

The Advent of Jesus the Messiah

Leaving The Throne Meaning & Application Philippians 2:5-8

We are in the second of a five part series on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ (His Incarnation): The Eternal Son, Leaving the Throne, Entering the Womb, Born in Humility, Tempted in All Things Like We Are. In this study from Philippians 2, we will consider what it meant for Jesus to leave His Father's side on the throne of heaven and come to this earth as a human being. We will give special attention to verse 7, examining just what Paul means by the phrase, "but emptied Himself,...." As background for this focus, I have provided a copy from a web resource dealing with the Kenosis doctrine, in which I have underlined key words that are all important in dividing between truth and error. I encourage you to read it, bearing in mind those important words.

- I. Considering the Context of this Important Christological Passage (vv.1-4)
 - A. Paul writes this passage in the context of admonishing the Philippian congregation to have mutual love toward one another in an attitude of humility, putting one another's interests ahead of their own individual concerns.
 - B. To support his exhortation he cites the sacrifice of Jesus in leaving heaven's throne and coming to earth to die for us, paying the penalty of our sins.
 - C. He exhorts us to follow Jesus' example. In and of itself this illustration has meaning because it holds forth the life of Jesus as a life and practice we actually can follow—it is a possibility.

- II. What the Passage Actually Says, and What it Implies (vv. 5-8)
 - A. Jesus existed in the form of God but did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (vv. 5-6)
These words state in unequivocal terms that
 1. Jesus the Messiah existed in the same form as the Father and the Spirit
 2. Jesus the Messiah was (is) in every way fully equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit
 3. It is not possible to exist in the very form of God and to be equal to God without actually being God
 - B. For the purpose of human redemption Jesus did not regard this equality, and all that it implies, something to be tenaciously held, but willingly emptied Himself in the interest of
 1. Taking the form of a bond servant (surrendering any autonomy He might have rightfully possessed)
 2. Being made in the likeness of men (taking a human form with all of its limitations)
 - C. As a human being, a man, a servant, He humbled Himself to become obedient to the point of death on a cross. For our sake He became subservient to the will of the Father and went obediently to the cross *because that is what we needed Him to do—no matter how much it cost Him.*

- III. What Did it Mean for God the Son to EMPTY Himself? (Kenotic theory, pros and cons)
 - A. What it does NOT mean: Jesus the Messiah never for an instant ceased to be, in any way, the Eternal Son of God. He was, is, and forever will be eternally divine, fully God. The kenosis, or emptying, could NOT mean that He in any way ceased to possess, as His own, all the attributes of deity. There are two occasions in which His deity was manifest during his earthly incarnation:
 1. The transfiguration on the mountain (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2)
 2. The arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:6)
 - B. What it DOES mean: kenosis means to make empty or to render void. While Jesus did not give up any of His divinity or divine attributes, He voluntarily set them aside and chose not to use them in any way to smooth His journey as a human being; choosing instead to live as a natural human being fully dependent upon the indwelling and empowering Spirit of God to enable Him to resist sin and perform the Father's will.
 1. Hebrews 2:17—He had to be made like His brethren in ALL things so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest
 2. John 5:30—I can do nothing on My own initiative...because I do not seek My will but the will of Him Who sent Me
 3. John 8:28—I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me
 - C. While Jesus the Messiah never surrendered His deity, He did leave in heaven, so to speak, His divine attributes so that:
 1. He could re-take the test of Adam and prevail as the Second Man and the Last Adam (I Co 15:45-47, Romans 5:12-21)
 2. He could be a meaningful and valid example of how we are to live (Ephesians 5:1-2)
 3. He could demonstrate the powerful reality of life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, assuring us that we could do the same things He did, and even greater, because He was giving us this same Holy Spirit indwelling and anointing power (John 14:11-16)

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*A Biblical and Theological
Answer to the False Doctrine of Kenosis*

Introduction

An increasingly prevalent teaching in evangelical circles, particularly in charismatic circles, is the doctrine of Kenosis. This false teaching is drawn from impure wells, it is dangerous because of the other false doctrines it leads to, and it flies in the face of the heart of Christian teaching. What is it? The doctrine teaches that the Messiah, in order to assume the form of a servant and become incarnate (into human flesh), had to give up some, several, or even all the powers and attributes of God and "live as a mere man." The advocates of this heresy, in an effort to assume an orthodox posture, try to say that the Son somehow "remains God," though He has given up all parts of that being. This teaching, which denies so much of the heart of the orthodox faith, comes from the misinterpretation and misconstruction of one Greek word.

This is a difficult mystery, but Jesus did not GIVE UP any part of His Being. To choose not to use a power is not the same thing as giving up that power. It is difficult to comprehend how the infant Jesus, or the child Jesus, could have meaningfully employed His divine attributes. (Paul Martin)

This word, and the doctrine it describes, refer to the deep, mysterious, but vitally important passage of Philippians 2:5-8, and especially in verse 7, where it says Christ "made himself of no reputation," or "emptied himself." The word in the original is *ekenosen*, from the root word *kenoo*, which can mean "to empty." The other references to the word are Romans 4:14, where the meaning is "made void," 1 Corinthians 1:17, where it means "of none effect," 1 Corinthians 9:15, where it means "make void," and 2 Corinthians 9:3, where it means "to be in vain." These references all refer to abstract principles, such as faith, preaching, or boasting--none of them refer to a person, or even to an object. Therefore, the use of the word as it is used in Philippians 2:7 is unique. The question, which shall be repeated later is "of what did Christ empty Himself?" The teachers of Kenosis say that what Christ did was to "empty Himself of all power."

The point in this paragraph is lost on me. A word is a word, and a word study involves how the word is used and what it means contextually in every passage in which it occurs. (Paul Martin)

The doctrinal area in which we are dealing is not academic, it involves the very heart and center of our faith. It is also not just a matter for scholars, but is for all of us. Kenotic teaching has become prominent in charismatic circles, and is the basis for much of what they promulgate. Indeed, much of the weird theology that surrounds the so-called "faith" movement is based on a Kenotic understanding of the incarnation, combined with a new-age-like leap of logic that says that since Jesus left His powers and attributes behind and lived as a mere man, we born-again believers are ". . . just as much an Incarnation of God as Jesus was" (Kenneth Copeland)

Clearly there is no way that we are as much an incarnation of God as Jesus was. I understand Copeland's point to an extent, but the subtle heresy in this statement is what leads to the logical conclusion that we are destined to be like gods—this is the first lie the devil told and the same one he has been offering since. (Paul Martin)

Charles Bunton

Search Bible.org and search at the site for Kenosis. The Empty God