of **our wilful rebellion** against God our maker; **He** did **no sin**, but could say of Himself what no other man could truthfully say: “I do always those things that please him (God the Father)” (John 8:29). He suffered for **our** wrong-doing in order that **we** might be delivered from the eternal consequences of our sin: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice which appeases the wrath of God) for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Jesus suffered **hell**, in order that we might not have to.

We often repeat the words of the most famous verse in the Bible, without really thinking about what is being emphasized there: “For God **so loved** the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God didn’t just **love** the world of fallen sinful men, He **so loved** them: He loved them **so much**, that He gave His only begotten Son to suffer and die in their place, so that believing sinners might receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life as a **free gift** from God: a gift which **He Himself purchased for us** at such a

great cost. And Jesus willingly and gladly came because, as a member of the Godhead, He shared the same love for us, and because, also, of the wonderful consequences which He knew would follow upon His obedient sufferings: “who **for the joy that was set before** him endured the cross (Jesus looked forward, with joy, to the bringing of many sons to glory that would result from His death), despising the shame, **and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God** (as the just reward for His sufferings)” (Hebrews 12:2). As we read in Philippians, in the verses which follow the ones quoted near the beginning of this article: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

“I cannot tell how He could love a child so weak and full of sin; His love must be most wonderful, if He could die my love to win” (from the hymn “It is a thing most wonderful” by William Walsham How, hymn no. 1162 in Christian Worship). Let us be amazed at the wonderful, self-denying “love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19). Let us ponder, with humble, thankful hearts, the amazing “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for (our) sakes he became poor, that (we) through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). And let us say, with joyful hearts, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable (indescribable) gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). Amen.