

Crushing the ‘Kingdom of Me’

Humility, Part 4

Philippians 2:7b-8a

In September of 1607, Captain John Smith won the case of one of first lawsuits ever registered – in one of our country’s earliest recorded jury trials.

You may remember Captain Smith from your Western Civilization course he was among those responsible for establishing the Jamestown Colony – the first settlement of pilgrims in North America. He was also the man dramatically rescued from death by Pocahontas after Smith was captured by her father’s tribe of local Indians.

Edward Wingfield, another original member of the Jamestown colony didn’t care for John Smith and publically accused him of – quote – “begging like a rogue without license.”

John Smith responded by suing Edward for libel, convened a jury and won the verdict. In today’s economy, his settlement would be somewhere around \$10,000 dollars.

The case was an effort to defend his reputation.

Lawsuits today have come a long way, haven’t they!

In our last study, I mentioned a number of law suits that had little to do with character or reputation – they are simply the result of self-centered, self-promoting, self-defensive motives to keep from being responsible.

Like the Princeton University student who climbed up on the roof of one of the university buildings that was clearly not a place he belonged. He ended up getting shocked by some electrical equipment, turned around and sued the school – and won – evidently it was their fault, not his.

I’ve come across a number of lawsuits filed by people who didn’t end up getting what they wanted

out of life – and reacted by suing. And they don’t just take place in our country, by the way.

One of the more disheartening cases I came across recently involved a Chinese couple. The man was a successful and wealthy businessman and he married a beautiful young woman. Unbeknown to him, she had spent more than 100,000 dollars on cosmetic surgery. I saw the before and after pictures and all I can say is the results were remarkable. She didn’t even look like the same woman.

They eventually had a baby girl – and as the little girl grew she obviously looked nothing like her father and very obviously nothing like her mother. He complained that his daughter was extremely unattractive. In fact, he began to question his wife’s faithfulness to him . . . this was obviously someone else’s child.

She finally confessed that their daughter actually looked exactly like she did – before she had all the changes made to her face.

Instead of accepting her apologies for keeping that secret and even more tragically, instead of accepting his daughter, he was offended that his daughter was so unattractive – he didn’t want her – she didn’t fit with the image he wanted to have as a professional and successful businessman.

He divorced his wife and then sued her for \$100,000 and won the settlement.

So much of occupies these lawsuits are nothing more than personal rights personal image and personal vindication.

Pull back the mask and it’s really all about I, me and mine.

Several years ago, the Chicago Tribune ran an article about Kevin Baugh and his own country

which he has named, “The Republic of Molossia”. He’s had an impressive khaki uniform tailor made with gold ribbons and six big medals, along with a blue, white and green sash. And he answers to “His Excellency”. The article said, “If you’ve never heard of the Republic of Molossia, that’s because it consists of Kevin’s three-bedroom house and 1.3 acre yard outside his home in Nevada.

He does have a sense of humor about his claim, this article recorded. He claims to have a space program, but [laughingly] pointed the reporter to a plastic, model rocket; he claims to have a public railway system, but it’s only a toy train; his national sport is broomball and his navy is just an inflatable boat stored in the garage.

Even though he’s tongue in cheek about it, he is still serious about it being his kingdom.

The reporter wrote, “This 45-year old father of two is what’s called a micro-nationalist – a group of people who raise flags over their front yards and declare their property to be their own private kingdom. Kevin calls his – quote – “The kingdom of me.”ⁱ

“The Kingdom of Me”

This might be a series of exaggerated illustrations – but they reveal the potential in every human heart to stand up for their own rights . . . their own reputation . . . their own vindication . . . their own image . . . their own lives that really and truly revolve around the ‘kingdom of me.’

One of the ways our Lord enabled the early Christians – and us today – to crush the kingdom of me, mentality – was to inspire an early church hymn.

We began expounding on the lyrics last Lord’s day, found in our study through Philippians.

We’re in **chapter 2** . . . let’s return to **verse 5**.

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus.

What kind of attitude is that?

Well, what Paul does next is quote – or perhaps even compose – this hymn; we’re not really sure if he quoted it (some believe Stephen, one of the first deacons, wrote this hymn) or if Paul is composing the hymn here on the spot.

Hymn writing is a practice the church has been involved in since the beginning – writing hymns and songs and spiritual songs for the benefit of the body learning and rehearsing doctrinal and practical truths. (Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16)

You actually did that earlier this morning and didn’t realize that Gary Hallquist added an original

and final stanza to the hymn I Sing the Mighty Power of God; he wanted to add a stanza to specifically address the cross work of Christ. He sent the stanza to me and asked me what I thought and he even let me change one line so that we could sing that Christ crushed the Serpent’s head; he wrote me back and said he liked the phrase but it messed up the timing . . . he said he’d try to work it out, and he did.

We sang earlier today:

*I sing the mighty power of God
That set my spirit free
He bore the wrath that I deserved
And died at Calvary
I sing the death that gives me life
That crushed the Serpent’s head
I live in resurrection power
That raised Christ from the dead*

Way to go, Gary.

Well, Paul is actually using hymn lyrics here in verses 5-11 and in so doing – stamping it as inspired, God-breathed text. And what it does is rehearse the humility of Christ in His incarnation and the personal rights that Jesus voluntarily gave up when He came to earth.

Now, if you look carefully, you’ll notice that the first two phrases in this hymn refer to our Lord’s essence – His deity.ⁱⁱ

The Lord’s Essence – Deity

Notice verse 6. He existed in the form of God.

That’s not a question, that’s a proposition – a statement of truth. And the verb – to exist – refers to timeless pre-existence. Jesus pre-existed in the nature and essence of deity as God the Son.

So we provided in our outline the first right that Jesus Christ gave up when He came to earth.

- He gave up the right to live like God.

In other words, he set aside the glory of His pre-existent majesty and descended to earth.

Then Paul writes in the next statement, the truth that Jesus has **equality with God** the Father.

But He didn’t clutch it – He emptied His hands of it.

- And so we said that Jesus Christ, secondly, gave up the right to act like God.

In other words, He never used the power and attributes that He clearly had a right to use, for His

own comfort – His own benefit – His own vindication.

Paul adds that Jesus didn't just surrender equal rights with the Father, He actually – *verse 7 – emptied Himself taking on the form – the nature – of a bond-servant.*

The One who was supreme from eternity past, now comes to earth and becomes a penniless servant.

He will borrow everything and own virtually nothing. He empties His hands of divine splendor and divine prerogative and divine rights and becomes our Servant Shepherd Savior.

He is the only Person to ever walk the face of the earth with the right to have anything He desired and to do anything He wanted – He literally gave up those rights for our eternal benefit and salvation.

The Lord's Likeness – Humanity

Now what Paul is going to do next is add to these two statements on Christ's deity by giving us two statements on Christ's humanity.ⁱⁱⁱ

And I'm going to wrap these two statements under the heading of one more right that Jesus gave up.

He not only gave up the right to live like God and act like God; thirdly:

3. Jesus Gave Up the Right to Look Like God

Notice *verse 7b – the last line – being made in the likeness of men.*

You could render this generically to refer to Jesus literally joining mankind – in other words, He became a member of the human race.

The word Paul uses for likeness *homoioima* (ὁμοιωμα) refers to that which is made to be like something else, not just in appearance but in reality. Jesus wasn't a clone, or some disguised alien.^{iv}

He wasn't a god wearing a slip on covering of flesh to fool everybody.

He had the same flesh and blood that we have; He would experience the same limitations that we do; He would be subject to the same ups and downs of life that we have – He would be subjected to all the emotions and all the temptations that we are.^v

What's interesting however is that this word for *likeness* informs us – and Paul is careful to inform

us – that Jesus Christ is truly similar to us, yet different from us in uniqueness.

One author wrote, Paul's use of this word here translated likeness is meant to tell his readers that while the Lord's likeness to man was real, it did not express His entire self.^{vi}

In other words, there is more than meets the eye.

As we've already discussed, He was without a sin nature and He had a divine nature as well. He was tempted like us, but sinless.

He was fully a member of the human race, but still a member of the Triune God.

And so, depending on the text you're studying, Jesus will sound like an ordinary human being and at other times make the audacious claim that He was God and/or equal to God the Father.

In fact, on one occasion, when the Jews fully understood that's what He was claiming to be, they picked up stones to hurl them at Him and Jesus asked them, *"I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." (John 10:31-33)*

Listen, they really couldn't understand it any more than His own disciples could – although the disciples believed Him.

That He was both God and man – the God/man.

Here Jesus is, absolutely exhausted as He sleeps through a hurricane while the boat carrying Him and His disciples stalls on the Sea of Galilee in this terrifying storm; they are certain they will die and Jesus is so tired He's just sleeping through it all; they finally wake Him up and He stands up and commands the wind and the waves to be still (Mark 4:39).^{vii}

And the disciples whisper to each other, *"Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41)*

You know what the problem is?

Jesus has given up the right to look like God.

I mean, He looks like an ordinary member of the human race. And what's an ordinary member of the human race doing, commanding the wind and the waves?!

Part of the problem is that Jesus *was made in the likeness of men.*

Paul drives the humanity of Christ home even further with his second descriptive phrase – notice *verse 8 – being found in appearance as a man.*

Being found – simply means, being recognized or observed – as an authentic man.^{viii}

In other words, when people met Him, he wasn't like Spock with pointy ears and absolutely no personality so that everybody immediately knew he was from another planet.

No, when people met and talked to Jesus, they observed – they found Him to be a normal human being.

Being found in appearance as a man means that now anybody can go and find out that Jesus is a real human being.

In appearance . . . mind you, Paul uses a different word here, translated **appearance**.

It's the word schema (σχῆμα) and it literally reinforces the fact that the outward appearance of God the Son was absolutely human.

This is the amazing reality of God the Son – God the glorious, preexistent, Creator, second person of the eternal Godhead becoming Jesus, a Jewish baby boy who grows up to be a normal looking Jewish man.

That can't be, can it?

The Medieval Catholic and Orthodox Church couldn't stand the thought of Mary being a normal human being and even Jesus being subjected to the rigors of normality; and so the Apocryphal writings and legends were raised to clean up the story and making Jesus anything but normal.

For instance, soon after His birth, one legend grew, as Joseph and Mary and the baby traveled toward Egypt, they sought refuge in a cave where it was so cold the ground was covered with frost. But there was a spider at the entrance to the cave that recognized this special, holy baby and so it spun a web across the entrance of the cave so thick that it hung like a curtain and the cave became warm and cozy.^{ix}

We just can't have this family out in the cold.

As they traveled, another church tradition says that Jesus commanded the trees to bend down so Joseph could pluck the fruit; later, Jesus ordered a spring of water to gush out from the roots of a tree to quench their thirst; Mary even was helped to sleep one night by angels coming and playing music for her on violins.

Church traditions taught that wherever they traveled, all the animals would bow and all the idols would crumble to dust.

Later, the boys in the neighborhood would spread their cloaks for Jesus to sit on and crown him with wreaths of flowers.

Everybody in Nazareth just knew He was special.

When Jesus eventually began his ministry – He preached in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth and when he finished, the people all said with amazement, "**Who is He . . . isn't He the Carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas. And His sisters, are they not all with us? (Matthew 13:55-56)**

In other words, they've known this entire family all their lives – they knew the names of Jesus's half-brothers and half-sisters – the whole family.

When Jesus finished his sermon in His hometown, nobody in the synagogue stood up after Jesus preached and said, "I knew it! I knew Jesus was different . . . I just knew there was something to all those miracles He did from His childhood on up . . . I knew there was something different about His halo!"

"I just knew it!"

No, the text says, in the following verse, **And they took offense at Him! (Matthew 13:57)**

Who do You think You are?!

Jesus had given up the right to look like God.

- Being made in the likeness of men – that means He joined the human race
- Being found in appearance as a man – that means He chose a human face.

Before His incarnation, Christ was clothed with the glory of divine splendor that we can't even begin to imagine – invisible to the human eye as is God the Father and God the Spirit.

But now God the Son has taken on flesh and blood and the result is – He looks like any human male of Jewish descent.

Now, doesn't sound all that bad, does it?

What's so humbling about being found in appearance as a man? We look pretty good! Especially you!

We don't really see anything all that humbling about choosing to join the human race and take on a human face – because we know almost nothing about His pre-existent glory.

Let me tell you a story some of you may have heard in years past.

When Marsha and I moved from Dallas to plant Colonial Baptist Church, we moved into our rented house in West Raleigh several years ago, we

discovered a mess! The former residents had housed a dozen cats – they were in every room.

When I went to look at the house to consider renting it, there were cats up on the kitchen counter eating leftover food from dinner plates – they were everywhere. You know how much I love cats . . . I immediately wanted to rent the place . . .

These families moved out – and so did the cats.

I moved in a couple of days before Marsha and our twin baby boys arrived. My younger brother came down from Virginia and helped me – we painted and scrubbed and vacuumed.

A few weeks later, my wife and I were constantly scratching our ankles – little red spots were appearing.

Then one night we had our 5 month old boys on their blankets on the dining room carpet . . . I leaned down to brush a black speck off one of my son's cheek . . . and just as I reached down, that black spot jumped . . . it was a flea! The house was infested with fleas.

I called the carpet cleaners and they came out . . . those fleas seemed to enjoy their bath. I had the exterminators come out and spray – still no sign of surrender.

I finally went to ACE Hardware and bought a flea bomb that emitted deadly smoke. The directions on the box let me know that one flea bomb would take care of our little house we were renting.

It didn't!

It might have given them a little heartburn, but that was all.

It was time to get tough! We were planning to leave town for a few days, so I went back to ACE Hardware and purchased, not one flea bomb, but six of them; never mind the directions: I got one for every room.

I set them off, went outside, climbed into the car and we drove away. I couldn't help but imagine the smoke billowing from the windows – and hoped nobody called the Fire Department. A few days later, when we returned home, there were no more fleas!

Now . . . I don't *hate* fleas. In fact, I don't necessarily care if they're dead or alive – just not in my house. How could I ever get the message to them that flea-bomb day was coming?

“Listen, there is trouble ahead--you are in danger; you need to be saved from the wrath of the master of this house.” How could I ever let them know?”

I can think of one way . . . I'd have to become a flea.

Now I would hate to live the life of a flea; and, to be perfectly honest, I would never in a million years give up the right to live like a man in order to rescue a house full of fleas.

That would be humiliation!

Listen, for the glorious God the Son to give up the right to live like God and act like God and look like God; in order to live and die so that those who listened to His message – and benefited from His incarnation; His gospel of salvation by faith in Him alone – they would be rescued.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Jesus Christ becoming a man would be like you and me becoming a flea.

But Jesus went even further in His display of humility.

Let me explain it with a question: If you were God the Son and you knew you were going to become a man – and because you were God you could actually choose the way you would look, what kind of man would you look like?

Ladies, enter into this imaginative question. If we were all able to literally choose our face and our figure and our physique, what would we choose to look like – being found in the appearance of a human being?

Guys, you could choose the size of your waist – the size of your biceps – the color of your eyes . . . the color of your hair – or . . . you could have hair.

If we could choose what we looked like – every woman would stop traffic; the guys would look like a combination of **Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Denzel Washington, Robert Redford and Dave Burggraff and Gary Hallquist . . . all rolled into one.**

I would!

So what did the Son of God choose to be found in the appearance of as a man?

Well, the only detailed, physical description of Jesus Christ is found in Isaiah. He wrote about the coming Messiah and actually described Him: ***“He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, no appearance that we should be attracted to Him.”*** *Isaiah 53:2-3*

Translated into common English: “He was an average, run-of-the-mill Jewish man who was not in the least good looking . . .” Imagine!

That was the face and physique that God the Son chose.

He truly gave up the right to look like God.

Is it any wonder that people assumed that Jesus was anything but God, in the flesh . . . the King of Kings, robed in common, ordinary Jewish skin?

Jesus Christ voluntarily gave up:

- The right to live like God
- The right to act like God
- The right to look like God

But before we wrap it up today . . . let's keep this exposition in context.

This hymn of the early church is not just a reminder of Christ's great sacrifice; it is a command to imitate the humility of Christ.

It begins in verse 5 – Have this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

So:

- Don't be tempted to say, "He's just so wonderful and I'm glad Jesus did that, because I sure can't."
- Don't be satisfied to think, "The Lord can do that, but surely He understands that I can't."

I've got to stand up for my rights . . . I've got to be vindicated . . . I can't be passed over or become a pushover. If somebody does me wrong, they're going to be sorry.

I'm going to defend the Kingdom of Me.

Surrender your desire to vindicate yourself and defend yourself and hide behind the walls of your own Kingdom of Me.

Our beloved friend, Robert Smith, a gentleman who's preached here several times and is coming to speak again, Lord willing, in our summer series, told us about the tragic event surrounding the loss of his son, 4 years ago. Antonio was 34 years old; working late at night in his restaurant when an attempted burglary went haywire and the burglar shot him and killed him.

Just this month, I saw an article in *Christianity Today* and recognized Dr. Smith's picture . . . the article brought me up to date on something he had told us all about when he was here last.

He writes, "During the trial I saw the back of Tony's murderer, then 18 years old. I saw his mother and some family members weeping as the judge sentenced him to many years in prison.

Following our son's murder, which did not seem to have any redemptive value, the question God's [Spirit was asking my heart was], "Do you really believe [the gospel] that you preach?"

I knew how to explain, illustrate, and apply forgiveness from a biblical perspective; now God was [challenging] me . . . that I must, by His grace, live that forgiveness now.

30 years prior to Tony's murder, I also had been working at a store on a Saturday night around 11:30 and was robbed at gunpoint; God spared me. I struggled with how God could spare me, but not spare Tony.

God has been preparing me to mirror the forgiveness modeled by Jesus Christ who died for the ungodly.

I have forgiven Tony's murderer. I confess that the ache of memory is still there, but the paralyzing sting has been swallowed up in God's agape love.

In September 2012, I finally mailed a letter to this young man, asking that he add my name to his visitors list so that I could [visit him and deliver to him the gospel of Christ.] [Just a few months ago,] he added me to his list.

Soon, by God's grace I will see the young man whose face was the last face our son saw before standing in the presence of the Lord.

Wow . . . that is the attitude of Jesus Christ, who laid aside His rights, and surrendered what He deserved out of sheer love and grace.

Jesus Christ will give up His right to live like God and act like God and look like God.

His humility, Paul writes, will end with His death. He will ultimately give up the right to be treated like God!

For the believer and the church, this attitude of self-denial and self-sacrifice is not optional, it is essential.

That's what you call, "crushing the kingdom of me."

Surrendering to the kingdom and character of Christ.

And as we demonstrate to one another and our world, the laying down of our rights . . . the gospel is validated . . . and Christ is ultimately exalted.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/8/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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