

The Man for Others

Maurice W. Lusk, III

The Christ of the Apostle Paul wore many titles and was portrayed in many roles, both divine and human. According to Paul, when one met Jesus of Nazareth, he was met by God. In him the godhead dwelt bodily (Col 2:9). But Paul also taught that in him humanity dwelt in its fullness, and, even more, in him humanity reached its highest possible expression. For Paul, Jesus of Nazareth was the quintessential human being - man as he was intended to be. To Paul Jesus was the second Adam who came to reverse what was done to the human race by the first Adam, and, thus, provide for man a model of what it means to be a being created in the image of God.

In the previous lesson it was suggested that the source of Jesus' sinless existence was the godliness within him, not his godliness as God, but his godliness as a man - a being created in the image of God. But here there is a critical point, in order to be filled with God; one must first be emptied of self. This appears to be one of the most unique characteristics of the man Jesus of Nazareth; he was one of the most unselfish human beings who ever lived. In this he, as "one of us," becomes the model for us.

Have This Mind in You

In instructing the church at Philippi in how they should live as new creations of God, Paul set a model before them of unselfish existence: Jesus of Nazareth - "the man for others."

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind in you which is in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form

of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:3-8).

As full of magnificent themes as this passage is, none is of greater significance than the theme of "selflessness" as modeled here by Jesus. The expression "he emptied himself" involves mind-boggling concepts, but what is implied, in all else that is implied, is that he emptied himself of "self."

This is a teaching hard to hear, because what he did is so hard for us to even think about, let alone emulate in our own lives. From the moment we enter this world our "sense of self" becomes a pre-occupation. One's first sense of self is that of *self-consciousness*, then *self-concern*, which usually develops into *self-centeredness*. As one matures and self-concern is brought into better perspective, *self-control* becomes a competing behavior with our self-centeredness. But, sad to say, self-concern and self-centeredness dominate most personalities. The self-willed spirit or "selfishness" is, without question, one of the greatest problems of the human race. Here again, Jesus, as "one of us," becomes a paradigm of human existence as it is supposed to be.

The word for "mind" here in this text is the Greek *phroneo*, meaning "one's thinking or attitude." People usually behave as they do because they think as they do. Thinking which is self-concerned and self-centered leads to behavior that is self-concerned and self-centered. Jesus' thinking was characterized by concern for others rather than self. So much was he concerned for others that he was able to empty himself of the prerogatives and powers of divine lordship and submit himself to the role of servanthood and even submission to the power of death in order to save others. This sense of self which so characterized the mind (*phroneo*) of Jesus of Nazareth is best reflected in his own words, ". . . the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The Role of "Self" in the Wilderness Temptations

After Jesus' Messianic anointing with the Spirit of God (Matt 3:16-17), he was immediately driven into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan. The scenario was the same as the temptations in Eden with the first Adam. The appeal in both temptation scenes was self-concern (i.e., how the choice made would best serve "self"). In Eden and in the wilderness Satan's primary enticement was "power." With Adam and Eve in the garden it was, "You will be like God!" (Gen 3:5). With Christ in the wilderness in each of the three temptations, the appeal was for Christ to use his powers to serve himself and/or to misuse his powers in the service of Satan.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him (Matt 4:1-11).

The first temptation, "turn these stones into loaves of bread," (Matt 4:3), was nothing less than an appeal to Jesus to use his supernatural powers to satisfy his physical needs or wants. The second temptation, "throw yourself down . . . the angels of God will bear you up," (Matt 4:6), was an appeal to Jesus to use his supernatural powers to fly from the pinnacle of the temple" (Matt

4:6), thus displaying himself as an otherworldly being, satisfying "the pride of life" unique to his humanity. The third temptation, "serve me and I'll give you the kingdoms of this world," (Matt 4:9), was a temptation to use his powers in the service of Satan in exchange for all this world had to offer. In each case Jesus' self-concern was at the heart of the temptation.

Where the first Adam failed (i.e., *harmartia* – sinned; i.e., failed to hit the mark), the second Adam was successful in denying himself the pleasures of sin that yielding to Satan would have brought. The first Adam was self-serving, and thus came the fall. The second Adam was God-serving, and thus came man's redemption. Here is a lesson we should never forget - there is something redemptive about self-denial.

The Nazareth Inaugural and Jesus' Messianic Agenda

The meaning of the role of the Messiah was greatly different in the thinking of Jesus than in the thinking of his countrymen. This is evident from the very outset of Jesus messianic ministry. After his return from the wilderness, Jesus entered the synagogue of Nazareth, read a messianic text from Isaiah, and announced his messianic identity. His speech was, in essence, an inaugural address and the text from which he read revealed his messianic agenda.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," (Luke 4:16-

21).

The Messiah longed for by the masses would come to receive power and offer the enemies of Israel on the altar of vengeance, the Messiah of the Isaiah 61 text would come to serve and to offer himself on an altar of love called, "the cross." He identified with the oppressed not the powerful, with the poor in spirit rather than the proud, arrogant, and powerful, with the servers of society rather than the served, with the gentle and lowly not the high and mighty. "Learn of me," was his message to his disciples, "for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt 11:28-29) Jesus' messianic identity and his messianic agenda were the same. This Messiah would be "a man for others."

Jesus' Concept of His Messiahship

The Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures was very diverse and multi-colored. He is portrayed in one text as the son of David and in another as the Son of God. He is here "a reigning Lord" but he is also "a suffering servant." He is before everything else "a man of God," but he also "a man for others." The juxtaposition (i.e., to compare and contrast at one and the same time) of these various messianic roles, as well as the various titles associated with these roles, is very important to understanding who or what the Messiah was to be. We must see him as "God with us," and we must also see him as "one of us." We must see him as "Lord," one in possession of great power and authority, but we must always make sure that it is a loving Lord who stand before as one who because he is a lord also becomes a savior. What we must not forget here is that our salvation was the result of his role as servant as much as his role as Lord. This concept of the role of the Messiah is evident in all that Jesus said and did.

The Nature of His Messianic Claims

His messianic claims were not ego-centered, but God-centered. He came to show us the Father (John 1:18), all deity claims of Jesus may be interpreted as "glimpses of the Father," and all the messianic

and majesty titles given him were in fulfillment of the will of God. Jesus' acknowledgement of his identity as the Messiah (Matt 16:16-17; etc.) are never self-serving, rather, they are acknowledgements of his divinely appointed role as the Messiah and savior of the human race.

Even his acknowledgement of the title "Lord" is used by him to teach the role of servanthood to his disciples (cf. Luke 16:16; Matt 23:10-12; John 13:4-16). In most instances where Jesus is confessed to be the Christ, and acknowledges the title, he enjoins secrecy upon his confessors (cf. Matt 16:20). The one messianic title he clearly accepts is the title which identifies him as "one of us." In over eighty instances in the Gospels Jesus uses the title "the son of man" (in Hebrew, *BenAdam* - son of Adam) as a self-designation.

His Miracles Were All "for Others"

As observed in the wilderness temptations, Jesus never used his supernatural powers to serve himself. The New Testament Gospels record no less than thirty-five miracles performed by Jesus: there are nine miracles involving the natural elements, seventeen healings, six exorcisms of demons, and three people raised from death. Every miracle worked by Jesus of Nazareth was in the service of others, which always said something, not only about the power of God, but about his compassion as well.

Jesus and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah

There can be little doubt but that Jesus saw in the writings of Isaiah the prophet the messianic role he was to play to it fullest. There are in Isaiah four passages that are, because of their poetic form, called "Servant Songs." These are Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12. In each of these a figure called "the servant of God" is portrayed. From a synthesis of these four songs the following characteristics emerge: (1) this servant is chosen of God, (2) God has put his Spirit upon him, (3) he suffers unjustly at the hands of other men, (4) he dies in a self-sacrificial manner to save others, (5) he does all of this of his own free will and with God's approval, and (5) he, through his faithful service to God, brings salvation to others.

There are numerous occurrences of the language and imagery of these Servant Songs found throughout the New Testament; in the Gospels, Acts of Apostles, and in the letters (cf. Luke 2:32; Matt 2:17; Matt 8:17; Matt 12:18-21; John 12:37-38; Acts 8:27-35; Rom 4:25; Rom 10:16; Rom 15:21; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 9:28; 1 Peter 2:21-24; 1 Peter 3:18). Perhaps the clearest is of these is the 1 Peter 2:21-24 passage, which reflects many of the motifs of the Isa 52:13-53:12 Servant Song:

*For to this you have been called, because **Christ also suffered for you**, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself **bore our sins in his body on the tree**, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. **By his wounds you have been healed** (1 Peter 2:21-24).*

What is portrayed here is that of a personality for whom service has become the very meaning and interpretation of who he is. His role as the Messiah is to give of himself to the end that through his selfless life of service to others redemption or deliverance may occur, especially deliverance from enslavement to "self." This appears to be the meaning of messianic deliverance for Jesus of Nazareth; to him the Messiah was to be, first "a servant of God," and second, "a man for others."

Conclusion

What is the meaning of all this for us? The lessons we must learn from him here are the same as those he taught his disciples long ago. When he washed his disciples feet, he said to them:

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is

not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (John 13:12-17).

When Jesus learned that certain among his disciples were seeking positions of power and authority over the others, He took them aside and taught them again the true meaning of being his disciple:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," (Mark 10:42-45).

Perhaps, the most difficult of all the teachings of Jesus to hear and follow is: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt 16:25). Why? Because the "self" is the hardest thing for us to deny!

MWLIII

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way does Jesus' life and teaching exemplify selfless existence? In what way would you say he was "a man for others?"
2. In view of the context of Phil 2:5, how do you understand the expression "the mind of Christ?"
3. In what way did Jesus empty himself of "self" as here in the Phil 2:3-8 text?
4. What do you make of the fact that Jesus refused to use his supernatural powers to serve himself in the wilderness temptations? What do you think would have happened if he had?

5. What is significant about the text Jesus chose (Isa 61) to declare himself the Messiah in the synagogue of Nazareth? What does this say about his understanding of his role as the Messiah?
6. If Jesus' makes deity claims and acknowledged the messianic confessions made to him, does this not imply that he had an ego-centered sense of self? If not, why not?
7. What do you make of the fact that all of Jesus' miracles were performed in the service of others? What does this say about him and what does it say about his revelation of the nature of God?
8. What does Jesus role as "the Suffering Servant" of Isaiah tell us about his understanding of the true identity and role of the Messiah?
9. What lessons are present in the teachings of Jesus concerning self-concern, self-centeredness, and the self-willed spirit for those of us we are his disciples?
10. Why are the words of Jesus found in Matt 16:25 so hard for us to hear and follow?