

# Universal Anthem

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Think about national anthems. Think for a moment about our national anthem. Francis Scott Key penned the beginning lines on a ship while under British custody during the bombardment of Fort McHenry on September 14, 1814. He was inspired, as he watched the battle, by a single United States flag which defiantly kept flying over the fort throughout the fight. So, we have the line—“And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.”<sup>1</sup> And now, 205-years later, those lines still inspire many Americans.

This morning, we’re going to study an anthem that puts Scott Key’s to shame. We’re going to look at a hymn written about the most important battle in the history of the universe. And, the goal of this hymn is the transformation of our worldview—the goal is to sculpt in us the very mindset of God. Let’s see how.

## **Philippians 2:5-11**

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

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<sup>1</sup> I gleaned much of this material from *This Day in History*. You can read more [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

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Well, in the last few weeks, I've only had a couple questions to ask of the text. Today, I have three. (So, we're really changing it up here.) (1<sup>st</sup>) We're going to ask—**What are we commanded to do?** (2<sup>nd</sup>) We're going to ask—**What does Christ do?** And, (3<sup>rd</sup>) we're going to ask—**What does God do?** Let's ask each question in turn.

### 1. What are we commanded to do (v. 5)?

Did you see the command? It's in the first verse of today's text. Paul tells us to have—in our relationship with others—"the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (v. 5). The apostle doesn't tell us to... "try really hard to have the same mindset as Christ" or to... "have a similar kind of mindset as Christ." He tells us to have the same one! Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul commands this!

In unison with Vizzini from the awesome cult-classic film *The Princess Bride*, you should, upon hearing this command, exclaim—"Inconceivable!"<sup>2</sup>

How can we possibly put on the same frame of mind as Christ?! See the world as he does?! Truly have his divine perspective on things?! It seems like a rotten trick. It seems—*Inconceivable!*

There've been times when my kids have asked to do some adult-ish task alone, like bake a cake or build a treehouse all by themselves. And, every once in a while, we will let them try. The result is, of course, an absolute disaster—an inedible cake or really dangerous treehouse. And, in a similar way, for us to try to put on the mind of Christ all by ourselves would be a disaster. We'd be crushed by it when we fail or puffed up by it when we suppose we've succeeded.

But, friends, the Lord never commands something of us without equipping us to succeed. When God calls us to something, he gives us what's necessary to do it. He gives us himself. He gives us his power. He works in and thru us.

And, that's true here. Remember what God already promised us in this letter? Think back a couple weeks ago. Recall what he promised—what Paul prayed.

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<sup>2</sup> [You're welcome.](#)

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more...so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ (1:9-11).*

Where does the power to discern as our Lord discerns, to think about things as Christ Jesus thinks about things, come from? It comes thru being united to Christ. It comes from being in Christ and having his Holy Spirit in us. We don't do it alone. We have this mindset by working for it in unity with and by the power of our Lord. And, as we do that, we will progressively think and act more like Christ does. Amen? Amen. Praise God for his power in us!

Let's dig now into our second question.

## **2. What does Christ do (vv. 6-8)?**

As we ask that question, let's look again at three of these verses. Ask yourself, what does Paul tell us Christ Jesus does in these verses?

*Who [referring to Christ], being in very nature God, / did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; / rather, he made himself nothing / by taking the very nature of a servant, / being made in human likeness. / And being found in appearance as a man, / he humbled himself / by becoming obedient to death— / even death on a cross (vv. 6-8)!*

What did you hear? What did you see? What is the Christ up to in these verses? I counted three things that he does.

- Christ Jesus doesn't use his divine authority for his own advantage (v. 6).
- Instead, he makes himself nothing—a mere servant, a human being (v. 7).
- And, finally, he humbles himself to a criminal's death on a cross (v. 8).

One of the wrong things often said of Jesus is that he's some kind of victim. Many have tried to make the crucifixion out to be some ill-fated historical tragedy—like Jesus was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, some poor-helpless peon who got crushed by political forces outside his control.

Friends, nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus humbled himself; he wasn't humbled. Jesus chose the path of humility; it wasn't forced upon him. Jesus chose his death; he was not some helpless casualty. Friends, at any moment, the incarnate Son of God could have *not* done these things. He was always in complete control.

This is the picture of authentic humility and real power. Just think about that for a moment. Think about what makes for authentic humility as well as real power. I would argue that the two are *only* truly and clearly seen at the crucifixion of Jesus. That's where we see authentic humility. That's where we see real power.

Winston Churchill once famously quipped of one of his political opponents—“He's a humble man...[with]...much to be humble about.”<sup>3</sup> And, that's really true of all of us; isn't it? Every human being who has ever lived should be quite humble because we all have so much in our lives to be humble about. Take any great leader; look deeply enough into anyone's life; and, you'll find things that should reduce him or her to humility. (Just last Wednesday, I read an article from NPR about Gandhi and his diminishing legacy—in light of revelations concerning his views about race and about sex.<sup>4</sup>)

Yet, this shouldn't surprise us as believers because the doctrine of human sin tells us that all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This doctrine applies to Gandhi, to Mother Teresa, to whoever your hero is, and to you and to me. We all have a ton of stuff to be humble about.

Except for Jesus! His is a true humility because he has no reason to be humble. Perfectly holy—every thought, every feeling, every action—perfect in righteousness before his Father in heaven. Friends, authentic humility is demonstrating humility when, in fact, the person has nothing to be humble about.

And, that's what we see in Jesus.

We, however, also see real power in Jesus. You see, real power isn't the ability to exercise brute force. It's not being able to wipe entire nation states off the planet whenever you please. Rather, real power is not doing all that even though you could, even though it might be easier if you did, even though it might be your right to do it. And, this is exactly the kind of power Jesus displays as he hangs on the cross.

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<sup>3</sup> See [this](#) article from Church History Review.

<sup>4</sup> You can read that article [here](#).

To save others, he cannot save himself, even though he's completely capable of doing so. Think about all the power at his disposal—the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe—yet, he remains on the cross for those who torture and mock him. That's real power! That's true power in humility!

This is the mind of Christ. This is what the Lord thru Paul calls us to engender in our relationship with one another and the world around us. But, how does it look in practice? Well, it'll look different for each of us.

But, here are a couple general thoughts to help us apply it to our lives.

- Think about the areas in which you are most prone to judge other people. These are usually areas of pride in your life. (If you're a pretty good parent, then you'll likely judge other people's parenting. If you're fairly patient with others, then you'll likely judge those who are impatient with others.) If you want to work on a Christlike humility, then confess your judgments to a friend. Ask them to help you. That, in itself, is a move toward humility. It's a move toward the mind of Christ in you.
- Now, think about the areas of power you have. (Maybe it's with your kids or your spouse. Maybe it's influence in your school or your place of work.) How do you use those places of power to serve them—even sacrificially? What could you do to serve them with the power that most other people would only use to serve themselves? When you begin to think about power like this, it's a step toward the mind of Christ in you.

Well, we need to move to our last question.

### **3. What does God do (vv. 9-11)?**

So, we've just looked at authentic humility and real power in Jesus. Paul sang about Christ's willing and active choice to die on the cross for us. Now, once more, let's look at what the Father does in response. Look at the last stanza of the anthem.

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place / and gave him the name that is above every name, / that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, / in heaven and on earth and under the earth, / and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, / to the glory of God the Father (vv. 9-11).*

It is our God's character to delight in elevating those who display true humility and who sacrifice and serve others. It is how he has behaved towards us in the person of Jesus; it's how he has treated us in Christ's humility and with his power.

But, this isn't how we naturally think. We don't think of elevating the lowly. We don't think of elevating a humble servant. Just consider our clichés.

- It's a dog eat dog world.
- Only the strong survive.
- You're only as strong as your weakest link.
- It's eat or be eaten.
- The cream will rise to the top.

I'm sure I could go on. The point is this. What God does here with Christ Jesus is our paradigm. It teaches us how to think differently about greatness.

Jesus died a criminal's death on a cross. No one thinks of that as the measure of greatness. No one thinks of that as the measure of success. But, God elevates him above all of creation. Christ Jesus reigns over all—every knee will bow before him; every tongue will confess that he is Lord. Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection become nothing less than our model for greatness.

And, Jesus teaches us the same lesson; doesn't he?

*...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all (Mark 10:43-44).*

Or:

*...all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 14:11).*

Brothers and sisters, my prayer for this church is continual growth in humility and service and sacrificial love. There is no greater sign that our Lord is among us than these characteristics in practice. All the best theology, without these attributes, is just empty, ugly talk—a resounding gong or clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1). The Lord will not be pleased with it.

But, when our faith leads us to humble ourselves for the benefit and the glory of God, when we look at our influence and attempt to use it to advance the gospel, the Lord is pleased with us. No one else may ever recognize it. You may be mocked and ridiculed for it. You may lose influence because of it. Nevertheless, your Father in heaven is smiling on it. And, one day, you'll hear and receive his commendation and elevation—"Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).