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He Humbled Himself

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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He Humbled Himself

Follow Him!

Lay aside your preconceived concepts of what the Christian life is all about and follow Him. Follow Him to the market place. Follow Him to the quiet place. Follow Him *any place, any place* at all, and you will be astounded, utterly astounded, at what God looks like when He totally controls a person.

All of the world's portraits of religious success will be nullified. Many of the church's concepts of what constitutes a godly life will be revolutionized. Most of the formats that men and women use to promote and protect and perpetuate their ministries will find no place in His scheme of things. All that He did, He didn't do. When confronted, He always denied that the power originated with Him. Who He was, He did not deny; but what He could do on this earth on His own, He continuously insisted was nothing.

One word characterized His entire life. One quality epitomized His whole attitude towards Himself and His work. One mindset overshadowed even the evidences of His power that flowed from His life. That mindset was one of utter humility.

He was God and very God. All that God is, He was. All that God had done, He was party to. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.¹ But He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He did not clutch at the qualities that make God, God. Instead, He surrendered His reputation, laid aside the benefits of His deity, and was made in the likeness of men.

And being found in fashion as a man, *He humbled Himself*. He declared Himself to be...nothing. He declared Himself to be totally powerless apart from the power that God, the Father, would pour through Him. What the Father said, he spoke. Where the Father led, He went. What the Father commanded, He did. Otherwise, He did nothing. Otherwise, He said nothing. Otherwise, He went nowhere. His entire being was characterized

¹ John 1:1-3

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by the mindset of a slave. A slave does not make his own decisions; he does what his master assigns him to do. A slave does not have his own agenda. A slave does not demand his own rights. *A slave has no rights.* A slave's only goal in life is to glorify his master. He takes no credit for what is done. It is the master's resources that make it possible, and were the master not caring for him, he would be unable even to have a part in anything that is good, or complete, or acceptable.

Oh, to understand humility. We need to redefine the word "humble" in our day. It has come to mean a kind of saccharin-sweet weakness that masquerades as meekness. We call someone humble who calls attention to the fact that they are not calling attention to themselves. That's not humility. Humility is Jesus Christ. You cannot describe Jesus without that word and you cannot define that word without Jesus. To us, a man or woman is humble if he or she, when seen doing something worthy of note answers, "Aw, shucks, it was nothing." When Jesus turned water into wine, He didn't say, "Aw, shucks, it was nothing." When Jesus healed the man born blind, He didn't say, "Aw, shucks, it was nothing." When Jesus spoke and Lazarus was raised from the dead, He didn't say, "Aw, shucks, it was nothing."

Nothing? These were miracles. These were divine interventions in history. Jehovah God had made Himself known by revealing a tiny fraction of His incredible power and by giving a tiny glimpse of His amazing love. Jesus never made light of *what He did*. He only made sure that the glory for what He did went to the One who did it. To do that, He had to *humble* Himself.

And so do you. And so do I. It isn't easy. It goes against the grain of everything man is taught from the cradle to the grave. But it is not only important, *it is essential, if we are to have the mind of Christ.* It was a deliberate choice. Jesus had more reason to be proud than any person who ever lived. In fact, humanly speaking, *Jesus was the only person who ever lived who had the right to be proud.* We are sinners. Our sins have separated us from God and from God's holiness. So God Himself died in our place, paid the total price, and purchased us, imputed His righteousness to us and set us free. We were impotent even to participate in the redemption process. That ought to humble us beyond measure. What have we to boast about? The best our

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lives could earn is an eternity in hell.

Jesus, on the other hand, *never sinned*. Not only did He never sin, but He agreed to lay aside everything He ever had or was in order to become a man, so He could suffer the ultimate humiliation *unjustly*. What a noble act. Nothing man or God had ever done could approach that in magnanimity. He had a *right to be proud*. He had the right to say to the Father, “*Look at what I have done for fallen man.*” He could have been proud, and by human standards, at least, been more than justified.

But not Jesus. Everything He did, He did in meekness and humility. Why? As God, He had every right to be proud. As man, doing what man had never done before, He had every right to be proud. Jesus was the most humble man who ever lived for two reasons. The first reason was that *if He even once had boasted of His work apart from the Father, He would have sinned, and that sin would have made Him unable to save us*. Why would that be sin, if He deserved it? The sin would not have stemmed from the fact that what He did was not worthy of praise. It was. The sin would have stemmed from the fact that He would have accepted glory for something the Father did. Jesus said, “I can do *nothing* of myself.” If that was true, then for Him to accept glory for anything He did on earth would have been stealing. He would have been stealing the Father’s glory. So had Jesus even once demonstrated pride, He would have sinned.

Secondly, when Jesus was living on planet earth, He was defining the life God lives when He is allowed to inhabit a human body. He was demonstrating for us how God looks in us. Therefore, “*If this mind is to be in us...*” *Jesus had to live a life of total, unlimited humility*. If that is true, then *we can define humility by watching Him*. If we just follow Him through the pages of Scripture, we will see perfect humility. He was the only man who ever lived who never tried to draw attention away from the Father. Always. He answered, “I can of mine own self do *nothing*.” He was the only man who ever lived who never once acted independently of His Father. He said, “I do always those things that please the Father.” Only a genuine slave can do that. Jesus was the perfect “*doulos*”.

Now, fast-forward the videotape of history to this century. Can you imagine how God must feel as He views the Christian’s concept of humility in our age? Can you imagine how God must

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feel, having left His Spirit to indwell us, having left His character to flow through us, having left His ministry to be accomplished in us, watching the self-centered, performance-oriented, substitute for the Mind of Christ that modern Christianity has pawned off on the world as the real thing? We promote, we advertise, we emphasize. We do anything and everything to call attention to ourselves, our spirituality, our organizations, our programs, our brand of religiosity. And then we try to define humility using the grid we have created. Even if we were aware of what true humility is all about, we could not define humility by those standards. We have to go back to where humility became flesh and dwelt among us. We have to take those thirty-three years in which God became a man, and translate them into shoe-leather reality. We must. And, by God's grace, in the next study or two, we shall.

For the rest of our lives, we ought to be willing to devote at least half of our study and meditation time to observing *through the Scriptures*, the life of Christ. And as we do, let us not only seek doctrinal truth, but spiritual application. Let's look at Jesus for the rest of our lives in order to see what true humility really is.

And then, by God's grace, may we let "*this mind be in us.*"

HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF AT BIRTH

Jesus' first great demonstration of humility came from His birth. The King of Glory, the Prince of Peace, the Great I AM, came to earth, not as a monarch to rule, but as a servant, to serve. And to prove that, He was born, not as a celebrity, but as a nobody. His parents were unknowns, His birth was anonymous, to say the least. He chose to be born in a stable, rather than in a palace. He chose a bed of straw to be the silk and satin of royalty.

You may be thinking, "Wait a minute, Jesus didn't *choose* how He would be born, did He?" I believe He did. I believe Philippians 2 teaches us that in His divine foreknowledge, He made a deliberate decision to lay aside the benefits of the godhead and become a man, in order to save us. And having chosen that, He further chose to *humble* Himself, and become a slave. He chose, by an act of His will, before ever the Holy Spirit planted the seed of eternity in the womb of Mary, to live the life

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of a transient, to forego the benefits of the world system, and to, even in His birth, be the epitome of humiliation. He *chose that*. He humbled Himself.

You and I had no choice concerning our birth. We did not choose our parents, our place of birth, our physical condition, or the incidents that followed. But Jesus, as God, knew. And He chose to be born in a stable, that we could at least begin to grasp the meaning of humility. And then He said, *let this Mind be in you*.

Does that thought ever cross your mind when the accommodations of life are not to your liking? When you are in pain, and the doctor won't answer the phone? When your car breaks down, and no one can fix it the next day? When you need new curtains for the house, and the budget won't allow it? When life seems to be insistent on offering you less in the way of comforts or pleasures than you think you deserve? Do you compare yourself with others who have more? Or do you look at Jesus?

He was the Creator God made flesh. He was the Great I AM in the same kind of body you and I have. And *He chose to be born in a body that was less than beautiful so that the beauty of His Holiness might not be masked by the flesh*. He was God. Yet He had no place to lay His head, and He chose to let that kind of humility begin His first day on earth. In the crib next to His were chickens, not children. No doctors or nurses attended His birth. No "God was born to us" announcements went out to Mary and Joseph's friends. The bulk of their friends, no doubt, did not even understand the birth of a child to them in their situation.

So His birth was His first demonstration of humility. He gave up creature comforts, lest those looking on might miss the message and construe wrongly that belonging to God was a ticket to prosperity and ease. It would be, on God's first trip to earth, a ticket to pain and suffering; a guarantee of humiliation, rejection, and persecution. He is coming again, Beloved, and both He and we will reign, but not yet. And His journey to nothingness was a portrait of the life you and I are called to *be willing to joyfully endure*. That's why Paul wrote:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

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But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

that no flesh should glory in His presence.

(I Corinthians 1:26-29 NKJV)

If you want a good memory verse for the next year of your life, try that one. And major on the last phrase. It explains the context of the rest of the passage. It says, “that no flesh should glory in His presence.” That means at any time you begin to take pleasure in who you are or what you’ve done, you are glorying in His presence, and you are hurling insults in the face of your Savior. “No flesh should ever glory in His presence.” That means that, before you became a believer, your natural claims to fame included your heritage, your talents, your accomplishments, and your station in life. And you had every right to boast. After all, what else could you take pleasure in?

But no more. Now you have inherited the Mind of Christ. Now you know that you were nothing when He found you, and that had He not found you and saved you and were He not keeping you, you would be *less than nothing today*. Now you live in His presence. He lives in you. Don’t you dare, says Paul, ever accept or even desire glory again.

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36 NKJV)

So as it is written,

“He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

(I Corinthians 1:31 NKJV)

LOOK AT JESUS.

He who was in the bosom of the Father before ever the world began, chose, by an act of His free will, to be born in a manger rather than call attention to Himself. And at no time in His thirty-three years of demonstrating how God looks in this real world of ours, did He *ever steal the Father’s glory*. Not once.

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HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF IN HIS CHILDHOOD

Now watch Jesus as He grew up in His stepfather's household. Incidentally, those who believe that God cannot possibly understand the plight of their children who are growing up in a single-parent setting or in a home with a stepparent need only to look again. Joseph was not the father of Jesus. He was the stepfather of Jesus. The seed of the Word was implanted in the womb of Mary by Jehovah God, and Jesus was conceived. Jesus grew up in a home with His real mother, a stepfather, and half-brothers and sisters. And how did He handle it?

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:52 NKJV)

He submitted Himself to those God had placed in authority over Him, knowing full well that the mind of God was present in Him, and knowing that He was, indeed, the Son of God as well as the Son of Man. How could He do that? He did that by continually, moment by moment, day after day, choosing to humble Himself.

Every time Joseph would instruct Him, or His brothers would harass Him, or His friends failed to appreciate Him, and the enemy whispered in His ear, "They don't know who You are. God doesn't have to take that!" He responded in His heart.

For I always do those things that please Him [the Father]. (John 8:29c NKJV)

So,

...when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (I Peter 2:23 NKJV)

Can you imagine what it must be like to *have been in the beginning with God*, and have your ten-year old brother tell you what to do? Can you imagine what it must be like to have the responsibility before you for bearing the sins of the world, and have your step-father tell you how to cut a straight-edge or when and how to feed the chickens? Can you imagine what it must have been like in the temple that day when, sitting at the feet of the rabbis, the truth of the ages begins to pour in you and through you, and *though you must be about your Father's business*, you humble yourself and obey your parents in all things?

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What temptation there must have been to let your siblings know that you were special, *the way Joseph did in the Old Testament*. How Satan must have been tempting Jesus to go to the temple and let those rabbis know that Messiah had come and that He was living in that carpenter's house until He was old enough to begin His ministry. We chafe when someone tells us what to do who is supposed to tell us what to do. The heart of man that is desperately wicked, wants its own way from toddler stages. Before we can walk, we're demanding. Jesus was God, and *He demanded nothing*. Why? He was *learning obedience by the things which He suffered*.

When His brothers or His sisters teased Him or ridiculed Him, He was learning obedience. When His mother or step-father told Him to do something menial or temporal, He was learning obedience as He responded. When His Heavenly Father made Him wait and wait and wait until He was thirty years of age to reveal even a fraction of His divinity, He learned obedience by waiting. We want instant ministries, and we want instant response. Jesus learned to obey by letting His Father decide when and where He was to minister, and whether or not any visible response would be forthcoming.

What church today would call Jesus as pastor? He had no credentials and no ambition, except to do the Father's will. And when the Father began to use Him, He refused to run ads in the paper or put billboards in front of His house saying, "Big Meeting Tonight. Come and Be Saved." His agenda was one of quietly training twelve apparent losers, and then turning the keys to the kingdom over to them. Never did He alter His agenda in order to promote the ministry. Never did He take His eyes off of people and focus on budgets or programs or buildings. He had a singular purpose and a singular focus: to please His Father.

Oh, that we could "*let this mind be in us*." Oh, that we could grasp that God does not reward His servants with crowds or numbers or dollars or acclaim. Sometimes those things come. And sometimes they are as much a test from Satan as a blessing from God. God rewards His servants with crowns in glory for lives in glory that are the result of obeying the commandment:

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
(II Timothy 2:2 NKJV)

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Jesus got no recognition on earth, unless it was the recognition of being the butt of jokes among the Jewish rabbis or the object of investigation of the Jewish CIA. His only claim to human fame was the crowds that began to form, begging for physical relief. The blind wanted to see. The lame wanted to walk. The lepers wanted to be cleansed. So Jesus healed them. Then one day, He looked them all in the eye and said, “Unless you are willing to deny yourself and take up your cross daily, and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.”² And the crowds ran like water off a hillside. Soon only the twelve remained. He asked them, “Do you want to leave, too?”³ This is success? We think that if a ministry or a church grows in numbers, it will never be tested. We think that once growth occurs, growth is guaranteed. It kills our ego to go the other way.

That’s why so many ministries in our day have departed from their roots of humility and begun using the ploys of men to gain numbers or dollars to “keep the ministry growing.” Jesus had that choice. He got tough with the gospel, and the troops ran home. His reputation was at stake. What did He do? He *humbled* Himself.

His birth was a foreshadowing of the life that would follow. He *had to be born in a stable* or we would never have understood the difference between His First Coming and His Second Coming. Many still don’t. His childhood was the preparation for a ministry of humility. So was ours. In fact, those rejections and pains that God allowed us to endure were to *teach us obedience by the things that we suffered*. The world tells us to dwell on them and be angry. God tells us to glory in them and be *humbled*. What a difference—it is all the difference.

HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF AT HIS BAPTISM

But I believe that no time in Jesus’ life on earth was more crucial to understanding the life of humility than was His baptism. Think about it. He was God. He formed the worlds. He it was, Job found out, and only He “who laid the foundations of the world, while the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy.”⁴ Now, here He was waiting in the wings for His Father to give Him the cue to move to center stage

² Luke 9:23, Luke 14:27

³ John 6:67

⁴ Job 38:7,8

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and begin to let the spotlight of history be focused on divine humility in a human body. But it was His cousin, not Him, in the spotlight. Crowds were following John, not Jesus. Jesus was just a carpenter's son, working, waiting and worshipping, while John was the "voice of one crying in the wilderness."⁵

How He must have followed John's ministry with interest. More than once He passed by and observed His cousin as he baptized his converts. Satan must have whispered into His ear, "Who does this guy think he is, Jesus? He's stealing your thunder. There's been no movement in Jewish religion in a decade, and just as you're ready to come onstage, this upstart relative of yours steals the show. Who is he to baptize you? Go do your thing, Jesus."

Not Jesus. Instead, He humbled Himself. This scenario had all the makings of a modern-day religious conflict. John was in the spotlight, Jesus was in the shadows, and the world was hungry for Messiah to come. Had either Jesus or John exercised any pride at all, it would have been a tragedy. They would have fought over whose converts belonged to whom, or *which converts had the real thing*. Had Jesus and John had today's mentality, they would have set up shop on opposite corners and the bulk of their time would have been spent advertising their relative strengths or their doctrinal differences in order to steal each other's members. It's a well-known fact that over 90% of all movement in church membership in the United States today comes from people changing churches, not changing kingdoms. Less than 10% (far less than 10%) of the total number of "additions" to our churches are new converts.

Can't you just see John with a placard saying, "This is the First Church of Jerusalem. I got here first." Oh, for a church that is willing to be just "a church in Jerusalem" (or Pittsburgh, or Dallas, or New York, or anywhere else). We all crave identification. We advertise our growth. Can't you just hear Jesus, with a tent set up a half block from John's with a public address system blaring, "You've heard the prelude, now come hear the concert."

No, both Jesus and John had a message to send to twenty-first century (hopefully last-century) Christians. It was this: Our ministries are not *our* ministries. Our crowds are not *our* crowds. Our people are not *our* people. We ought to want

⁵ Matthew 3:3

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them to join another church if they are more needed there. We ought to encourage them to move to another fellowship if their spiritual needs are not being met where they are. God wanted us to understand that. So He implanted in John the Baptist the mind of Christ, and He let the Son of God *humble Himself and be baptized*.

Can you imagine what must have gone through John's mind? What must have gone through Jesus' mind? Repaint the portrait in your heart. John's popularity was on the upswing. The crowds were coming to his meetings. John's disciples were ecstatic. A group of Pharisees suddenly appeared at one of his baptismal services. The atmosphere grew a bit more intense.

"Who are you?" one of the Pharisees asked. "We've been commissioned to find out." John answered:

"I am the voice of the one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the LORD,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

(John 1:23 NKJV)

"Why are you baptizing then?" the Pharisees grumbled. "If you're not the Christ, and you're not Elijah, why are you baptizing?" John replied:

"I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.

It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." (John 1:26,27 NKJV)

The next day, John was baptizing again, and suddenly, to the amazement of the crowd, he turned around and pointed to a young man who was passing by.

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

(John 1:29c,30 NKJV)

It was in John, chapter three, that the real heart of John the Baptist was thoroughly exposed. A group began arguing whose baptism was genuine, John's or Jesus'. Here was the perfect example of humility. John responded:

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices

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greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

He must increase, but I must decrease.

(John 3:29,30 NKJV)

What an attitude. As of that moment, John's whole ministry was, in essence, being dismantled. He was about to step into the shadows and disappear, without so much as taking a bow. Was he defensive? Was he angry? Was he disillusioned with God? No, Beloved, he was excited! His only reason for ministering was to prepare hearts for the Coming One. Now He was here. With the ultimate in humility, he stepped aside and gave us that verse of Scripture that ought to be written over the doorposts of our hearts from the day Christ comes into our lives.

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30 NKJV)

What a beautiful testimony. But is not the greater testimony that of Jesus Himself? He was the Son of the Living God. He was the Word made flesh. He was the Creator. And He humbled Himself and submitted to be baptized by His cousin, so that we could see that baptism is a beautiful act of humility wherein we bow before the Father and acknowledge publicly our identification with Him. If you have never seen the importance of believer's baptism, study that passage again. Baptism is an act of identification that requires an act of humility. It indicates that the old you is dead and gone. You have a new Master. You have joyfully, willingly, become His slave. If you were baptized before you actually became a believer, consider humbling yourself before man and God and identifying with Jesus through the very same method He used to identify with the Father.

He humbled Himself. The Living God became a man. He chose a stable for His homecoming. Though destined to rule over all, He grew up in absolute submission and obedience. He watched as His cousin, John, took center stage and began to call men and women to repentance. The crowds formed, and began to follow John. Quietly, Jesus waited on His Father's timing. Patiently, He stayed in the shadows until that moment in history when the Father said, "Be baptized". As an act of obedience, He placed Himself under the spiritual ministry of the very one who occupied the limelight, and God's Spirit, amplifying the Savior's humility, poured that same mindset through John, and his humble deference to the Master brought his ministry to its

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conclusion and gave Christ's ministry its beginning.

And all because neither Jesus nor John wanted any glory. They both knew the secret! The secret of the life of joy! The secret of the life of peace! The secret of the life of victory!

What is that secret? That secret is simply this:

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Dear God, by your grace, may we learn to do the same.

HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE

He must increase, I must decrease

What a potent thought!

My weak soul must disappear

Through the blood 'tis bought

Ne'er again ought I to boast

Save in Christ, my Lord

Ne'er again my name exalt

And lose His sweet reward

He must increase, I must decrease

Oh, what peace 'twill bring

Once I know that I must die

That Christ be *everything*.

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