

Power and Weakness 2

Philippians 2:1-11

To many, Christmas has become a feast to consumerism. Does the birth of Christ 2000 years ago have anything to say to us?

The Spirit of Christmas

In Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew says that Christmas is a time of year when people look with generosity on others – and for that reason it is a good thing. When he says that he echoes Paul in Philippians 2. Paul says we should be marked by common-mindedness and an attitude that puts others first, and this should mark us all year round, not just at Christmas.

Instinctively we like the sound of this – until it hits our self-centredness. We don't like being treated as a servant – and that shows how much of a servant heart we really have. So what can help us live as Paul calls us to live – and deal with the problem of our self-centredness?

The Example of Christ

The writer to the Hebrews says that the fact Christ became a man means that he can sympathise with us – he can comfort us in all our struggles. But Paul says it is also Christ becoming human that can help us in our struggle with pride and self-centredness. In his birth Christ turned his back on everything we tend to value. He humbled himself and became a servant. The degree of his humbling himself is revealed in his genealogy – it is a family tree of broken people – the kind of people he came to serve. And he came to serve by going to the cross – the lowest of all places. When our mind is shaped by Christ's, when we are untied with him in faith, Paul says that we too can have an attitude of sacrificial service.

However, often we don't like the thought of losing control – we worry what a life of service will cost us. So how can we willingly submit to Christ's direction and control?

The Authority of Christ

Today, we idolise personal autonomy. We think we will only be happy if we are in charge of our lives. It is in God humbling himself, and putting himself in the power of others, that our claim of authority over our lives crumbles.

When Joseph was told what to call Jesus (a father's right), it was a call to submit. If the Lord really has been born in Bethlehem, then we also must bend the knee to him. Paul says it's not just Christ's example, but also his exaltation that has profound implications for us. He who came to the lowest place is now in the highest. When our hearts are melted by love for him we will give him that place in our lives.

And when Jesus is your Lord it means you will trust him, whatever he allows into your life - including facing social shame for him, as Joseph did. You will also obey everything he tells you to do – whether you like it or not. If that seems scary – it shouldn't – he knows much better than you what is best for your life.

In the light of his coming, in his example and exaltation, we can, and should, bow to him. And as we do that, his mind becomes ours, and we grow in our desire to live a life of loving, humble service.