

The Object of Our Worship

Philippians 2:5-11

Homo Adorans

I'll bet worship was the last thing on your mind as you drove into Lehigh's campus last month and unloaded your belongings into your room. If you were like other freshmen, you were wondering about your roommate, concerned about not looking too foolish, and finding your way around campus. A week later you were an expert on the best times to go to the dining hall, you had formed an opinion about your classes, and you were well on your way to making friends. But in all this you were actively engaged in worship.

The scientific name for our species is *homo sapiens* – thinking man. According to scripture a more accurate term would be *homo adorans* – worshipping man. The central characteristic of man is that he worships something. Some people worship the God of the Bible, others worship Allah, or Buddha, or spirits. Some people claim to worship nothing, but they really do. They worship money, or success, or popularity, or something else. Bob Dylan said it succinctly in his *Slow Train Coming* album – you gotta serve somebody. “It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.” The eternal question is this: who are you going to serve? Will it be the devil? Or will it be the Lord? Or will it be some “safe”, “neutral” object like success?

To be a Christian is to worship Jesus Christ. This is the essence of Christianity. Anyone who makes a credible claim to being a Christian prays to Jesus, lives by His word, and participates in worship services in church. But you may have observed that some Christians are not very faithful in prayer, Bible reading, or attending church. Perhaps some of these people do not truly believe in Jesus. The church does have false Christians in it. But what about real believers? Why is it that the worship of some real believers is so lame? And what about you? Do you pray throughout the day? Do you read the Bible every day? Do you attend church every Sunday? Was Jesus in your thoughts as you were moving into Lehigh last month? And here is the critical question – if you can answer “yes” to those questions, do you worship Jesus eagerly, energetically – or out of obligation?

The essence of worship is admiration. Worship is simply expressing admiration for someone much greater than yourself. If you don't honestly admire Jesus all that much, your worship will be weak, and maybe insincere. One reason some Christians are not very faithful in worshipping Jesus is that they just do not admire Him very much. They are grateful that He died for their sins, but they have not considered very deeply what that really means. Tonight we are going to take a closer look at Jesus. As Christians, Jesus is the object of our worship. If our worship is to be real and meaningful, we need to admire Jesus more deeply. Tonight we are going to look at a passage of scripture which may have been an early hymn sung by the first Christians. Paul possibly incorporated this hymn into His letter to the Philippians, and it comes to us now as the word of God. This passage makes two main points about Jesus. First, He humbled Himself, and second, He is the exalted Lord.

Christ is the Humble Deity

What is the difference between humility and humiliation? Humility is letting someone else take the credit for the win when you made the decisive play in the game. Humiliation is when you fumble the decisive play. Humility is praising someone who got a lower grade than you on your mid-terms. Humiliation is failing your mid-terms. Humility is voluntarily taking a place lower than you deserve. Humiliation is failing to fulfill the expectations of your place. Humility cannot exist unless there is some great virtue. You cannot give away someone else the credit for something you did unless you actually did something. And obviously the greater the virtue, the greater the humility.

Paul begins this passage by reminding us that Jesus was God. Jesus was not simply with God, or like God, Jesus was God. From eternity past Jesus was always God. Turn over to Colossians 1:15-17.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

As the image of the invisible God, when you see Jesus, you see God. In John's gospel Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (John 14:8). Jesus replied, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) In Hebrews we read, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." (Hebrews 1:3) However great you can imagine God – however powerful, and glorious, and intelligent – that is Jesus. Although a man, He is simultaneously the all-powerful, infinite God who has always existed and who created the universe. Verse 16 in Colossians 1 tells us that He was the creator. He is also the sustainer. "In him all things hold together." In other words, Jesus keeps this world from collapsing into oblivion. Every moment He keeps the planets revolving and the atoms whirling.

It is necessary to understand how magnificent Jesus was so that we can grasp Paul's first point. Because Jesus was God, He was entitled to all the rights and privileges of deity. He owed no one anything. In fact, He was owed worship by the creatures He had made. Jesus was entitled to the happiness, comfort, and glory of heaven. But Jesus gave up His rights. He humbled Himself and became a man. You see, we have a real hard time getting the impact of this because we think very highly of ourselves. We think we are wonderful, and we are flattered that Jesus should decide to become like us. This is far from reality. We *are* wonderful in some sense. We were made by God, so that makes us wonderful. We are the best of God's creation, so that puts us at the top of the value scale as far as creatures are concerned. But when you compare God's creatures – even the best of them – to God Himself, we are a very poor comparison.

Think about it this way. Suppose you created something – say a statue or a robot. If you were a skilled craftsman and you took great pains in your work, you may be very pleased with your efforts. But would you give up your present life to become a statue or a robot? That is something like what Jesus experienced in becoming a man. He gave up the glory of divinity to take on the humble existence of a mere creature. By now it should be clear that this is the greatest possible humility. No one can be more humble than Jesus, because no one can give up more glory than He did.

But Jesus did not stop with becoming a man. Among men He lived a poor life. He did not come as a ruler, or even a teacher or businessman. He came as a slave. Most English versions translate this word as "servant", but it means slave as well. The point is that Jesus entered this world at the bottom of the social scale. He suffered hunger and cold, thirst and heat, persecution and betrayal. And in the end He died. Not only was His death a horrible, gruesome experience, but it was the most shameful death possible. The Romans held their empire together by force, and they developed crucifixion as a means of subduing their conquered peoples. It was considered so shameful, it was illegal to crucify a Roman citizen. The physical torture and the crushing shame of crucifixion terrorized the enemies of Rome.

Putting all this together, Jesus displayed the maximum humility possible. He voluntarily gave up His divine glory and became the most despised creature on earth.

Christ is the Exalted Lord

To hear some Christians talk, you would think that Jesus is still on the cross. Everyone knows He

isn't. Scripture clearly tells us that Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. But the fearfulness of some Christians betrays their failure to grasp that Jesus has been exalted to the highest position in the world.

Paul goes to great lengths to convince us that Jesus is above all things. He says God "highly exalted Him". God gave Jesus the highest name possible. This name is so magnificent, everyone everywhere will eventually bow before it. That includes all people, dead and alive, all angels, all demons – anything able to worship will worship Jesus. Also every tongue will confess this name. And what is this most magnificent of names? It is Lord. Jesus has been given the title of Lord, and everyone will worship Him as Lord.

This means something to us, but it was a revolutionary teaching in the first century. Then the cult of Caesar worship was just developing. In subsequent decades it would become mandatory that all residents in the Roman Empire offer incense before the genius of Caesar and confess that Caesar is Lord. There was freedom of religion in the Roman Empire, and it was real freedom. Rome was perfectly happy for you to worship Jehovah, or Isis, or Mithras – just so long as you confessed that Caesar is Lord. Failure to do so was treason, punishable by death. And decades after Paul wrote this letter, death became the fate of any Christians who took him seriously.

Put yourself in the first century. Rome controlled all the known world. Her power was unrivaled. Everyone knew about the slave rebellions and the barbarian uprisings. They had been brutally crushed. Roman roads transported the legions from one end of the empire to the other. Roman engineers built aqueducts to carry water into the cities and amazing buildings where the business of the empire was conducted. Wealth flowed through the empire, and even the poor people had a better life under Rome than under their former rulers. A common language, coinage, and legal system made commerce easy and lucrative. The world had never seen anything like the glory and power of Rome – and Caesar was the personification of that power.

Now consider Jesus – a poor preacher who died in disgrace. Reasonable men may admire His teaching, and emulate His life. But no one but a fool would call Him Lord. Compare Him to Caesar? You've got to be crazy! What can Jesus do in the face of Roman power? Confessing that Jesus is Lord can do nothing but get you killed.

You know, the situation is similar today. Many people admire Jesus' teachings. Some seek to follow His example. But few believe He is Lord. Poor Jesus, He seems so pitiful. Lehigh University can grant you a degree that will get you started on a great career. Bill Gates can donate billions to alleviate poverty. The medical profession has extended our life expectancy significantly through miracle drugs. NASA can put a man on the moon. President Bush can overthrow governments and, if he desires, launch nuclear missiles which could wipe out the Korean peninsula in one hour. But Jesus can do none of those things. He is a great teacher, but the real power in this world is held by others. And if you refuse to accept those powers, you have no hope of success. Or so we think.

God says otherwise. God says it is all an illusion – a colossal deception. The power of Caesar or President Bush is only a mirage. Jesus holds the real power in this world. He told us this before He left this earth. His last words in the book of Matthew are these: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) When He says "all authority", that means that there is no authority outside His control. Jesus rules everything! Paul is merely echoing the word of Jesus Himself. Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord.

Whom Shall We Worship?

Who do you worship? People worship what they admire. We admire the athletic prowess of our favorite teams, and we praise them to each other. We admire the academic achievements of our professors,

and we hang on their every word. We admire the musical skill of our favorite band or orchestra, and we applaud their performance. We worship these people because they are so much greater than we.

Therefore we should worship Jesus above everything else. Jesus so far surpasses the power, skill, intelligence, and beauty of any human being, you would think we would praise Him to everyone we meet. If all this is true, we should be bursting with praise for Jesus. Prayer should be constant, the Bible should be our daily reading, and worship services should be the greatest thrill of the week. And if this is not true of us – is it because we do not really believe that Jesus is Lord? Are we more impressed by the world than by Jesus? Are we trying to hedge our bets by trusting Jesus for salvation and the world for success?

But there is yet another reason to worship Jesus. The purpose of His humbling Himself, becoming a slave, enduring the miseries of this life, and suffering the torment and shame of the cross – was to save us. And the reason Jesus came to save us was His great love for us. We are less than amoebas compared to God, but He loves us. He gave us an amazing world to inhabit, and we wrecked it by rebelling against Him. We deserved to die, but He died for us. All because He loved us. Your friends may love you, Your parents love you much. But no one loves you like Jesus. No one can. No one can give up divine rights and die for your sins. Now doesn't this move you to worship Jesus?

You are *homo adorans*. You are made to worship, and you do worship everyday. Even when you are moving into Lehigh, or doing your laundry, or sitting in class, or hanging out with your friends, you are engaged in worship. In the midst of those activities, is Jesus present in your thoughts? Do you listen to your professor because he is the source of wisdom and success, or because Jesus has sent him to serve you? Do you hang out with your friends because they are the source of a good time, or do you see them as gifts from your Lord? Is Jesus Lord? Is He the only one you worship?

RUF is a very active ministry. Tomorrow we will talk about our goals and what we hope to accomplish. But the only thing that matters is Jesus. He is the center of our life. He *is* our life. Everything we do must be in worship of Jesus, and contribute to leading others to worship Him too. If you look at your own life and must honestly say that Jesus is not the center of your life, I call you to turn to Jesus. Jesus is the God who loves you so much He died for you. Jesus is the Lord who reigns for you. Reject allegiance to any other Lord, and cling only to Jesus. Let Him be the only object of your worship.

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