

Greatness in Humility • John 1:1-5, 14; Philipians 2:5-11

I want to talk to you about Jesus. Not about religion or churches or denominations. Not about controversial doctrines or historic institutions: just Jesus. Because when we experience Jesus, when we meet him and get to know him, all these other things become unimportant.

For someone who is so famous it is surprising that we know nothing about his physical appearance. You would think that at least one of his biographers would have described his height and weight, the color of his hair and his eyes or the shade of his skin. Is it that they didn't notice or that they considered it unimportant? Or did they become so enthralled with the man that his appearance didn't matter?

His story starts before the beginning. Whether you calculate the beginning of time to be 4000 BC or 4000 billion trillion BC he was there before the beginning. He is more ancient than time itself. Here's the way his best friend and biographer John describes it in John 1:1-5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

It's so simple and yet so profound. It refers to a time before Jesus was called Jesus. I don't know if he even had a name at that time. If he did we're not told what that name was. So his best friend John simply called him "Word." It was a Greek philosophic term but it was also a nickname. Words are invisible but powerful. That's who he was before he was called Jesus—invisible and powerful. If we were choosing a term today perhaps we might call him "Password" because a password can access everything that is valuable and secret and important.

Jesus touched those that no one else would touch. He loved those that were unlovable. He embraced those that were the outcasts of society. He sided with the poor. He washed the feet of his followers. He honored women in a society that didn't.

Back then—before the beginning—whatever we call him, he was with God and he was God. And he was spectacular. He made everything. Everything that exists in the entire universe was created by him. And he is the light, the source of all life.

The truth is that our best human languages are not adequate to describe all that he was or what he was like. So we guess. We use our imagination and we describe him in our terms and in our experiences.

What must his heaven have been like around 5 BC or 1 BC? He was unquestionably the boss. Everyone in heaven knew him and everyone in heaven adored him. An infinite number of angels constantly praised him for how good and great he was—and it wasn't flattery. He was absolutely worth it. And whatever he wanted he got. He could beckon an angel or simply speak with power. He was comfortable. He was invisible so he could go anywhere at any time without any restrictions whatsoever. No one told him what to do. He was God. In our biggest thoughts and most extravagant speech we cannot begin to describe him. It would be like a gnat trying to describe a galaxy only a billion times more.

So how do we compare what it was like for him? Suppose you had a billion trillion dollars—more than you could ever spend. Imagine a house so large you couldn't visit all the rooms in a lifetime. Pretend that all your needs are satisfied. You are never sick, never tired or uncomfortable, never sad, never uninformed. Life is better than you ever imagined it could be.

Do I think it was like that for Jesus back before he was Jesus? No, not really. I think it was infinitely better. We can't really imagine how good it was.

And then came Christmas.

"Son of God" because that's what the Bible calls him—God the Father struck a deal with him that he would give all this up, leave heaven behind and

come to earth. Earth was this tiny little speck out there in one of the galaxies he had created, a place inhabited by human creatures that were in rebellion. And he would not only go there, but he would actually become a human. That's what the Bible tells us in John 1:14: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*

I doubt that the angels could comprehend how this could even be possible. While they had always believed that God could do anything, this seemed to be a stretch even for God. How does God shrink down to human size? How does God become a creature? And if he does become a creature, does that mean that he has to eat and sleep and go to the bathroom? And how long does all this humanity stuff last?

Actually, it was more dramatic by far than even an angel could imagine. The Son of God didn't shrink down to the size of a man but to the size of an embryo. God became microscopic. He lived for nine months inside a young virgin. The Light of the World was in complete darkness. The Word of God was silent. It was unimaginable.

What do you think of when you think of humility? Do you not think of someone who is great and powerful becoming a "nobody"? Is it not giving up fame, power and fortune? The New Testament says about Jesus in Philippians 2:6-7, *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."*

When he was born he was named Jesus, but he was no less God. And so as God, but now human, he submitted to all the things that happen to humans from birth to circumcision to being nursed at his mother's breast to having his diapers changed. He had to learn to talk, he who was the Word. He had to learn to walk, this Creator of the universe. He had to learn to feed himself, to read and write. He experienced the stuff of growing up from neighborhood bullies to puberty to learning a profession and making a living.

Was all this embarrassing? Humiliating? Infuriating? Amazingly, he did it all with dignity and grace. God became human—and not a human king but a human servant.

It takes my breath away. It kind of makes me wince. I want to look the other way. I am embarrassed. God should not have to be like me. But there's more.

He not only humbled himself at Christmas but he humbled himself all the way to the cross.

I confess that my preference is to fight back when I think I'm right and others are wrong. I want to defend myself. I'm easily offended if my pride is hurt. I want to fight for my rights.

But, not Jesus! He let them laugh at him. He let them accuse him of things he had not done. He let them think they were better. He let them strip off his clothes. He let them beat him almost to death. They caused indescribable pain. They crucified him!

And he died. God died. The Creator of the universe, the Author of life, died! I don't know what it feels like to die, but Jesus did. I don't want to die, but Jesus volunteered to die. I want to die when I'm old and in my sleep, but Jesus died when he was young and on a public cross. I don't even like to think about it.

Jesus was God. Jesus was human. And Jesus was humble. I don't really get it, and I certainly don't have the vocabulary to explain it, but I am impressed beyond comprehension. Jesus was so great, so good, so humble.

Do you know the story of Edwin Hubble? The Hubble telescope is named after him. He was a truly astonishing man. In 1906, when he was a teenager, Hubble competed in an Illinois track meet and in one day won the pole vault, shot put, discus throw, hammer throw, standing high jump, running high jump and was on the winning mile-relay team. He won seven First Place ribbons in one track meet. He came in third in the broad jump and that same year set a record for the high jump in Illinois. He was one of the premier athletes in America.

Hubble was described as "handsome almost to a fault." They called him Adonis. He studied physics and astronomy at the University of Chicago and became one of the first Rhodes Scholars at Oxford University.

He began his career as an astronomer at the Mount Wilson Observatory in California in 1919 at a time when astronomers believed that the Milky Way was the only galaxy. In 1924 he wrote a landmark paper showing that the universe contains many galaxies. He was the first to conceive that the universe is expanding. He basically changed the way scientists view the universe in which we live.

He was an amazing man, but for Edwin Hubble none of that was enough. On his resume he claimed

he was a successful lawyer in Kentucky in his 20s and 30s, but he lied; he taught school in Indiana. He bragged that he was a World War I hero. The truth is he arrived in France one month before the Armistice was signed and probably never heard a shot fired. He told people stories about rescuing drowning swimmers. He never actually saved anyone. He claimed that he fought an exhibition fight with a world-class boxer and threw a knock-down punch. That fight never took place.

Edwin Hubble was great but not humble. Jesus was God . . . and he was humble.

Jesus' whole life is a drama of humility. Between Christmas and the cross Jesus touched those that no one else would touch. He loved those that were unlovable. He embraced those that were the outcasts of society. He sided with the poor. He washed the feet of his followers. He honored women in a society that didn't.

Jesus is my hero. If there is anyone I want to be like, it's Jesus. Philippians 2:5-11 says:

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

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

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

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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The promise and prediction of God the Father is that Jesus will be recognized by everyone everywhere. Jesus, even before he was given the name Jesus, trusted God the Father enough to turn over to him the keys of heaven. He surrendered the independent use of his divine powers and attributes.

He left heaven, totally trusting that God the Father would take care of him and make everything right in the end.

Who do you trust to that extent? Who would you trust with Power of Attorney over all your assets or the PIN number for your credit card or your bank card? Who would you trust with the keys to your house when you are outside alone on a sub-zero winter night? Who would you trust with the pages of your diary? Who would you allow to hypnotize you in front of a crowd?

Jesus trusted the Father enough to give up everything, to serve others and to suffer more than anyone before or since. He trusted God to make everything work out right in the end. And the Father guarantees him that one day the entire human race will know who Jesus is. One day everyone will give him the honor he deserves. One day *“at the name of Jesus every knee (will) 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.”*

The Missouri River is little more than a trickle at Three Forks, Montana, but it's a torrent at St. Louis where it meets up with the Mississippi River. You can step over the Mississippi in northern Minnesota but at New Orleans the river flows at 600,000 cubic feet per second. What started out small became great. Jesus started as God, humbled himself to a human trickle and someday will be exalted beyond our imagination or description.

So what do we do with this picture of Jesus? Certainly we can learn about humility and seek to grow the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. Surely we should be drawn to him as our Savior and Lord. But, most of all, let us just be impressed. See Jesus. Understand Jesus. Appreciate Jesus. Experience Jesus. He is so great . . . so good . . . so amazing . . . so wonderful . . . so humble.

Jesus trusted the Father enough to give up everything, to serve others and to suffer more than anyone before or since.

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