

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
JESUS IS THE MESSIAH
MATTHEW 11:1-6; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11
10/01/2017



MAIN POINT

When we doubt Jesus is who He said He is or whether following Him is worth it, these questions should point us back to Scripture.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your favorite hymn? Why?

Is there a particular line or phrase in that song you love?

Was there a particular time in your life when the song was meaningful to you?

Songs touch us in deeply personal and powerful ways. Philippians 2:5-11 might have been one of the earliest Christian hymns. It powerfully teaches the core doctrines of the person of Jesus Christ and is a wonderful summary of the character and work of Jesus, which we see on display in today's passage from Matthew 11. All of us need to be reminded of the truth of Jesus' identity from time to time, especially during seasons of doubt.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Matthew 11 describes a time when John the Baptist, forerunner of the Messiah, voiced doubts about Jesus' true identity. Like John the Baptist, we all have times when we question whether Jesus is the real deal, and whether following Him is worth it. Instead of being stumbling blocks to our faith, these questions should point us back to Him, and back to the pages of Scripture that remind us that eternity with Him is worth the pain of the wait.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 11:1-6.

Read Matthew 14:1-5. How did John land in prison?

Why might prison have raised doubts for John about Jesus' identity?

While John was in prison, he was dependent on other people to relay Jesus' actions to him, and the reports he received confused him as to whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah. Even though he previously expressed faith in Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 3:14; John 1:29-37; 3:22-30), John's doubts here were likely the result of his prolonged imprisonment and his disappointment that a "baptism of fire" had not yet occurred (Matt. 3:11-12).

What kinds of "prisons" tend to bring out doubts for you regarding Jesus?

In those periods of discouragement and doubt, what most renews your courage and faith?

What six things listed in these verses characterize Jesus' ministry? Of these six, which is the most powerful to you and why?

Jesus confirmed His identity as the Christ by appealing to His miraculous and gracious works (Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1). He never chastised John for asking the question. Instead, he held up John as a model prophet and follower (vv. 7-11). In verse 6, Jesus pronounced blessing on those who were willing to suffer without being offended at Him. John thus serves as a model for those who persevere in faith despite suffering. He is a model of expectant waiting captured in Advent. In Philippians 2, Paul further affirmed Jesus' identity and work, centered around the Son of God's humble sacrifice on our behalf.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11.

What do we learn about Jesus from these verses?

What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven and become human? What did He give up in doing so? What did we gain from His action?

Though culture often views humility as a weakness, in what ways did Jesus' humility convey and require strength?

Paul pointed to Christ's love for others and His obedient service to God as examples for His Philippian friends. We are to live with an attitude of humility as we relate to others. With a healthy, balanced view of ourselves, we neither think too highly nor too little of ourselves. With that wholesome attitude, we can serve others effectively.

Out of this entire passage, what part of the description of Jesus is most moving to you? Why?

Why do you think the church might have sung words like these in their early days?

How would singing these words serve as both a protection for and a motivation to the church?

God's exaltation of Christ is because of His death of humiliation on the cross. Our Lord did nothing out of selfishness, nor was He disobedient at any time to His Father's will. He did not seek His own glory. And, even in His exalted state, all of the glory will belong to the heavenly Father. In this passage, Paul lifted up Christ's self-sacrificial love for others and His obedient service to God as an example to the Philippians.

How specifically do verses 10 and 11 give you confidence to continually proclaim the gospel?

Paul concludes this section with a firm promise. Jesus will be named as Lord by all of creation. To some, this fact serves as a great comfort, for they know that when Jesus is declared Lord, all the wrongs and injustices of the world will be put

right. For others, these verses are an ominous reality, for even those under the earth will bow their knee before King Jesus. The question is not whether Jesus will be named Lord; the question is when.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How might you remind yourself daily of the character of Christ this week?

Has the reality of Jesus' lordship penetrated all the spheres of your life? Which area of your life is stubbornly resisting the truth of His reign?

PRAY

In your prayer time this week, use Philippians 2:5-11 as a guide. Praise Jesus for His humility and His willingness to sacrifice. Acknowledge His glory, and state your belief that He will be declared as Lord in the earth. Then ask for the resolve to dwell on Him regularly this week, that you might have a similar attitude to Him.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 11:1-6

11:1. The words when Jesus had finished are important for understanding the structure of the Gospel. Matthew divided his Gospel into three major sections. He introduced new major sections with the words "from then on Jesus began to" (Matt. 4:17; 16:21). These transitional statements divide the Gospel into the introduction (Matt. 1:1–4:16), body (Matt 4:17–16:20), and conclusion (Matt. 16:21–28:20). Matthew also divided his Gospel into five major blocks of teaching, each of which concludes with a summary statement (Matt. 8:1; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Some scholars believe these five major discourses were meant to correspond to the five books of Moses and to confirm Jesus' identity as the new Moses.

11:2-3. John the Baptist previously expressed faith in Jesus as Messiah (3:14; John 1:29-37; 3:22-30). John's doubts here were likely the result of his prolonged imprisonment and his disappointment that a "baptism of fire" had not yet occurred (Matt. 3:11-12). Jesus identified Himself as the One anointed by the Spirit in Isaiah 61:1-3. However, Isaiah 61:1 promised that the Anointed One would "proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners." John probably interpreted the prophecy literally and thus mistakenly expected a miraculous release from prison.

11:4-5. Jesus confirmed His identity as the Christ by appealing to His miraculous and gracious works (Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1).

11:6. Jesus pronounced blessing on those who were willing to suffer without being offended at Him. John thus serves as a model for those who persevere in faith despite suffering.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

These verses from Paul paint a poignant picture of the humility Christ revealed in His incarnation and His substitutionary death. Paul urged them to exchange their selfish motives for the Savior's attitude. While Christ has all cause for glorying, being God Himself, He willingly surrendered Himself for the needs of others. The Son of God did not seek His own advantage, that is, He refused to ignore others' needs. The passage states that Jesus Christ made himself nothing. The result was that the Savior set aside His glory to minister grace and mercy to those who are most undeserving of such blessings.

Max Anders - Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary*

2:5. Paul proceeds to give examples for the Philippians to emulate. The first is Christ. He is the supreme example of humility, love, and selflessness. Christ's model brings to life Paul's words. As believers are united with Christ, we are to have the same attitude as Christ, one of humility. Paul expresses the same thought in Ephesians 4:2: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." All believers should share this humble, selfless mind-set of Christ.

2:6. Jesus is the preeminent example of humility. He has always been God. John 1:1 speaks of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As God, he did not selfishly grasp hold of or tightly hold to his position as equal with God. Instead, he was willing to leave his high position in heaven temporarily and to give himself over to serving our needs. Although he set aside the rights and privileges of being God, he remained God.

2:7. Jesus made himself nothing or "emptied himself." Scholars refer to this important statement as kenosis, from the Greek word. By becoming a man, Jesus did not lay aside his deity. Charles C. Ryrie sheds light on this event: "Christ didn't become any less God, but he chose not to use some of his divine attributes. This involved a veiling of his preincarnate glory (John 17:5) and the voluntary nonuse of some of his divine prerogatives during the time he was on earth (Matt. 24:36). For God to become a man was humbling enough, but he was willing to go even further. Christ could have come to earth in his true position as King of the universe. Instead, he took the role of a servant. The Creator chose to serve his creatures.

Jesus did not come into existence as a baby in Bethlehem. As God, he always existed. He did take on human nature as Jesus of Nazareth being made in human likeness but remained sinless (Heb. 4:15). Christ did not have a halo as paintings sometimes portray him. He entered this earthly life looking like an ordinary man. Had you passed him on a street, he probably would not have caught your attention.

2:8. Jesus, looking like a man, humbled himself and became obedient to death. Mark 10:45, speaking of Christ, declares: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Second Corinthians 8:9 is also helpful: "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." Even though Jesus was equal to God the Father, he submitted to his Father's will (John 5:30).

Becoming a man was humbling. Taking the nature of a servant was more humbling. Christ went still further. He humbled himself to the extent of being willing to die like a common criminal on a cross. Crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that could be inflicted on a man (NIV Study Bible, 1865). It was the form of capital punishment the Romans employed for foreigners and slaves. Many died in this manner. Most paid the penalty for heinous crimes. Christ's death was unique! He died but not for what he had done. He was sinless with no penalty to pay. He died for others. He died to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Observe Galatians 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Isaiah 53:6 asserts: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:14-15).

2:9. Following Jesus' humility and obedience, God the Father exalted him to his rightful position of honor and glory. Through the miracle of resurrection from the dead, God gave new honor to the obedient, humble Son. The Lord Jesus Christ resumed his preincarnate rank and dignity seated at the right hand of God's throne (Heb. 12:2). God bestowed upon Jesus the name that is above every name. The exalted Christ, seated at God's right hand, was now called "Lord." He became the object of worship for the church. He became the Master instead of the servant. The church became his slaves and looked to him as their Lord. All this is a result of God's exalting the humble, obedient Son.

2:10-11. The result of Christ's humiliation was exaltation. Following his obedience, God the Father decreed at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The emphasis here is on every creature in the universe acknowledging Jesus as the Lord of the created order. God's heavenly forces and his earthly church will honor Christ. Likewise, demonic powers and people who opposed Christ and his church will bow down before him (see Isa. 45:23-24). In God's heavenly precincts, in humanity's earthly home, and in the devil's domain below the earth, every tongue will worship Jesus for who he is: The Lord, the Sovereign of the universe. These verses do not mean that all will confess him as Savior, for the Bible offers no second chances after death (Heb. 9:27). This is the combination of worship from those who believe in him and acknowledgment of his power and authority by those he has defeated. The honored place the Savior now occupies and the universal acknowledgment of his lordship in the future are all to the glory of God the Father.