

The Great Kenosis

This musing is an attempt for me to better understand the limitations of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus, as He lived on earth as the sinless Son of Man. As we read Scripture, we are in awe of how this Man Jesus performed miracles of healing, how wisely and all-knowingly He preached and prophesized, and how clearly and effectively He exposed the heresies, the false teachings, and the sinful nature of the self-proclaimed religious leaders of that day. Furthermore, while we may not fully understand why it was essential that He suffered and died on the cross, we accept the fact that He did, and that through this ultimate sacrifice, all who fully believe on Him are given eternal life with Him in the heavenlies.

Given all of this, what is often confusing and difficult to embrace as we read about His exploits during His 3 ½ year ministry here on earth, are His limitations. Being the Son of God, (John 1), and the One and Only One through which redemption is possible, how could He have been deficient in any aspect of His Godly knowledge, power and prerogatives? Knowing who He is, don't we find it disturbing to read of Him saying as recorded in Mark 13:32 that even He didn't know when the "*heaven and earth shall pass away*"? Are we not curious as to why Jesus, the Son of God who was God Himself, had the need to be in almost constant prayer, that is communication with God the Father? It was so that He could provide Him as the Son of Man with the power, strength and direction He needed to carry on His earthly work.

Jesus makes other interesting comments, such as in verse 28 of John 14 where He says, "*...My Father is greater than I.*" and in verse 31 He tells us that "*...the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.*" Also there is the issue of the Comforter. Jesus told His disciples that the "Comforter" would be His earthly replacement when Jesus would leave. This is in John 14:16, when Jesus prayed to the Father to send another comforter to replace Him. In the Greek, it is "Paraclete" that is "one called along side to help," also translated as "advocate". In just four verses earlier, Jesus made another interesting

statement. This one was preceded by verily, verily connoting a very important truth. He said that those who believe on Him will do greater works than even He has done. What are we to think as we ponder these verses that speak so clearly to His limitations and to His subordinate relationship to the Father-God?

Elsewhere in Scripture we read of Jesus being fully equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, inseparable as the One God, the Triune Godhead. We are assured of this when we read in John 1:1-5, 14: “*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not*” “*14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” In John 10:30 Jesus says, “*I and my Father are One.*” The only begotten son was not Jesus. It was the Son portion of the Godhead. Jesus came into the world 4000 years after creation. Only when at age 30, He had reached rabbinical status, in verse 38 He said that “*...the Father is in me. and I in Him.*” This was a claim of Godhood. It great angered all the Jewish spiritual leaders.

These are clear and powerful statements attesting to His deity and of His full equality with the Triune Godhead. There is no subordination to the Father here! So how do we reconcile these two seemingly opposite aspects of Jesus? On one hand He was in every way equal to God the Father. On the other hand, He was completely subservient and obedient to the Father, being the most humble of all men. He was a flesh and blood man in the nature of a man in all ways except, He did not sin. He was a servant of the Father ready and willing to die the most terrible of all deaths as ever to occur, and to do so all in accordance with His own will.

Many find, and are satisfied with the simple thought, that being both God and Man He simply acted in one capacity or the other as it fit the circumstances. That is certainly a logical, but inaccurate answer. It seems to be a reasonable answer, until we hear Him

admit that He doesn't know when the Rapture will occur. This is not a statement we would think our all-knowing incarnate God would make. Not doing anything by His own choice that was in His power to do is understandable. However, not knowing is a far more troubling issue. We also wonder when we read of the episode in Gethsemane that He suffered such great fear and stress as to perspire blood in anticipation of what would happen the next day. Knowing what the next few hours would be like, He prayed to the Father to show Him how to avoid this ordeal if it were possible to do so. Yet in His totally subordinate role He committed without further pleading to what His father had called Him to do. Furthermore, we see His godliness manifest in the many miracles, yet His godliness gave way to His human limitations as He faltered when He attempted to carry the cross up the hill. Jesus didn't physically resist the cross, and yet during the last minutes His spirit called out to God and asked why He had forsaken Him.

Those who have studied Scripture have found the explanation of all of this in Paul's letter to the Phillipians 2:5-8 as here quoted: *"5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient..."* These verses explain the essence of the Great Kenosis. Yet these very same people, at one time including myself, continue reverting back and are troubled when they read the above references to the Son of God's lacking Godly omnipotence while He lived on earth as man. However, if we truly apprehend Phillipians, we should not be troubled by any of these seemingly conflicting pronouncements about Him. With that in mind, what follows is an attempt to probe this passage in Phillipians and see if there is anything beneath these translated words of Paul's that will help us reach a greater understanding of what may seem to be so paradoxical.

In verse six it says that Jesus thought it not "robbery" to be equally with God, because He already was in the "form of God." This being in the "form" of God may leave us wondering. Wasn't He actually God? What is this "form" all about? Form is from the

Greek word “morphe” which means shape or form or nature. However, the root word is “meross” which translates to “division or share, piece, portion, etc.” From this we can see that Jesus as God is being identified most carefully. God is the Triune Godhead of which the Son of God is a “portion” or a “form” in this application of the word God. Jesus, the Man, even though He had the Spirit of the Son of God in Him, was not yet part of the Triune Godhead. However, because the Son Spirit was the Son of God aspect of His being, He was in fact in the “form of God.”

Therefore it was not robbery to consider Himself equal to God. However in order to carry out His earthly mission, He had to obscure a portion of His deity. Being thus limited is why He always prayed to the Father for guidance and for the strength to do the Father’s will. He had put that portion of His “equality” aside thereby depending on the Father for all things. How wonderfully intricate and precise is our Lord’s precious Book, this Book of History, Instruction and Autobiography!! Now let us look at the word “robbery.” The Greek word from which it is translated is “harpagos” which means plunder or robbery. However, an expansion of this meaning may be useful as we realize its similarity with the word from which it is derived, namely, “harpazo” which means to catch (take up), pluck, pull, take by force.”

Does this connection cause your heart to spark? It did mine! In 1Thessolians 4:17 is where we are told of the Rapture, that is when Jesus will come for His church which will be “caught up” to meet Him in the clouds! This word “caught” is a translation of the Greek word, “harpazo”. It is from the Latin translation of the word “harpso” that we get to call this the “Rapture!” The word “harpagos” appears nowhere else in Scripture while the word “harpaso” appears only three other times. It is found in 2Corinthians 12:2, 12:4 and in Revelation 12:5 where each time it means being caught up into heaven, or to paradise, or to God. Going back to Philippians 2:6, we see that because Jesus was in fact God, as the Son of God, there was no robbery, no taking away of anything from God to also call Himself equal to God.

Specifically, Philippians 2:6, 8 is known as the “The great Kenosis”, that is “the great emptying”. It means that Jesus emptied Himself of certain of His Godly powers, that is, He made Himself of no “reputation.” The Greek word is Kenosis which translates “to make empty (figuratively) to abase neutralize, make of none effect, of no reputation, void” This is the only place in Scripture where this word is used. What He did to be affective as Man, was to empty Himself of the fullness of the glory He shared equally with God the Father while He was here as Man, He didn’t lay aside His nature as God, but in His own ways kept some of it secret, undisclosed, masked, until He chose to manifest it, which He did at the transfiguration, and in small amounts through some of His activities and declarations.

He emptied Himself, not by spiritually ceasing to be what He was before, equal to the Father, or by putting out the essential form of God, but by acquiring the added and extended form of a servant wherein He would resemble men, and become all Man, thus assuming for Himself this added nature, a human nature. Now we can say, perhaps more accurately, that He veiled the largest portion of His godly nature in the sense that He emptied it from the forefront of His total being, filling the void with His humanness. While in the form of a servant, His main role could be likened to that of a merchant whose business was the purchase of souls unto salvation and to show to all of mankind how each could be “purchased” unto salvation.

In order that prophecy would be fulfilled, His humanness was conceived in the womb and He grew into the fullness of sinful man, yet He was sinless. Many wonder how He could be considered 100% man and yet be sinless when all of mankind is intrinsically sinful. Well, the fact is that sin was not intrinsic to mankind if we go back to creation. All of God’s creation was good, and there was no such thing as sin on earth. Adam and Eve were created sinless. There was no sin until Adam disobeyed God. We have heard people say that Jesus was the “second Adam”. This is the one unique characteristic of the created Adam which gives this comparison credibility.

Having come out of a woman's womb, as any son of man would, He grow up to be a genuine physical man as has all mortal men. However we may ask, when did He come to the full realization that He was also the Son of God and how much of the fullness of God in terms of that memory of His eternal self did He receive. We find Him at age 12 speaking of being about His Father's business. (Luke 2:49) yet it is unlikely that He had yet the fullness of understanding of all which that meant. Surely however, at age 30 when He spoke in the Temple in Nazareth reading from Isaiah 61, This Son of Man, Son of God knew exactly who He was, for we see that here He declared Himself to be the fulfillment of that prophecy, wherein He had come as the Messiah. From there on, we can begin to sense the existence of an especially intricate, perfectly planned and woven segment of God's completed tapestry of words and actions which culminated 3 ½ years later in its most glorious revelation on the cross.

Each thread of the sacred tapestry was woven with such precision that it could only have been supernaturally designed at the instant time began. Even the healing miracles He performed each conveyed a message specific to all who would acknowledge them, as did each of His encounters with the Pharisees. All of His messages, such as the one called the Sermon on the Mount, revealed wisdom so profound that even some of the most ardent scoffers of today admit that its meaning and its eloquence are of the highest order ever to be uttered by man. His superior wisdom is evidenced in His every encounter with the most learned of the so-called religious leaders when He always put them to shame for their petty attempts to discredit Him. Regardless of all of these God-like attribute, and His numerous admissions as to who He really was, as well as His authoritative demeanor as He recited Scripture, He always maintained that most humanly noble form of humility and controlled power that characterized His servanthood.

As we look at the finished tapestry of His brief life we can see how carefully He crafted as well as cloaked the expressions of deity so as to be clearly seen by those who would believe, and to be dismissed with hatred by those who refused to believe the evidence He provided. In this we recognize the essence and purpose of Scripture, which by analogy, is that awesome incredible tapestry. God has rolled it out for all of mankind to see and to

appreciate. However, only the believers and those who will become believers see and appreciate it for what it is. The world however, only sees the back side of the tapestry which to them is an ugly, absurd formless mass of randomly crossing threads, just as God intended it to be for those who would reject Him.

This strange dichotomy of His being both God and Man was most evident during those last 15 hours from Gethsemane to His death on the cross. All of the major segments of those fateful hours had been predicted through the prophets. While He admitted both to the priests, and again to Pilate, that He indeed was the son of God the Messiah, and the King of the Jews, He nevertheless took His scourging and all other indignities as a man, silent and not at all invoking His available godly power to alter or avoid anything that man's hatred chose to inflict.

Finally, while yet suffering the horrible pains of the cross, only minutes before His death, He expressed His divine love, even for His torturers, by praying to the Father for their forgiveness and then He unmistakably expressed His godly power by promising the repented thief that he would be with Him in paradise. Thus we see at the very end of His mortal Son of Man life, the manifestations of both the Son of God, and the Son of Man, each expressed at different times in strange and even troubling ways. They are troubling only to those who do not know Him, and those who have yet to study and learn what God has revealed in His Holy Word.

So what is the bottom line of all of this? How can we come to grips with the truth of this absurdity that there was a man born of woman. How can we reconcile, and be completely at ease with the fact that this God-Man would live in the humblest subservient manner, yet perform miracles and utter profound truths that were exclusively within the province of God? In one sense, He appeared to be like a fully homogenized mixture of omnipotence and impotence, as unlikely a blending as oil is with water.

Most who have studied Scripture, probably have found nothing new in what they have read here. I dare say that more than a few of these are still troubled by some of Jesus'

apparent limitations. I believe this can be reconciled in our hearts if we will accept the tapestry analogy. That is that every word, every idea, every thought and every action regarding this, and all things in the fullness of Scripture was fully planned and every thread intricately and perfectly woven at, or before the world began. You must know that if your view of any portion of the tapestry seems unclear, it is not the tapestry that is at fault, it is your own limited spiritual eyesight that is the problem. There is no randomness, fault, improvisation or impulsive element in any part of Scripture. Every verse is there having been pre-planned for our learning (Romans 15:4). *“¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ that the man of God (Christians) may be perfect. (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* (2Timothy 3:16, 17) emphasis mine. What this is saying, is that ALL Scripture is by inspiration – God breathed, that it is by His authorship, and that it is for doctrine, that is telling us what is right, it is for reproof, that is telling us what is not right; and for correction, that is telling us how to get it right.

As we proceed through our studies of Scripture and find what seem to be mistakes, conflicting statements, or concepts that we cannot understand, we should never doubt the inerrancy of the Word, or the inherent value of any verse or precept. Instead, we should rejoice in it, because it contains something in need of discovery and deeper understanding. If we pray in sincere unwavering single-mindedness and confidence, the Holy Spirit has promised to reveal all things that are in accordance with God’s will for us to know. (James 1:5, 6) Yet even so there are things that are not for us to know, just as even Jesus the Man did not know while He was on earth, such things as the time of His coming back for His church. Also, as we continue to study Scripture, we realize that there are some things that God has chosen not to reveal because we would not be able to understand them, or because such knowledge would do us harm, Remember the harm we all suffer because Adam acquired what he wasn’t suppose to, the knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus could not have walked the earth with the full expression of His godness, nor did He shed or veil it completely so as to have no supernatural countenance or expressed power. If He had walked in the fullness of God, He would have caused such fear and awe as to have made Him unapproachable, and therefore effectually impotent regarding the things He came to accomplish. How could He, in the full expression and power of God, preach humility or effectively deliver the messages to both the poor and the proud? How could He in that state be condemned or beaten or hung on the cross to die? Had He come as a Theophany, He couldn't have qualified as a man, that is as a kinsmen and therefore as the Kinsmen Redeemer to take away the sins of the world. In order to fulfill the many prophecies, that spoke clearly of His God-ordained purpose, He had to be a bonafide Man, from physical birth to physical death. As a theophany, He would have neither qualified as man nor been able to suffer physical death. We often read that something had to occur in order that prophecy be fulfilled. When we read this we should realize that whatever the event, it was long ago already woven in God's tapestry. The prophecy is merely an advanced notice of what will happen at its appointed time.

As we seek to examine Jesus' presence on earth, we must come to the realization that His Son of God, Son of Man powers and limitations, were in the exact proportion needed in order to fulfill His purpose, which was divinely planned and implemented in every detail. The state of His being, and the conduct of His life were minutely choreographed. When we find God's ways strange or difficult to understand, or sometime even difficult to believe, we need to recall God's Words to Isaiah in chapter 55:8 where He assures us that neither His thoughts nor His ways are like ours. Where there are differences, whose must we conclude are the only right ones?

While it may seem impossible at first, with sufficient committed study of His Word, in true faith, and continued prayer for guidance, our thoughts and our ways will surely at least in an elementary way, approach toward a mergence with His, and thus to an ever increasing joy, love, knowledge and acceptance of "What it is all about."