

The humility of God

(Video teaching – 4 June 2020)

The wood of the vine

I would like to talk about the humility of God, and I want to start with an unusual Scripture from the Old Testament - Ezekiel Chapter 15.

Ezek 15:2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?"

15:3 "Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?"

15:4 "If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends, and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?"

15:5 "Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything?"

This is an unusual passage of Scripture. It speaks of the wood of the vineyard that has no worth. When we read ahead in this chapter, it speaks about the people of Jerusalem who have wandered far away from the Lord; he basically says that these people have no worth.

God becomes Man

Please keep this passage in mind: the vine has no worth. We will look at this again later. Let's read now in John Chapter 1. The theme is the humility of God.

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Of course, he is referring here to Jesus, the Messiah, the Word.

1:2 "He was in the beginning with God."

1:3 "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

1:4 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Here we see the Word, Jesus, as the Creator of the universe. Everything originated through Him.

Further on in the chapter we read,

John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ..."

The Word became flesh. God, in His omnipotence, in His glory, the Creator of heaven and earth, condescends to become a Man. He comes down to the earth from the glory of His heavenly throne and humbles Himself to become a Man. This is awesome.

Friends, when we read a little further in Scripture, we find Paul speaking about Jesus in Philippians 2:7, and he says,

*Phil 2:7 "But emptied Himself, taking the **form of a bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men ..."*

In other words, not only did God humble Himself to become a Man – that is already an enormous demotion – but He then further humiliates Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant. He, Almighty God, becomes the Servant of mankind. Can you believe it? *The humility of God.*

Old Testament prophecy

Let's go back to the Old Testament. Isaiah Chapter 49 speaks of the Messiah who is to come. Here is only one of many prophecies that Isaiah gives, and I want to read from Isaiah Chapter 49. He says,

*Isa 49:5 "And now says YHWH, who formed Me from the womb to be **His Servant**, to bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him ..."*

From this we note that the purpose of the Messiah, *the Servant*, was to gather Jacob, Israel, to God. But there is more:

*Isa 49:6 "He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My **Servant** to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a **light to the nations** so that My salvation may reach **to the end of the earth.**'"*

In other words, He did not only come for Israel, He also came for *all* the nations. And *He came as a Servant.*

*Isa 49:7 "Thus says YHWH, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One, to the **despised One** (the Messiah, the Son, His Servant), to the **One abhorred by the nation**, to the **Servant of rulers**, Kings shall see and arise ..."*

This passage refers to the Messiah as the *despised One*, the One who is *abhorred by the nation*, a *Servant of rulers*; this is His purpose, this is what He came for.

We are discussing the *humility of God*. How humble - to bow so low from His highly exalted heavenly throne!

What does Jesus say about Himself?

This is what the prophets said. But now my question is, what does Jesus say about Himself? Let's read in Mark 10 what Jesus says:

*Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but **to serve**, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

The Son comes to serve. This is remarkable! The Gospel of John adds more. Jesus says:

*John 5:30 "I can **do nothing on My own initiative**. As I hear, I judge; and My judgement is just, because **I do not seek My own will**, but the will of Him who **sent Me**."*

He is *sent* by the Father and therefore, as a *Servant*, He does not come to do His own will. Even in Gethsemane Jesus says, "*Father, not My will, but Your will be done.*"

We read further:

John 6:38 **"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."**

He is a *sent One*, a *Servant*. Let us proceed further to a remarkable passage in John Chapter 13. The event described here takes place during the last supper, the communion - on the night before the crucifixion. Gathering His 12 disciples around the table, we read the following remarkable passage revealing the humble character of our precious Jesus. He...

John 13:4 **"... rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about.**

13:5 **"Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."**

Can you believe it? Friends, if only those disciples could have realised the full significance of the incredible moment. Here the **Creator of heaven and earth is kneeling before them, washing their feet.** *The humility of God.*

John Chapter 15

Then we arrive at Chapter 15. And this is what Jesus says about Himself (keep in mind that this is right before the crucifixion):

John 15:1 **"I am the vine ..."**

You must understand that Jesus knew the Scriptures well. He quoted extensively from a number of prophetic books during His time of ministry, including various passages from the book of Ezekiel. He knew the Scriptures. He knew what was written about the despised vine in Ezekiel 15, which is abhorred by the nation, a Servant of the rulers; and now, in John 15 He says, "*I am the vine ...*" That *despised One*, who can do nothing of Himself, not even be made a peg on which to hang things, He can do nothing of Himself ...

Jesus says, "*I am the vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*" The vine can do nothing of Himself without instruction from the vinedresser – the Father. And then He points to us, and He says,

John 15:2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."

*15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the **branch cannot bear fruit of itself**, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*

In ourselves there is no value and there is nothing that we can bring to the table. We must abide in Him in order for that living water to flow through us; the power of the Holy Spirit flowing from Jesus to us. And that is how we are able to bear fruit. In this past week we have just celebrated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to come alongside us and to help us to bear fruit. Not from ourselves, is the message here. Not from ourselves.

*John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for **apart from Me you can do nothing.**"*

He repeats this over and over - "*Apart from Me you can do nothing.*"

John 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me (pride – thinking I can do things myself, and that I know what to do), he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (just as in Ezekiel 15)."

He throws it in the fire. There is no value. That value, our worth, comes when we are grafted into Him; when the water flows, when the sap flows out of Him.

*John 15:7 "If you **abide in Me**, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

*15:8 "By this is My Father glorified, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples."*

The Lord intended for us to *bear much fruit*, but we cannot bear fruit in our own ability. He does not work with pride, with arrogance. He absolutely doesn't work with it. He despises it, He rejects it. But to the humble, Peter and James tell us, He gives grace. Friends, if God humbled Himself, how much more ought we to keep ourselves humble so that He can do His work through us, by His Spirit. It is only in humility that this is possible.

Paul's writing – a treasure within

Paul speaks in Corinthians. Friends, here is the core of the message that I want to bring today.

*2Cor 4:5 "For we do **not preach ourselves** but Christ Jesus as Lord, and **ourselves as your bond-servants** for Jesus' sake."*

Paul understood the concept. We cannot preach ourselves. There is nothing of worth in me that I can bring to the world. In the same way that Jesus became a Servant – by taking the form of a bond-servant - we also should help and serve one another in the form of a bond-servant.

During the last supper, the disciples had an argument around the table about which of them was the greatest, the most important. Jesus told them that *the one who served the others, he was the greatest*. If you want to be a king in the kingdom of God, *learn to serve*.

On another occasion, Jesus lifted a little child onto His lap, and said, *"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* That object, that branch which gets thrown into the fire, has no value. Value in the kingdom comes through *humility, servanthood*.

Paul says here, *"For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake."* He continues:

*2Cor 4:7 "But we have this **treasure in earthen vessels**, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves."*

This is such a favourite Scripture of mine. The *earthen vessels*. What is an earthen vessel? It is a pot made of clay. It comes from the earth, from clay, made of soil – this is who we are. We are merely made from dust. Earthen vessels.

But he tells us that there is a *treasure* inside of that earthen vessel which has been deposited there by the Holy Spirit. And this is the *treasure* – *"that the surpassing greatness of the power might be of God, and not of ourselves."*

This is the treasure. That *God works through us*, frail mankind, that the Holy Spirit can work through frail, insignificant little me, so that people outside can know and recognise that this miraculous work was not accomplished through any power or ability residing in any man. *It is God who is at work here.*

Remember when the disciples were arrested, and the authorities questioned them, trying to trick them? The disciples answered with conviction and authority. The authorities were astonished, because they knew that these disciples were uneducated people, ordinary people. We read that the authorities then recognised these men as *having been with Jesus (Acts 4:13)*. They saw Jesus in these disciples.

The authority with which we speak, the miracles that can be done through us, friends, that is the treasure: that it is not of ourselves, but that it is the power that comes from God. What an awesome privilege!

Seek, ask, knock

Friends, we have such a huge privilege, that God took the form of a servant in order to save us, and then He deposited the Holy Spirit inside of us - ordinary earthen vessels like you and me; He offers the Holy Spirit to you.

Seek, ask, knock, and it will be given to you. He wants us to have the power of the Holy Spirit which we need in order to effectively proclaim His Word - us, frail mankind. And it is when we go out, knowing who we are - we are nothing, merely a part of the worthless vine; mere servants - and when we give ourselves as servants to others, this is when God works through us - a power and effectiveness far beyond our own abilities.

There are too many people in this world who seek the highest rank, and not enough people who are willing to serve. May you and I also take the form of a servant as God did, and offer ourselves to Him and to one another.

Lord, *not my will, but Your will be done*. May the Lord help us, and may we, in gratitude and abject humility, open our hearts in obedience to Him.

Henry Jackson