He Emptied Himself

Philippians 2:5–11 · The emptying shows what God is like.

> *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow — in heaven and on earth and under the earth — and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
>
> Christian Standard Bible

THE SHAPE OF IT

1. Six steps down, then one word, *for this reason*, and the climb. You can't skip the bottom of the V. The way up went through the _____.
2. Most modern scholars hear a _____: something the churches were already singing. Inside a generation of his death, the church was singing that he was *in the form of God*.

WHAT HE WOULD NOT USE

3. *Form* isn't a costume. It means the form a thing has because of what it _____.
4. In plain English: he had it, and he wouldn't use it on _____.
5. *Harpagmos*: the phrase means a _____. A stroke of luck. Money that falls into your lap, yours fair and square.
6. _____ he was in the form of God, he didn't treat equality with God as something to spend on himself. The self-emptying isn't something that happened to God's nature. It's the _____ of God's nature.

WHAT HE TOOK

7. He emptied himself *by taking*. The emptying isn't subtraction. It's _____.
8. *Doulos* doesn't mean an employee. It means a _____: a person who is property. He took the form of one, and he died the death of one.

THE SENTENCE NOBODY WAS ARGUING ABOUT

9. 2 Corinthians 8:9, in the middle of a fundraising letter: *Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor.* Paul doesn't call it a sacrifice or a strategy. He calls it _____, a gift given to people who had no claim on it.

WHAT GOES UP

10. What can exaltation add to God? What gets exalted is the _____. He goes down alone. He doesn't come up alone.

WHAT IT IS FOR

11. *It is God who is working in you both to will and to work* (Philippians 2:13). Not just the doing, but the _____.

YOU WILL HEAR IT SAID At Bethlehem the Son put his divine attributes in a drawer, lived without them, and picked them back up at the resurrection.

AND THE ANSWER IS Then either God changes or the one in the manger was never God, and Paul rules it out with the very next word: he emptied himself *by taking*.

THREE WORDS PAUL CHOSE

ἁρπαγμός *harpagmos* · har-pag-MOSS · a windfall; something that's yours to cash in for yourself *Money that falls into your lap, yours fair and square.*

ἐκένωσεν *ekenōsen* · eh-KEN-oh-sen · he emptied himself; he poured himself out *Read it with the very next word: he emptied himself by taking.*

δοῦλος *doulos* · DOO-loss · a slave; a person who is someone else's property *Not a man who works for wages. A man who is owned.*

Philippi was a Roman colony, settled with retired soldiers, a town that measured a man by his rank. Everybody there knew where *slave* sat in the order of things. It sat at the bottom.

WHAT THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS SAID

> *For both natures retain their own proper character without loss: and as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God.*
>
> Leo the Great, *Tome to Flavian*, A.D. 449, read aloud at the Council of Chalcedon in 451

> *Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself.*
>
> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, Preface, a bishop in Gaul, around A.D. 180

> *For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is he said to take what, as God, he ever had.*
>
> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* I.42

TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Paul is settling a quarrel between two church members. Why reach for the incarnation? What would have been lost if he had simply told them to get along?
2. If *emptied himself* doesn't mean he laid down his divinity, what did it cost him? Give something concrete out of the Gospels: an hour, a scene, a sentence.
3. We've admired a descent, and we've been asked to make one. The passage puts one question to every advantage we hold, the same question the Son answered with his. What is that question? And why isn't it a crushing one, when the standard is a man who went to a cross? Read verse 13 (*it is God who is working in you both to will and to work*) before you answer.

THE SENTENCE TO TAKE HOME

He had every advantage in existence, and he did not spend one of them on himself.

Verses 10 and 11 borrow Isaiah 45, where the God of Israel swears that every knee will bow to him, and Paul aims it at Jesus. Nothing was taken from God by the coming down. The coming down was God. And Paul doesn't ask you to manufacture the mind of Christ. It belongs to people who are in Christ. Use what you've been given.

THE ONE THING I WOULD SAY TO SOMEBODY WHO ASKED

NEXT WEEK Romans 1, Descended from David. Paul opens his letter to the Romans with words the church was already saying together.