

1-11-09

“The God of the Crib and the God of the Cross” (Phil. 2:5-11)

Sermon Follow-up

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I have preached on this passage several times, and my basic understanding of the text has not changed. However, in this latest sermon, I was greatly helped by the teaching of Darrel Johnson. Of course, N. T. Wright and Rich Bauckham are always helpful on this pericope as well.

Have you ever had a preconceived notion of someone you had not met in person, and then when you finally did meet them face-to-face, found them to be very different? In a way, that’s what Paul is doing here. Phil. 2:5-11 is like meeting God again for the first time. God is not exactly as we might have imagined. In particular, Paul singles out humility as his leading attribute. A humble God! Who would have thought! People today either think of God as giant Santa Claus (that’s another sermon!) or an oversized Oriental despot. Paul shows something else: An omnipotent Lord who humbles himself in sacrificial love.

It seems like a contradiction, but Paul shows us it is not. The life of Jesus is just a revelation of what the Triune God has always been like, from all eternity. Being God means being a servant. Paul unpacks Godhood in terms of acting as a slave. In choosing to become one of us and live the life of a slave, Jesus does not give up his Godness, but expresses it! He is not stripping off divinity, but showing what divinity means, as his life takes the shape of self-giving love. If our thinking is trained by the gospel, we will come to see how fitting and appropriate this is.

If we really think that Jesus’ way of life is incongruous, we still do not understand who God is. The incarnation does not hide God in the form of a slave; it reveals God’s very mind and heart! God finds his glory in giving himself to us and for us. He puts himself at our disposal because....well, that’s just the kind of God he is!

The basic interpretive crux in Phil. 2:5-11 is this found in v. 6: ‘He did not consider it *robbery* to be equal with God.’ There is a lot of technical, linguistic stuff here that I will pass over. Oversimplified, the issue looks like this: What is

the equality with God here? And what does the word 'robbery' mean? The language could be translated in such a way as to give two possible results:

[a] He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (but rather waited patiently for God to exalt him to this status);

OR

[b] He did not consider equality with God (which he already possessed) something to be exploited for his own advantage (but rather used for the good of others)

Which reading is right? Obviously, either is possible grammatically, which means we should turn to theological, typological, and literary considerations. But both readings are equally possible theologically as well.

I think this is one of those cases where perhaps there is a built-in ambiguity. We are, after all, dealing with theology in poetic/hymnic form. How does each reading work?

On the first reading, the point is that Jesus did not grasp glory, and the contrast is with the first Adam. While in a certain sense, Jesus had equality with God, in another sense he did not. He did not yet have the "name above every name" *as a man*. Whereas Adam ate the forbidden tree, thereby seizing equality with God and falling for the serpent's lie "you shall be like God" (Gen. 3), Jesus refused to grasp after this God-likeness. Instead, he did what Adam should have done, namely, wait patiently for God to exalt him in due time. Consider an illustration: Suppose someone is promised the throne. He knows that in due time he will be exalted to the highest position. But after a while, he gets tired of waiting around, so he murders the king and seizes the throne for himself ahead of time. He has grasped for something promised to him, rather than waiting for it to be bestowed. Adam did that, but the second Adam did not. The first Adam sought to seize what he had no right to, while the second Adam gave up what he had a right to in order to receive exaltation as a gift from his Father. Jesus is Adam done right. He fulfills the task and vocation originally assigned to Adam.

On the second reading, the point is that Jesus already had equality with God as the one who was in the form of God, as well as in the form of man. But this reading stresses that he did not use that God-ness for his own advantage. Instead, he considered others better than himself and put their interests ahead of

his own (Phil. 2:1-4), using his resources to love and serve. Take an illustration: Suppose the son of a king uses his royalty to his own advantage. He bends the rules for himself and gets away with whatever he can because, after all, no one has the guts to bring the king's son to justice. He uses the royal coffer not to help the needy but to throw parties for himself and his friends. This is a prince who is using his royalty – his prince-ness – to his own advantage. He makes his princely status serve his own benefit and comfort. Jesus, of course, is the mirror image of all that.

Again, I do not know that there is any clear cut way to decide between the two readings. They both make sense, fit the grammar, satisfy the broader context of the passage, etc. Is Paul developing an Adamic theme? Or giving us insight into the eternal life of God? Either one works. The first reading presupposes the incarnation and shows how God acted when he came in human form. The second reading can be pressed back into the pre-incarnate “consideration” that the eternal Son of God made in becoming man (with the resulting ‘parabola’ shape of the narrative: stepping down from glory into human history as a slave → dying on the cross → returning to a position of glory, now as the God-man). There is nothing humiliating in becoming man, per se, since man is the image and glory of God. But Jesus chose to come in the most humiliating of circumstances, conceived in the womb of an unwed mother, born into a poverty, in “low condition” as WSC 28 puts it, etc. Jesus did not adopt the mindset of a servant at age 20 or 30, but from the very moment of conception in Mary's womb. The ‘consideration’ to act as a servant certainly applies to his life as the God-man, but it also applies to his pre-incarnate decision to enter human history in a particular way and for a particular purpose.

The way this interpretive dilemma is answered has a bearing on how we understand the structure of the hymn. Most commentators agree that there are three basic movements. The sections are not neat and tidy because certain phrases could belong with more than one section, but roughly, it looks like this:

v. 6-7 – Jesus' incarnation, focused on his posture as the God-man

v. 7-8 – His self-giving death

v. 9-11 – his glorious exaltation by the Father as God-man

Jesus' self-giving love will compel every knee to bow. Paul's song resonates with echoes of Isa. 40-55, but especially here, we find that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isa. 45. Isa. 45 is a robust affirmation of the Lord's uniqueness and Israel's monotheism. And yet Paul obviously suggests a plurality of divine persons

within this monotheist framework: the divine Father exalts the divine Son; the glory that cannot be shared with another is shared with Jesus; etc. Trinitarian theology was not an invention of the later “church fathers” but a direct result of giving the NT a close reading.

N. T. Wright’s essay on this text in his book, *The Climax of the Covenant*, is simply marvelous. Wright does a nice job unpacking Adam and Servant of the Lord themes, and integrating both of these strands into a holistic Christology. Wright’s burden is to show that Jesus, as Adam and as Israel, has performed the obedience God called for from these figures. Jesus has accomplished the task Adam and Israel were marked out for but failed to fulfill. Wright gives a meticulous survey of the various options for interpreting the phrase “he did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” Listen to Wright’s take:

Nothing described by either “to be equal with God” or “in the form of God” is given up. Rather, it is reinterpreted, understood in a manner in striking contrast to what one might have expected. Over against the standard picture of oriental despots, who understood their position as something to be used for their own advantage, Jesus understood his position to *mean* self-negation, the vocation described in vv.7-8...divine equality does not mean getting but giving...The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God. Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying) image, Calvary reveals the truth about what it means to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present Christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God...

The thrust of the passage in itself is that the one who, before becoming human, possessed divine equality did not regard that status something to take advantage of, something to exploit, but instead interpreted it as a vocation to obedient humiliation and death; and that God the Father acknowledged the truth of this interpretation by exalting him to share his own divine glory. In its wider context, this means the passage is well able to fulfill the role which, *prima facie*, it has in Paul’s developing argument,

namely, that of the example which Christians are to imitate. God acknowledged Christ's self-emptying as the true expression of divine equality; he will acknowledge Christian self-abnegation in the same way. (p. 83f, 97; cf. p. 89f)

In other words, Jesus does not rule over his people as a Gentile lord (cf. Lk. 22). He came to serve and give his life for his people. He did not come to take, to clutch to his own rights, to serve himself. In fact, had that been his attitude, he would not have come at all. The same attitude displayed in the incarnate life of our Lord was the driving force behind his decision to become incarnate in the first place.

How can these mysteries even be expressed? Words fail us! It is almost impossible to capture in words the glory of what Jesus Christ has done. How does one understand (much less explain) divinity that is defined by the incarnation and cross?

How does the equation

God = self-giving love
make sense?

Yet it does. For Paul, nothing is more sensible.

It is too tempting for us to draw up an understanding of God that leaves Jesus out. Paul is showing us that God is *defined* by Jesus. God has revealed himself *as he really is* in the person of Christ (cf. Jn. 1:1-14). Jesus proved he knew what it means to be the Lord by living as a bondservant. He is worthy of the family name YHWH.

The problem is that if our definition of God does not start with Jesus, we can never really find a way to fit Jesus in. But our Christology and our theology proper should not be at odds with one another. God has manifested to us most fully in the person of Jesus. This is why Jesus said things like "I only do what I see my Father doing," "I came to do my father's will," "I learned all from my father," etc. (cf. John's gospel, where these inter-Trinitarian statements are legion).

But we cannot simply wrestle with the radical theological implications of Paul's Christ-hymn. As Wright shows, we also have to drink in the ethical implications for our lives. We must pursue the mind of Christ every day. If being God means

self-giveness, surely self-giveness is at the heart of what it means to be human as well! In 2:1-4, Paul is challenging the church to prove that she is in Christ and has the Spirit by practicing the way of self-abnegation. Wright shows that Paul himself demonstrated this self-giving form of life (see *Climax*, 88f). Paul voluntarily emptied himself of all his Jewish glory and privilege:

[I]n 3:4ff, Paul is first outlining the privileged status he enjoyed (and continued in some senses to enjoy) as a member of Israel, the people of God, and then showing that, because of Christ, this membership had to be regarded as something not to be taken advantage of. He did not give up his membership; he understood it in a new way, avoiding all possibility of taking advantage of it for self-aggrandizement. This clearly fits into the context of 3:2-3, in which Paul transfers attributes of Israel to the church in Christ. Belonging to God's people did not, he now realized, mean a privileged status, outward symbols of superiority, an elevated moral stature in the world. It meant dying and rising with the Messiah. In hoping for vindication at the resurrection (3:11) Paul is claiming that the thing which, for him as an erstwhile Pharisee, had always been the hope of god's people, was now to be his because, and only because, he was 'in Christ.' So in 2:5-11, as himself the true Jew, had led the way for this reinterpretation of what it means to be the people of God.

When we "live to give" as Jesus did, as Paul did after him, God promises to exalt us and vindicate us.

The two Adam theme may also be tied in to the two trees in the garden of Eden. In Gen. 2, we find God placed a Tree of Life and a tree of Death. The Tree of Life was there for the taking. It was a gift, a sign that life itself comes from God. The Tree of Death (called also the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; note how that phrase "judging good and evil" is used elsewhere in Scripture for kingly rule, e.g., 1 Ki. 3) would only be given to Adam after a period of time, when he had matured and proved his faithfulness. Eating the Tree of Death would be Adam's rite of passage to a higher and more glorious eschatological state – 'like God' in the fullest possible sense for a man.

There are a number of connections we can draw here. The Tree of Life is the priestly tree, a tree of gratitude. The Tree of Death is the kingly tree, a tree of sacrifice. Jesus' ministry moves through these two phases: first he is Tree of Life,

giving life to all around him, but then he dies on the cross (the Tree of Death), entering into kingly glory and lordship.

As we know, Adam chose to by-pass the freely given tree, the Tree of life, going straight for the straight for the Tree of Death. "The rest is history..." as the saying goes. Adam seized something he was not ready for. The kingly office crushed him. He was not yet mature enough to determine good and evil, and in taking what was not his, he lost those things that already were his.

This Adamic background is one of several keys to the text as a whole. If we have in mind the two trees, the self-exaltation of Adam in Gen. 3, and the calling of Jesus to be a new Adam, then all the pieces of the puzzle begin to snap together.

Wright summarizes the Christology of the passage (*Climax*, p. 91ff): "The contrast between Adam and Christ works perfectly...: Adam, in arrogance, thought to become like God; Christ, in humility, became human." From there, Wright goes on to show that Paul has redrawn his definition of God, revising his Jewish monotheism, to include Jesus within the name "Lord." Of course, this is the beginnings of Trinitarian theology (p. 94ff). But in a race to prove Jesus' deity from this text, we should not overlook what it says about his humanity. Jesus is certainly more than a man – but not less! He is humanity done right. In his self-denying, self-giving pattern of life, he not only reveals True God, he also reveals True Man. This model of life is what it means to be "very God of very God" as well as what it means to be "made man."

If we take seriously the two-Adam substructure in Phil. 2:5-11, there are huge ethical implications here. For example: Do you live like someone joined to the first Adam or the second Adam? Does your life reflect the grasping, selfish Man or the self-giving, self-denying God-man? We think, "If I don't look out for myself, who will?" It is precisely here that love becomes a test of faith. Do we trust God to exalt us as we humble ourselves? Or do we insist on exalting ourselves because we do not think we can count on God to do it? Can we learn to live like God, to live like a true human, and give glory to others, rather than take it for ourselves?

Toby Sumpter has some very good points along the same lines as above (<http://havingtwolegs.blogspot.com/2008/12/christ-is-born-glorify-him.html>):

And this gets back to our prior point. We tend to contrast the God who creates, the God who rules, the God who inhabits eternity with the God who is conceived, the God who is born, the God who dies. We are Christians, and we believe the Bible and so we don't question these things. But we tend to contrast them nevertheless. We talk about God as God and then we talk about the incarnation as though it were something somewhat different. It's something amazing and glorious, but we tend to describe the incarnation as though it doesn't ordinarily fit with the idea of God. We have a notion of God, an idea of deity that pushes the idea of suffering and humility and incarnation to the far side of God-ness. To be God, we think, is to inhabit eternity, is to be a Spirit, is to be infinite, is to be unchangeable, is to be something and someone quite different than our human experience. And again, there is some truth there.

But these Scriptures push against this conception of God. John says that when Jesus was born we finally saw God for who he really is. We finally saw the glory of the Father full of grace and truth when Mary brought forth her Son and laid him in the manger. And when the child grew in wisdom and stature and in grace before God and men, we finally saw what God is like. And when that same carpenter's Son was mocked and spat upon and despised and afflicted and finally crucified, Hebrews says that we saw the brightness of His glory; the express image of His person was revealed.

Similarly, in John's first epistle, he says that the eternal life of the Father was manifested, revealed, seen, heard, looked upon, and handled. Whatever our conception of God, it must include this. When we ask 'what is God?' the first thing the New Testament writers would point to is the person of Jesus. Who is God? God is the one who revealed himself in Jesus. God is the one who was born of Mary. God is the one who lived as a man, who taught, who healed, who ate and drank with sinners, who was ultimately betrayed and crucified and rose again and ascended into heaven. That is our God. God is not first of all something else. God is not first of all infinite and eternal and unchangeable in a way that is at odds with the incarnation. Rather, the incarnation is the veil finally being torn away. If the ancients thought of God as someone distant and other and infinite and unchangeable they had some excuse for thinking that, although the Jews had plenty of hints that this was not the case. But when Jesus was born, when the incarnation occurred all of those preconceived notions were blown apart.

The incarnation is not something that we must try to fit into our doctrine of God. Rather, the incarnation is the beginning of our doctrine of God. It is the revelation of the glory of Lord, the brightness of His glory, the express image of his person. The incarnation is not merely consistent with the person and character of God; the incarnation shows us the kind of God we actually serve. The incarnation shows us not an aberration from the way God usually is; rather, the incarnation shows us what God is actually like. God is the God who both creates and sustains the worlds and gives himself for sinners. God is the God who both inhabits eternity and freely enters time and space and identifies with his people. God is the one who is both unchangeable, whose Word stands forever and cannot be moved, and He is at the same time always and unalterably free to experience growth and sorrow and love and joy. The God who rules heaven and earth is also the God who is born a child in Bethlehem.

And, as the hymn declares, this really is tidings of comfort and joy. The New Testament has a great deal to say about glory, and as we look at those passages we notice over and over again the association of glory with God's people. We've already pointed out that Jesus is the revelation of God's glory, but the New Testament writers don't stop there. Paul says that in the New Covenant we have been given the Spirit, and as we read the Scriptures and hear the gospel proclaimed, we all with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:17-18). He says that we glory in tribulations (Rom. 5:3), and while our outward man is perishing and we experience afflictions, these are working in us an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:16-17). Paul's own tribulations are the glory of the Ephesians (Eph. 2:13). He says that the Thessalonians have suffered like Christ and therefore they are his glory and joy (1 Thess. 2:14-15, 19-20). Peter, likewise says, 'If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.' (1 Pet. 4:13). A little later he says that he is a "witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed." (1 Pet. 5:1).

The reason it is great comfort and joy to know the God who is both sovereign and humble, the God who is both infinite and a child, who is both eternal and born of a woman, is that this same God promises to bestow this glory on us. Partaking of the glory of God, sharing in that glory, means living in this same reality, living as weak and broken people

and yet strong and exalted, seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We live as those who have been given eternal life and yet have been born, and who will all die. We have been united to the changeless one, the one who will never leave us or forsake us, and yet we grow up, and live, and change, and die and rise again.

In Ephesians Paul prays that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, that they might know what are the riches of his glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 2:18). What the Ephesians need, and what we so often need is not for God to show us his glory. That has been revealed to us in Jesus. What we really need is for our eyes to be opened to see the glory right in front of us. We see a child in a manger, and say God has in some way laid his glory aside. But God says, 'no, no, that is my glory, my wisdom, my infinity, my changelessness, my holiness, my justice, my goodness, my glory. God in the manger is the glory of God revealed. And if God in a manger is the glory of God revealed, then God on the cross is the Lord of Glory (1 Cor. 2:8). The glory of God is joy in suffering, peace in upheaval, mercy in justice, exaltation in humility, losing our lives to find them. If the glory of God is revealed in an infant lying in a manger, then why can't the glory of God be revealed in your family? Why can't the glory of God be manifest in your fellowship at a table, in your exchanging peace and joy and mercy with one another? Why can't the glory of God be revealed in the midst of brokenness and confusion? Why can't the wisdom and power of God be evident in weakness? The answer is that it can be and that it is. And so here we are assembled to proclaim that glory, the glory of the Lord that has been revealed to us and is being revealed in us through the working of the Spirit. Christ is born! Glorify Him! The glory of the Lord has been revealed. The veil is torn away. See the glory.

As I mentioned in the sermon, Paul moves on from the hymn in Phil. 2:5-11 to provide concrete models of "having the mind of Christ." Timothy and Epaphroditas are praised as conforming their lives to the pattern of Christ in 2:19-30. They have both done the "Jesus thing." Paul does his own "Jesus thing" in Phil. 3. In chapter 3, we see Paul considering his Jewish status and privileges as dung. He makes himself poor, suffering for the sake of the gospel, in order to enrich others. We see an echo of the same thing in what was quite possibly Paul's

last epistle, 2 Timothy. In 2 Timothy 5:6, Paul speaks of himself as a “drink offering” that is “being poured out.”

This kind of Jesus-like humility and service is the key to joy and unity, two major themes in Philippians. If we greedily clutch after what we do not have, or selfishly exploit what we already possess, we will be miserable and divided from one another.

The phrase “made himself of no reputation” is badly translated. It really should read, “he emptied himself,” and it serves as an echo of Isa. 52-53, where the Suffering Servant is said to pour out his life. The emptying in view is ethical, not ontological. Jesus did not empty himself the way we empty a cup of water, but rather, he emptied himself the way a husband pours himself out for his wife, or the way a mom empties herself for her children. Husbandness and motherness are not lost in the acts of self-giving/self-emptying. Rather, these acts *define* husbandness and motherness. To be a husband is, by biblical definition, to give oneself up for one’s wife. So it is with Jesus: as the one who is in the form of both God and man, he gives himself up for his bride.

This is why the hymn of 2:5-11 is not only a retelling of the gospel narrative, but also grounding for the ethical imperatives that surround it (especially in 2:1-4). The hymn fuses the objective and subjective, the legal and the transformative, aspects of the Christian gospel. Christ is both the one who accomplished our salvation in his obedience unto death, as well as the mold into which we should pour our lives.

On Sunday, I read a short piece from Archbishop Rowan Williams’s Christmas sermon. I want to give that quotation in its wider context because Williams make a profoundly pro-life, pro-children point:

Human beings, left to themselves, have imagined God in all sorts of shapes; but – although there were one or two instances, in Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt, of gods being pictured as boys – it took Christianity to introduce the world to the idea of God in the form of a baby: in the form of complete dependence and fragility, without power or control. If you stop to think about it, it is still shocking. And it is also deeply challenging.

God chose to show himself to us in a complete human life, telling us that every stage in human existence, from conception to maturity and even death, was in principle capable of telling us something about God. Although what we learn from Jesus Christ and what his life makes possible is unique, that life still means that we look differently at every other life. There is something in us that is capable of communicating what God has to say – the image of God in each of us, which is expressed in its perfection only in Jesus.

Hence the reverence which as Christians we ought to show to human beings in every condition, at every stage of existence. This is why we cannot regard unborn children as less than members of the human family, why those with disabilities or deprivations have no less claim upon us than anyone else, why we try to make loving sense of human life even when it is near its end and we can hardly see any signs left of freedom or thought.

Jeff Myers has put some very helpful thoughts on his blog related to this discussion (<http://jeffreymeyers.blogspot.com/>). Here are some excerpts:

When I studied geology at Mizzou, we could learn just a little about the subsurface geological phenomenon without physically examining the rocks themselves. But what we were really looking for was an *outcropping* of rock that would reveal to us what was below. The birth and cross of Jesus, if you will, are two major outcroppings of God, who remains largely invisible to us, even though he has in some sense made himself known in creation. In Jesus the invisible God is seen.

Of course, Jesus' entire life was the manifestation of the glory of God, according to the first chapter of John: Jesus is the Word of God, the true and original Image of the Father, the very form of God, and the true and final revelation or manifestation of God by which all of our conceptions of God are to be measured.

I am convinced that every year it is supremely beneficial for Christians to be brought again to the manger and to the foot of the cross and forced to look—Behold, this is your God! No other. What Jesus is, God is. What

Jesus does, God does. Here is the meaning of the word "god."

All of the birth narratives rub out noses in this essential fact: this baby is your God. Worship him. This infant is nothing less than "God with us" — Emmanuel. "God among us." Worship him...

We behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God is most fully God when he is taking on human flesh in order to serve us.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-- the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1:1-2).

If you insist on learning the meaning of the word "god" from somewhere other than Jesus himself, then your god is a false one. This has always been the temptation for the church. To make over God according to how we think he ought to be.

This is the error of every major heresy in the early church. Most of the heretics meant well. They were concerned to guard a pure conception of God and his nature. This is well illustrated with the arch heretic Arius. The reason why Arius would not say that Jesus was fully God was that he consumed with protecting God's purity from any contact with the material world. He was defending the immutability and impassability of God, as he understood it.

Jesus just had to be something less than fully God! Why? Well, it's not too difficult. He is born an infant! He is in full contact with flesh and material existence. He suffers and dies on a cross. God cannot, God must not be envisioned as submitting to these indignities. God is higher and holier and loftier and therefore above all of this muck.

The Church, by God's grace, did not give into these Greek conceptions of God as surgically removed from his creation. For all of the possible pitfalls, the church confessed what the Scriptures said: Jesus was God. Jesus was born. Mary was the Mother of God (theotokos, literally: "God bearer"), not just the mother of a man. God suffered and died on the cross for us, not merely a man. We cannot explain this. It makes us wince and

causes us great intellectual angst, but it is what the Scriptures teach. Here we stand....

But his divine nature and character are unveiled primarily in his humble service to us in his birth, life, suffering, and death. Think of Phil. 2:5-11: "because he existed in the form of God . . . he humbled himself."

The point is that what makes, what proves, if you will, that Jesus is God, is not his works of power and might, but his humble self-sacrifice. His self-effacing love and service for humanity. This is who God is.

The Good News is not that God made some external determination to forgive man, exercised the his divine will, waved a disinterested wand and sprinkled some salvation dust across the human race. What he did was penetrate the very depths of humanity's being and live, to restore the distorted and corrupt condition of man's actual human existence. Genuinely united himself to human, creaturely existence.

God himself bore our infirmities and sins and the whole inheritance of judgment that lay against us--God himself, not merely in some extrinsic, detached wa--but he personally bore all this.

The angels knew where to direct the shepherds. The apostles know where to guide the world to find life—to the heard, seen, touched Word of Life! To Jesus. Listen to the angel when he says, "You shall find him. . ." Where? The angel did not say, you should find him in heaven! The angel did not say you shall find him within you. The angel did not say, you shall find him after much fasting and prayer so that you can transcend the distance between God and man. The angel did not say, you shall find him if you do great works of mercy and love. The angel did not say you shall find him when you philosophically abstract from him all created attributes. The angel said, "Unto you a Savior is born, he is Messiah Yahweh. You shall find him in Bethlehem, lying in a manger."

Listen to the beloved Apostle John. "We proclaim to you the Word of Life" What word of life? John does not say you will discover it within you. He does not give a list of the attributes of divinity and ask you to hold all of these together in order to get your mind around God. He does not say, "You must understand now that God is quite spiritual and cannot have any contact with physical matter." He does not attempt to take us down

the path of negation so that we can rise about earthly, material things in order to make mental, purely internal contact with divinity.

No. He links what seems impossible to bring together: "That which was from the beginning" and "what we have seen, heard, and our hands have handled." This is the Word of Life. This is the one "who was with the Father" (v. 2c) and has now appeared.

This little baby is your Creator and Savior. This is the glad tidings to be shouted on the mountain top, according to the prophet Isaiah: "O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" (Isa 40:9)...

Don't be distracted by the majesty and incomprehensible otherness of God. Consider the pattern of God's work for us in Christ. Consider what this pattern reveals about who God is. Come and watch and listen at the manger. Consider the cross.

In every other way God is terrible and awesome, a consuming fire. Only in the flesh of Christ do we find a merciful God. Only in Jesus Christ do we find the Word of Life, communion with the Father, eternal joy.

Two movies that capture well the "Lord as Servant" theme are Bruce Almighty and Evan Almighty. These are basically Christian movies, and understood as such, they make profound theological statements. Obviously, they require us to bracket out certain beliefs and use our imagination. But, taking that into account, they are worth watching for mature viewers (though Evan Almighty seems pretty safe for kids). They certainly could not have been made by those whose conception of God was Islamic or pagan.

In brief, Bruce Almighty, shows that God uses his power to serve. We must learn to do the same. The whole plot makes this point. To use power for selfish ends is incredibly destructive for individuals and society as a whole.

Evan Almighty works a bit differently, but there is one scene that really makes our point well. Evan's wife has left him (because she thinks he's crazy!), and she is at a restaurant. The God-figure (Morgan Freeman) comes up to her and they

have a conversation. As he leaves, he says, "I gotta go. Lots of people to serve." The picture of God waiting on tables is a powerful portrayal of his humility.

There is really no end to the discussion of a passage like this. Phil. 2:5-11 is perhaps the most commented-on text in all of Scripture. It is perhaps the best summary of the gospel in its theological content and ethical implications in all of the NT.