

Hymn for Him

We are back to our series from the New Testament Book of Philippians that we are calling **Joyride** (because **joy** is the theme that runs throughout this letter from Paul to the Church in the Greek city of Philippi).



You can see that I'm calling today's message *Hymn for Him...* because most scholars view this passage (Philippians 2:6-11) as a *hymn*; we'll talk more about that in a moment.

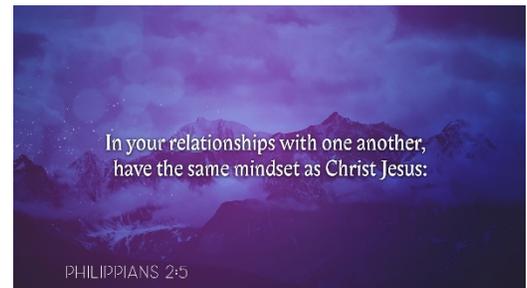
I have in mind to do something with this passage that I haven't done before; I'm going to use this passage for two sermons. *Of course* I have preached the same passage multiple times (including this one). I'm old and have been at this for a while, so of course I have brought messages from the same passage many times. What is different this time is that we're going to look to the same passage, in the same series, *back to back*. We'll work through this passage today, and then when we are back in the series (Sunday after next) we'll consider the same passage... but it will be a different message with a different focus.

Today we will focus on **Him** in the Hymn... and by *Him*, of course, I mean **Jesus**. There is much to learn about Jesus in this passage; in technical terms, there is rich *Christology*.

Next time we will focus on **us** in the Hymn. Paul says it clearly in verse 5:

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ¹

The primary purpose of the words that follow are to **set an example** for Christians. Pastor Paul was writing from incarceration in Rome to the new Christians in the Church in Philippi (a church he planted). He was encouraging those Christians, and all those who would follow throughout the ages, including us, to have the same mindset as Jesus.



Christians are not to merely carry the name of Christ; we are to bear His mindset.

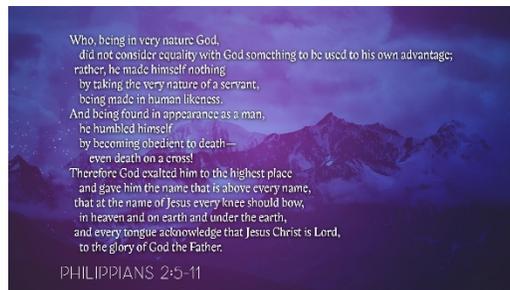
¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So what we will see in the following verses is the **example** we are to follow. This is to be the mindset of believers; this is how Christians ought to **be, think, and act**. A more academic word is that there are **ethics**, or ethical implications, in the hymn. It is a *Hymn for Us...* and that will be the point of the next message.

But first, before getting to the *ethics*, we will focus on some of the theological truths portrayed here... the **Christology** in the Hymn.

So... is it a **Hymn**, and if it is, so what?

There are libraries full of volumes written on this short passage, more than most other passages of Scripture, by far. One of the questions debated by scholars is: "Is this a hymn?" Most say that it is, others say it is not (including my favorite New Testament commentator, [Dr. Gordon Fee](#)... although even he seems to *hedge his bets*, using words like *probably* not a hymn).



With all due respect to Dr. Fee, I think it is best to consider this a hymn. Most Bibles acknowledge that these verses are set in a poetic form even by the way the type is set. I see a hymn in three verses:

1. Jesus, as God, emptying Himself (6,7)
2. Jesus, as a human, humbling Himself (8)
3. Jesus, eternally exalted (9-11)

The passage does what hymns are supposed to do, that in **artistic form**, the words **teach us about God** and **call us to praise Him**.

That *artistic form* is present (although not perfect) in the *poetic* or *lyrical* nature of the text. It is also present in some of the specific **words** chosen. This is the sort of thing debated by scholars who are working with the text in the original Greek language. We may not see it in our English translations (or whatever translation you may be using since English isn't the first language for many here today).

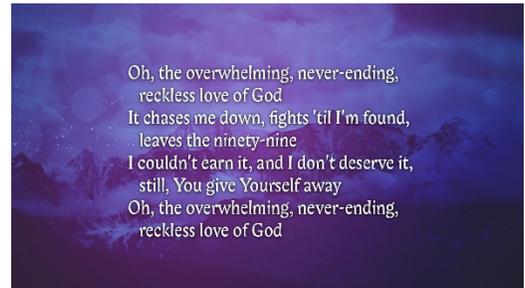
One of the reasons that this text is the focus of so much academic writing is that there are some *strange* words in here, words that aren't used like this anywhere else in the Bible, words that aren't usually used to describe theological things and such.

Without getting too far off into the *academic weeds* here, that *artistic license* found in the words is evidence that this passage is an artistic expression, hymn lyrics or poetry.

We do that with words we sing today; we stretch words with *artistic license* to grab attention and get us to think.

For example, we have been singing a song that is new to us here at Northshore for the past several weeks. We did not sing it today, but we did sing it Friday evening, for those that enjoyed the team from Northwest University for the hour of worship.

The song is titled *Reckless Love*. I've heard from some of you that it is now among one of your **favorites...** while others really **don't care much for it at all**. For those who don't like the song, it seems to be all about that word **reckless**. Some folks are adamantly opposed to using a word like **reckless** applied to God.



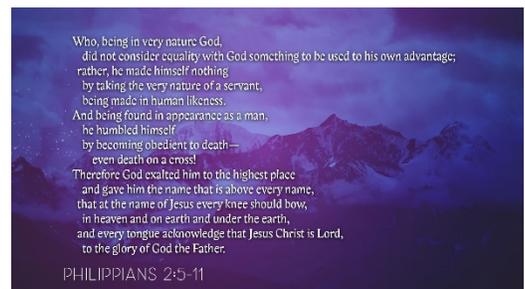
We saw it coming. Cameron talked to me about the song before we introduced it, anticipating that it might cause some concern, noticing that others had voiced their concern since the song was introduced (you can look it up online; the song is popular and you can find a number of articles and blog posts and such debating that word *reckless*).

I didn't know the song when Cameron first mentioned it, so I took a look. I didn't like it either, at first... but then I carefully considered all of the words (I couldn't earn it, I don't deserve it... you leave the 99). I saw that the song wasn't accusing God of being reckless (which would be a mistake); the song was displaying that when we understand the extent and force behind God's love for us, then in our small and broken ways of seeing things, it might seem reckless to us.

In this case, the word *reckless* does what **art** ought to do. It shakes us up, causes us to think and see and consider things differently... and that new perspective results in broader and deeper understanding and appreciation.

There are words like that in this hymn passage, especially in the original language. Thus, more evidence that this should be understood as a hymn.

That leads us to another consideration debated by scholars. If it is a hymn, how did it find itself in Holy Scripture, this text in our Bibles?



There are three basic theories here:

1. Paul wrote it, in hymn form, in the text of the original letter. Essentially, Paul wrote a song or poem in the middle of his letter.
2. Paul wrote it, in hymn form, sometime earlier, perhaps while planting the Church in Philippi or before so they would have recognized the text.
3. Somebody else wrote the hymn and Paul put it in because it fit the point.

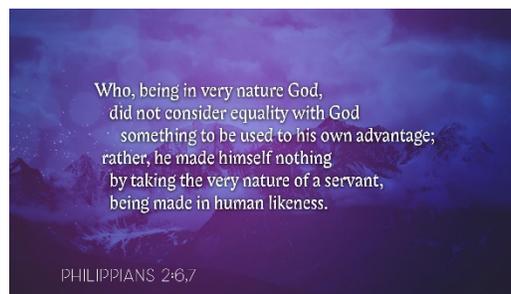
Nobody knows for sure. This is a 2,000 year old text and we don't have the original letter, let alone the notes and such that Paul might have had. It isn't like writing today. You can go online and find my manuscript (the one I'm using right now) and you'll find footnotes and hyperlinks and such. We don't have that background material for Paul's work.

With that said, I *hope* that it is the third option (there is a good argument for that)... that this is a hymn that someone else wrote, that Paul referenced, that would have been familiar to the Christians in Philippi.

We understand our Bible's to be the Word of God, but not in the sense that God penned the words without human agency. It was not as if Paul sat quietly at his desk in prison, put himself in some sort of trance, and the words magically appeared on the scroll. No, God used Paul's circumstances and history and sensibilities and intellect. Furthermore, God uses community. The Church is the Body of Christ, many members working together. It is a beautiful picture of God's work to think that His Word, in this case, comes to us through many contributors, just as the whole of His Word comes to us through many contributors.

So, to the text...

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be
used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness. ²

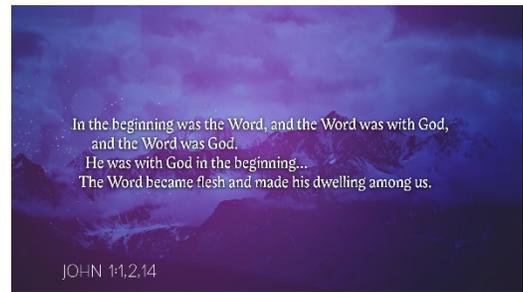


The first statement about Jesus may be the most profound Christological statement: ***being in very nature God.***

² *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:6–7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

It resonates with how the Gospel of John begins:

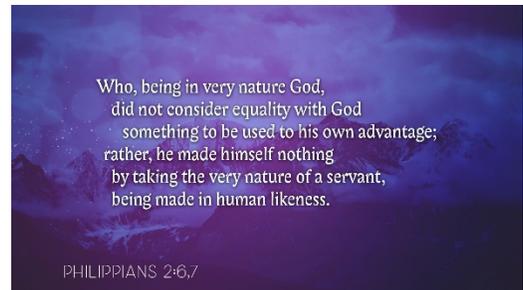
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.² He was with God in the beginning...
¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.³



Jesus is God, was God, has always been God,
and will always be God... in very nature. He was not created, but has always been.
Jesus is 100% God.

Yet...

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his
own advantage⁴



For those keeping score, this is where one of those really *weird* words shows up. Many translations use the word “grasped” here which may get a bit closer to the word that otherwise is translated “stolen.” How could God steal from God? Why would anyone ascribe a word like *stolen* to God (maybe because it is *art*, the same way we might use a word like *reckless*... to get us thinking).

This is how God is... that in terms of the privilege of being God, God would think of it as repugnant as *stealing* to grasp that privilege for His own advantage.

This is so *upside down* to our usual way of thinking. We generally think that power is to be used. That is the way we almost always depict gods, as those who use their power to build and protect their power. But this is not how our God is. It is an idea *so upside down* that it would take extraordinary measures for us to even get a glimpse of how God is in these matters, so...

rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.⁵

To show us how God is, He did not fill Himself with power... but rather emptied Himself, making “himself nothing... being made in human likeness.”

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 1:1–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

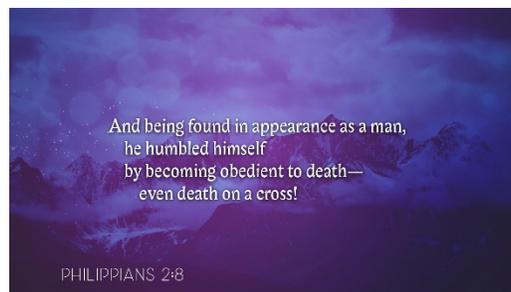
That is the Christmas story, right? God in the most *powerless* circumstances, a baby in a borrowed manger. A baby in perilous danger from a tyrant, out for His life. A baby in a family who would be forced from their homeland, immigrants needing asylum to preserve the life of this powerless child.

Jesus is God (100%) and took on “the very nature of a servant;” Jesus was 100% human as well.

That may seem a bit confusing, but it is the only way all of this makes any sense. It cannot be that Jesus is anything less than 100% God, or 100% percent human. To be anything less than 100% means that He is not God at all. Likewise, being anything less than 100% means that He is not truly human either.

Jesus, as God, emptied Himself.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross! ⁶



Jesus, as a human, humbled Himself.

He humbled himself facing one of the things that most definitely makes humans **human**: death. These bodies die. And God dying is certainly controversial... the omnipotent one suffering ultimate weakness.

But the *method* of death, was **scandalous** (possibly even reckless): death on a cross. It *was* brutally excruciating. But more than that it was humiliating. The cross was reserved for the *scum of the earth*. Rome did not crucify its own citizens; the cross was for those with no rights. The cross was reserved to humiliate the lowest of the low... the position that God willing took to show the extent of His love.

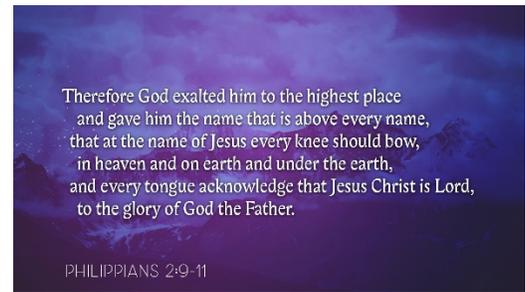
Jesus, as God, emptied Himself.

Jesus, as God, humbled Himself, and

Jesus, is eternally exalted as God.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 2:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. ⁷



The name that is above every name...

In the Old Testament, there were many names for God, but the name above every name was a name too awesome and holy to be uttered in those days: *Yahweh*. In our English Bibles it is usually translated **LORD** (all caps). In response to what Jesus, God the Son, accomplished, that name above every name is Jesus, now and forever... a holy and awesome name, for sure, but a name to be shouted and confessed by all.

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow⁸

We would be wrong if this is perceived as a picture of subjugation. This is not a matter of bowing under command or tyranny. If anyone reads this as evidence that God is some glory-hungry immortal that delights in being venerated, then we miss the point of the passage.

What is it that you find beautiful, really awesomely beautiful? What causes you to pause and enjoy the beauty? Mountains fall in that category for me. I am awestruck by mountains (there are no mountains in Chicago; I'm glad I live here now). Imagine if I found myself enjoying the majestic beauty of a mountain and then suddenly flipped to despise the mountain because I found it beautiful, as if I said, "Hey Mountain! Who do you think you are, causing me to be captivated by your beauty?"

Whatever we find awesome and beautiful, mountains or whatever else it might be... *that* awesome beauty is but a **glimpse** of the beauty of Our Savior.

and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. ⁹

⁷ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:9–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 2:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In these days, in these lives, we are called to believe. We are called to ***faith***, believing what we cannot fully see. That faith in Jesus is all we can do to be saved; today is a day to believe. But there will be a day when **all** will **see**, not *faith* or *belief*, but **sight**. For those who believe, that day will be a wonderful day, acknowledging, confessing, that Jesus Christ is Lord, glory to God... glory to God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son!

When it comes to the end of a message like this on a Sunday, there are all sorts of ways to *wrap it up*. Sometimes there is a call to pray, and some might even come and kneel at these altars. Sometimes the implied call is to simply go and think about it, or go and do it. We have even, from time to time, had a time for discussion, questions and answers.

Today I want to end the way that the text seems to lead us. In our text, we see that **theology leads to doxology**, that a broader and deeper understanding of Jesus leads us to praising Him.

Solid theology leads to heartfelt doxology.

So today I would like to close with doxology... singing, bowing our hearts and heads and even knees to Jesus... acknowledging, confessing, and even shouting that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Perhaps today is a **first** step of faith, or a first step of faith after a long time. Believe today as we sing.

Perhaps there is something heavy on your mind or heart today, confess again today that Jesus Christ is Lord of All... He is Lord of everything, including whatever might loom large in your life today.

In sight of that great day in eternity, let's acknowledge, again, that Jesus is Lord of all... that His name is above every name.

