

The Gospel

The Humility of

God

Christology

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I am not attracted to poverty. I am not sure if I can correctly define what it means to classify someone as poor. When I was a child, a man we called Old Ben lived near our home in Maryland. Ben did odd jobs as a laborer when he was not working on the back of a garbage truck. Occasionally he would be found lying drunk near the road. Our neighbor, with my father's help, would drive him to his dilapidated home back in the field and put him in bed. He had very little and certainly was considered poor. We don't find people raising their children with the hope that some day they can become poor like Old Ben.

But there is one exception that comes to mind: God.

Luke 2:21-24

"21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been

completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord
23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), (to devote,)
24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

These few verses are full of redemptive pictures or, in other words, of salvation.

Jewish parents understood that according to God's covenant with Abraham, a male child, on the eighth day, was to be circumcised (Gen. 17). Circumcision was a sign given by God that represented union with God. In Genesis 17:7 we read, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

Second, we are told that the one to be circumcised in this instance was Jesus, whose name in the original means salvation. Matthew quotes the angel saying, (1:21) "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Third, if you look at Exodus 13:2 and 12 you will find that God instructs His people about consecrating the firstborn child or firstborn of their flock:

"2 Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."

This instruction was given at the time God was delivering His people out of Egypt. In following this aspect of the law, the Jewish parent was reminded of the time of slavery

in Egypt and the freedom given to them by God. This was a foreshadowing of the salvation to come in Christ.

All of this would have been running through the minds of Joseph and Mary as they were on their way to the temple in Jerusalem. There is, however, another dimension to the passage: **poverty**. This aspect of the passage needs to be considered in reference to Christ. In doing so, appreciate God's view of poverty and its implications within the gospel. Here we discover the extent of Christ's humiliation.

The Presence of the Poor

It is possible that you might not notice the presence of poverty in this passage. It is here in a number of ways. Joseph and Mary are to offer a sacrifice to the Lord when consecrating the baby Jesus. What governs this offering? If we turn back to the book of **Leviticus** we see that God had given the following instructions:

- "12:1 The LORD said to Moses,
 2 'Say to the Israelites: A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period.
 3 On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.
 4 Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over.
 5 If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.
 6 When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the

priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering.
 7 He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood. These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl.
8 If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean'."

We would assume that Joseph and Mary had some financial means to travel from Galilee, look for lodging, and care for themselves for a period of time. And yet, it was limited, and when it came time for her purification according to the law of Moses, the offering made was consistent with what would be given by someone who was poor.

I find this to be amazing in light of the fact that these two people were given the responsibility of caring for the Redeemer and yet had little means. We would have done the opposite. We would have made sure that every resource needed was there so that the Christ-Child never would have come close to being in need. But that was not the case. Thus we are reminded, perhaps informed, of a perspective on poverty that is rarely spoken about.

We often think of poverty as a sign of someone who has not been blessed by God. Certainly that is not the case with the picture of poverty and humiliation that Christ presents.

Recall Christ's words to the disciples in Bethany from Matthew 26:

“6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper,
7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

9 This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me."

That statement was made some 2,000 years ago, and nothing today makes us believe that Christ's word is untrue. At present a large portion of the world's population is poor. In South Africa much poverty exists within the townships. In a nation of approximately 43 million people, over 85% are black native Africans, and around 40% are without work and have little hope of ever finding it. Their living conditions vary. Some live in homes similar to those you would find elsewhere. Others live in makeshift structures made with scraps. Only 15% of the people in the entire nation have electricity. A high-demand business is waxed candle-making. The odd thing is that many in other parts of Africa would love to live in South Africa because it has so much more to offer than where they live.

Why does God allow so many to live an existence of such poverty? I am not sure. Is it possible that **one of the reasons why the poor will always be with us is so that we might have a better understanding of the extent of God's love.**

The Depth of God's Poverty - God's call to Poverty

The most striking part about the passage in Luke is something that is hard to grasp. I stated that a parent who loves his or her child would not want him to grow up and become poor. In fact a great portion of any child's training is dedicated to learning how to be productive so that there will be no threat of poverty.

However Luke reminds us that God called His son to a life of poverty. God-in-the-flesh was the greatest act of humility that could ever take place. Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 says:

"9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Consider the nature of God as provided in Isaiah 40:

“10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?

14 Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right

way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?
 15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.”

Later on in the same chapter he writes:

“23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
 24 No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.
 25 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
 26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.”

What a powerful God! Yet in chapter 53 we are told of the extent of His humility:

“3 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.
 4 Surely he took up our infirmities
 and carried our sorrows,
 yet we considered him stricken by God,
 smitten by him, and afflicted.
 5 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.”

How is it that the One who created the universe and world in which we live, and keeps it running in an orderly manner by His providence, would be placed under the care of a Jewish couple who were too poor to give the normal offering of a lamb? Wait-- look again at the passage: The lamb is present!

Our Lord Jesus, who is King, humbled himself as our great High Priest and entered into a state of humiliation and suffering.

Did Christ’s suffering come only when His life was concluding? It has been pointed out that Christ suffered His entire life. Born in a place fit only for animals, He was forced, with his parents, to run and hide in Egypt. He lived in a state of poverty as a child. It was Christ’s humiliation that we see when He entered the wilderness for forty days and nights. He was not only insulted by Satan, but constantly dealt with verbal abuse from the religious leaders and Jewish people at large. No doubt even the unbelief of his own disciples would have been humbling. As we take a look at the end of His ministry we see the humiliation intensify. He must face the taking of the cup as seen in Mark 14:13, 34. He is handed over by one of His own resulting in His arrest, trial before Pilot, flogging, and people screaming for His crucifixion, followed by the painful walk to Golgotha. The sentence carried out as Christ was hung on a tree was perhaps the zenith of His humiliation, but not the end. He spoke a number of times while on the cross and then breathed His last.

For one to experience death is an admission one has offended God and therefore is experiencing the penalty. The Scriptures are clear that when Adam and Eve fell into sin God said the result of disobedience would be death. It is judicial in nature. God has withdrawn Himself from their presence along with His blessings. Yet it is not only a withdrawal of His blessing but a pouring out of His wrath. That is what Christ spoke of when praying about the cup (Ezekiel 23:32-34). Christ's ultimate humiliation was to take upon Himself God's wrath, anger that belonged to sinners.

Indeed, when Christ's parents came to the temple that day to fulfill the law, they did bring a lamb. Perhaps the pair of doves were not needed after all.

Remember the words of John:

“29The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” –John 1:29

It is one thing for a person of wealth to give a portion of his income to some worthy cause or personal need. It is another matter for the person to give sacrificially for what causes them to truly sacrifice their lives. This is exactly what we have in the gospel— Christ's becoming poor so that others would become wealthy, "so that you through his poverty might become rich" - 2 Corinthians 8:8

-Reflections -

1. How do you define poverty? Is it always evil?

2. What is your initial response to Christ's humiliation?

3. Would the gospel make sense without Christ's humiliation?

4. Is it possible that Christ's humiliation is confusing to the non-believer?

5. Read Philippians 2:5-8. What does it mean for you to have the same attitude as that of Jesus Christ?

“5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

7but made himself nothing, taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

6. What impact should the humiliation of God have upon the church?

7. What impact should the humiliation of God have on the government community of Washington?