

"The Attitude of Christ"

Philippians 2:5-11

March 24, 2013

Palm Sunday

"You've got a real attitude!" Perhaps you've found yourself saying that to someone. Maybe you've had someone say that to you, especially if you are a youth. The words don't mean much. *Everyone* has an attitude of some kind. But this sentence is neither a mere statement of obvious fact, nor is it very complimentary. When we talk of "an attitude" in that manner today, we are referring to a particular way of thinking, feeling, and acting which is very arrogant, rebellious, and defiant.

Although many people decry this "attitude" thing, we shouldn't really be surprised that it is so prevalent. From athletes who "talk trash" to belittle their opponents and gain an advantage to entertainers in rock and rap music, situation comedies on television, and various movies -- our culture is immersed in "attitude". And, although we think this is only a problem with the youth, adults often have "attitudes", too. We, too, can be arrogant, rebellious, and defiant. We are just better at concealing it sometimes.

While this may seem to be a troubling twenty first century phenomenon, the origin of this problem with "attitude" goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had an "attitude". They were not content to be creatures under the Creator. Instead, they wished to be equal with the Creator. Satan's temptation to them was not to eat the fruit because it was more tasty and enjoyable than all other fruits, but, he said, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil." And that is why Adam and Eve fell into sin. It was not because they wanted to try out the forbidden fruit. They wanted to be like God. So, in their arrogance, they rebelled against God, defied His clear command, and ate of the fruit.

This "attitude" is at the core of all sin since then. We no longer want to be under God and obedient to Him. Instead, we want to be the god of our own little world. We want to be in charge and set standards. We want to decide what's right and wrong and bad and good for us. We resent

anyone who might set standards for us or "judge" us. We arrogantly deny that we are responsible to anything other than "what works best for me".

This "attitude" manifests itself in blatant sins. People steal because their need or want for material things is considered of more importance than God's command against stealing. People murder because they elevate to themselves the right to end life rather than allowing the One who created life to make that decision.

But "attitude" is also the reason for more common sins. Children rebel against parents because they want to be in charge of the decision making process. Why do we gossip, insult, and back-bite except that we desire to build ourselves up by tearing others down?

As much as we struggle to be in charge and to be the gods of our own little universes, it is a battle that we cannot possibly win. God will be God and no one else. The Scripture says, "God opposes the proud" (1 Peter 5:5) He will tolerate no rivals. Jesus said several times throughout His ministry, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled." If you try, either overtly or covertly, to boost yourself up to the level of God, He will cast you down, as He did Satan - the first to try this, and as He has done with every person who's had that "attitude" since then.

If a king ever had such arrogant subjects as we have been to the King of the Universe, one might expect him to call his son, the prince, to go to those rebels, be more arrogant than they, and crush their rebellion under his thumb. God called His Son to go to us rebels, but He came with an entirely different attitude.

If there was anyone who had the right to be proud and arrogant, it was Jesus Christ. As our text says, He was in "very nature God." He didn't have to make Himself out to be God. He was truly God. He had a right to an "attitude" when He came to this earth. He also had the right and the might to destroy a rebellious mankind who tried to be God.

But He didn't do that. He chose humility. It was not forced upon him, nor did he reluctantly accept humility. Our text says, He took on "the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Consider how humbling *that* was -- to be the all knowing, all powerful, all present God and to choose to become a human being; to go from ruling all to being subservient to all.

Jesus' humility was not only in what He became but how He acted. The test of attitude is not what you have to do, but what you choose to do, especially if there are compelling reasons or temptations to do otherwise. It's easy to be weak and humble when you have no other choice. Jesus had other choices. He was fully God while being fully human. He had all the divine power at his disposal. Yet, as our lesson says, he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing,". He chose *not* to hold on to that equality with God but "made Himself nothing" -- He chose *not* to always or fully make use of His divine power while on earth. Can you imagine how hard that must have been? When he was weak and tired, he could have zapped himself up a palace with servants to attend to his every need, but he didn't. When he was hungry and thirsty, he could have made the stones into bread and the dust into wine, but he didn't. When he was arrested, mocked, and tortured, a wave of his hand could have destroyed all of his enemies, but he didn't. The only time he ever really used his divine power was to help others, not himself. And it's not that he didn't know who he was or that he forgot he had this power. He chose this attitude. Instead of self-serving pride, He chose subservient humility.

Nowhere else is that more self-evident than on Palm Sunday which we celebrate today. Now, on the surface, this might seem to be lacking in humility. After all, the people are having a parade with Jesus as the grand marshal and object of their adulation. Yet even this Palm Sunday processional is an example of our Savior's humility because of the way he entered and the reason for which he entered.

Conquering heroes with all of their pride and arrogance would enter a city perched on a large white horse, a symbol of their virility and power. Jesus chose to ride a humble little donkey as a sign of humility and in fulfillment of the prophecy: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of

Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

Conquering heroes would come to do just that: conquer. Military men who entered a city came to forcefully overthrow it by killing those who stand in their way and forcing those who remained into submission. Jesus came to do just the opposite. In humility, He came, not to force obedience, but to Himself obey the will of His Father as Adam and all other people had failed to do so many years before. He came not to conquer and kill, but to offer Himself up to be killed. Our text says, "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross!" This is something only the Son of God could do. Only He could "accept death as *obedience*; for ordinary men it is a necessity." (Tyndale, p.102).

At the cross, His humility and obedience met. Such a humbling experience it was to die on a cross. For the Gentile, death by crucifixion was absolutely repulsive. For the Jew, death by crucifixion was a curse by God. It showed that the victim "was outside of the pale of Israel, and that he was under a ban of excommunication from God's covenant." (Tyndale, p.1-4) According to Deuteronomy 21:23: "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."

Yet this was obedience to the will of God. God so chose to treat His Son this way so that He would not have to treat us that way for our sin. Jesus so chose to do this so that we wouldn't have to undergo it. As Isaiah had predicted so long ago,

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:3-5)

But that was not the end. God did not crush His Son and leave Him. As our text says, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." After humiliation and obedience comes exaltation, but from God at the proper time and according to His will.

Because of that, God calls us to a new attitude. Our text encourages us to "have this mind among you." The word for "mind" could also be translated as "attitude." That attitude is one of choosing humility, not having it forced on us or being shamed into it. Humility means that we do not think of ourselves and our wills first and foremost. Gale Sayers, star running back of the Chicago Bears in the 1960's, wrote an autobiography called "I Am Third." When asked for the meaning of the unusual title, he said, "Simple. The Lord is first; others are second; and I am third." That is humility. That is the attitude of Christ.

And, having that attitude of Christ, like Christ, we choose obedience willingly and joyfully. This is obedience not to self and our desires and passions, but obedience to God and His will. Like Christ, it is not obedience only when it is convenient or happens to coincide with our own will. It is obedience even when it is difficult and conflicts with personal desires.

But can this come to be? Such humility is the opposite of our sinful pride and such obedience clearly conflicts with our world's notion of serving self. Only Christ was able to do this. Therefore, the only way that we have any chance to apprehend such humility and choose such obedience is to be closely connected with Christ. This is what the Scripture calls being "in Christ".

This isn't something you can choose. When you have a sinful attitude, you don't even want that. But God has chosen you and brought you into fellowship with His Son. By Jesus' humble life and obedient death, God has made peace with you. When you were baptized, it happened in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You were grafted into Christ Jesus, covered with His holiness, and made sons and daughters of God. As Galatians says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27)

You don't need to be told how to think and what to do, but reminded of who you are and whose you are. You are children of God and belong to Him alone. The Scripture says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." (2 Cor. 5:1-18) You have been made completely new in Christ. You don't have to strive to get the attitude of Christ. It has been given to you by His grace. This attitude is strengthened in you every time you have contact with Him in His Word. This attitude is renewed in you every time you approach this altar to receive the body and blood of Christ and to be in Him in a very mystical way.

This attitude will reflect itself in the humility you will have, not only during a church service, but in your every day life. And, as Christ is in you and you are in Christ, this attitude will show itself in more and more obedience, not only to God in some vague indirect way, but to those who have authority over you and to whom you have responsibility. It will not be you doing it, but Christ doing it through you. As Paul said, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

Does this mean we face a life of being walked on and being taken advantage of because we are so humble and obedient? Possibly. Most likely. But, you see, we've been freed from worrying about our place and status in this life, as Jesus was. He lived humbly and died obediently, knowing that God would raise Him up. The same is true for us. We don't have to live to lift ourselves up. When we trust fully in Christ and have the mind of Christ, God will take care of lifting us up. Jesus said, "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12) Peter tells us, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Pet. 5:5-6) We will be exalted, however, not when we desire or how we desire, but as God desires and when God desires. Perhaps that will happen in this life, but for sure in heaven.

Therefore, do not be afraid or ashamed to have an attitude. As Christ had an attitude which moved him to be humiliated and to obey unto death on a cross for you, so may it be with you. Choose that humility. Live that obedience. May it always be said of you: "You have a real attitude -- 'the same as that of Christ Jesus'. Amen