

THE CHRIST HYMN

God's Word:

Philippians 2:1-11

Key Verse:

HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOURSELVES WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST
JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 2:5

Breaking It Down:

Paul wrote to the Philippian church while he was chained in a prison cell for the crime of preaching the Gospel. (Philippians 1:12-14) The Philippian believers heard of his hardship and sent him a generous financial gift. (Philippians 4:15-18) Paul's response is more than a simple acknowledgment of thanks; it is a delighted testimony to the joy he found in the Lord in the midst of his suffering. Paul commends the Philippian believers for their “partnership in the Gospel” (Philippians 1:5) and he encourages them to stand firm in their faith in Jesus during their own hardships. (Philippians 1:27-30)

Reflecting on the sacrificial attitude of Jesus, Paul recounts Jesus' life in a beautiful lyric poem. Because of the unique poetic structure and vocabulary of this passage (beginning in verse 6), many scholars believe Paul was likely quoting an early Christian hymn or statement of faith, possibly one that the Philippian church used in its worship as well. This “Christ Hymn” testifies to the great sacrifice Jesus made out of His own humility.



As the hymn begins, it states that Jesus existed “in the form of God”—that is, everything God was, Jesus was. Scripture directly identifies Jesus with all of the attributes of God. He is described as the Creator (Colossians 1:16), the Almighty (Philippians 3:20-21), the Judge (2 Corinthians 5:10), and the Eternal One (Colossians 1:17), among many other titles and actions that clearly belong to God alone. Jesus Himself is recorded as claiming eternal pre-existence (John 8:58), omnipresence (Matthew 18:20), the ability to forgive sins against God (Mark 2:7-10), and even the equal right to receive honor with God the Father (John 5:23).

Jesus' total equality with God, however, was not something He held onto selfishly. Rather, He willingly "emptied Himself" (Greek *kenosis*, Philippians 2:7). There is some debate among theologians about what exactly Jesus put aside from Himself, but the process was clearly one of great humility and selflessness. Neglecting the form of God and equality with God, Jesus took the form of a servant and the likeness of a human. He went from infinite power and glory to a low place in a humble society of oppressed and weak people.

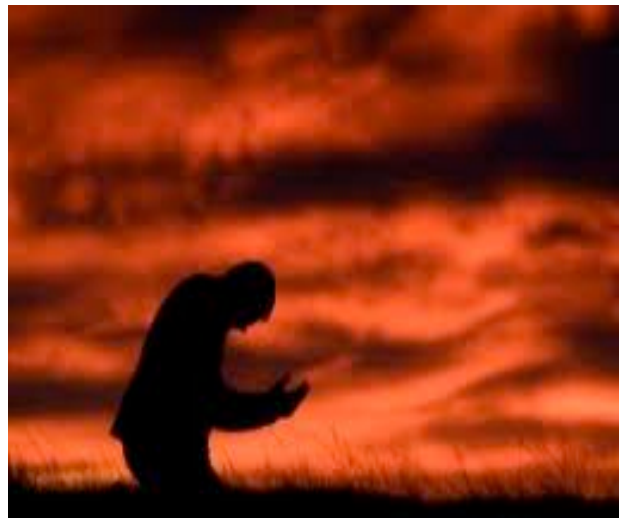
As though that was not enough humility, Jesus went even further. He was totally obedient to the will of His Father, even when it resulted in rejection, persecution, and ultimately death—an execution by torture that was reserved for murderers and rebels.

By His death, Jesus took the penalty of our sins and brought about the redemption of all who trust in Him. Jesus could have remained in heaven with all the glory, peace, and power that come with equality with God, but He chose to sacrifice all of that to live a limited, oppressed human life on earth, and then even to sacrifice His earthly life. He did that out of obedience to the Father and His love for humanity (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8). What marvelous humility and love!

Living It:

Jesus' death was not a defeat but a victory. Because of Jesus' sacrificial life and love, God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to the highest place of honor in the universe (verse 9). The exalted name of Jesus will inspire every knee to bow and every tongue to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. Everything Jesus put aside He received back and more. God says through the prophet Isaiah that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear to God alone (Isaiah 45:23). To say this of Jesus is to say that Jesus is fully and completely equal with God.

Jesus spoke of His death with the analogy of a grain of wheat: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." (John 12:24-26, NIV)



If a grain of wheat were to jealously hold onto its identity as a single seed, nothing would ever become of it. But by falling into the ground and becoming something other than a grain, it is able to grow up into a plant that produces many more seeds that can benefit many more people. In the same way, Jesus says, hanging onto your life as your own will cause you to miss its real purpose and the benefit you could have for others. If we are serious about following Jesus, we will be as willing to sacrifice our privileges and comforts as He was.

Understanding It:

1. What character qualities does Paul exhort believers to have in themselves?
 2. What actions did the “mind of Christ” lead Christ to take?
 3. What other Scriptures can you think of that also make the point that Jesus is God?
 4. How does the description of Jesus’ character affect your view of God?
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Doing It!

Think of a person or situation in your life that gives you difficulty. Is there someone you don’t get along with? Where do you see discord, conflict, or lack of unity? With that in mind, write a personalized version of this passage of Scripture, inserting your name in place of the general statements. (Example: “Let this mind be in [your name], which was also in Christ Jesus.”) What specific changes does this suggest for your attitude or actions? Pray that Jesus will fill you with His attitude in these areas so that your life can honor and praise Him.

