Philippians 2:8 He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

I mentioned a few Sundays ago in a sermon that one of the things that I do for my personal life during Lent is read or reread the book, The Crucial Hours by William Lauterbach. It is a 1977 publication but it is still a valuable and wonderful book to read especially to focus all the more on what it is that Jesus actually did for us. Well, once again, that devotional reading for myself gave me great pause as I began to prepare to write this sermon.

What struck me this time was Lauterbach’s reflections on the Centurion and the other Roman soldiers that were at the cross of Jesus! Now, it is possible that this Centurion was present for most of the trial of Jesus, in other words, from the time Jesus was presented before Pilate and through his crucifixion this Centurion may have been an eye witness of everything. He saw that Pilate condemned Jesus even though three times Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent. He heard the mockery of the Jewish leadership around Jesus during this whole time and even during the course of the crucifixion itself. He saw and heard the various statements of Jesus from the cross, and we would have to admit that some of them were rather extraordinary.

For instance, that first statement of Jesus, **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”** I have a feeling that this Centurion had attended many a crucifixion for many different people and that was the first time he had ever heard anything like that. This man, this innocent man (remember he heard Pilate three times pronounce Jesus innocent) was praying for the forgiveness of those who did this to him. The normal crucifixion brought cursing, swearing, and all sorts of bad behavior from the cross, or sometimes there was just a stoic silence but I will bet that not once did he ever hear the dying one praying for the forgiveness of his enemies and judges.

Or the statement that caused this particular introduction is the last of Jesus, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”** Again the Centurion and the other soldiers are deeply moved by what was going on. We are told of the darkness, of how at the death of Jesus an earthquake took place, and now this event. I call it “this event” because it isn’t just about the words of Jesus, it is what happened. The Gospel writers make a point of **“He gave up his spirit.”** Contemplate that. Jesus didn’t just expire, that is, slowly die as we would expect. It is clear from what is recorded that “**[Jesus] gave up his spirit.”**

I don’t completely grasp what it was that happened but it seems this last “act” of Jesus, combined with all else that took place caused this Centurion, this hardened Roman soldier to say of Jesus, **“This man was really righteous.”** (Lk23:47) and **“Truly this was the Son of God.”** (Mt 27:54, Mk 15:39),

What an extraordinary confession! This man knows nothing of Jesus. He may have heard about the guy going around doing miracles for the past three years, we don’t know. But based on just what he saw and heard in the last 6 hours this Roman soldier concludes that not only was Jesus righteous, that is innocent of deserving death, but that Jesus was also **“truly…the Son of God.”** This Centurion could see and grasp the wonder of Jesus in this short time and put that in contrast to the fact that the Jewish religious leaders couldn’t see and grasp that Jesus is the Son of God in the three years of Jesus’ ministry and miracles. His thousands upon thousands of miracles. They still couldn’t grasp the truth of Jesus!

Do we? I ask in all seriousness. I see and hear people say all the time, “Yeah, I believe in Jesus!” but by the way they live and conduct their lives evidently all they believe is that Jesus at one time existed. Because if you believed what this Centurion believed, that Jesus IS **the Son of God**, don’t you think this knowledge would truly and positively impact your life? Can you actually grasp that Jesus is the Son of God and then toss aside the teachings, life, and importance of Jesus in your life? So yeah, do we grasp the truth of Jesus! That will be our theme for today: **THE TRUTH OF JESUS!**

The passage before us is really a well-known portion of Scripture. Here is the Apostle Paul writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which means he is writing the very word and truth of God. In the opening chapter of this book Paul emphasizes the wonder and marvel of the Gospel of Jesus in his life, imprisoned though he is, and in the life of the Philippians. On the basis of this Gospel of Jesus everyone is encouraged to stand firm in the faith and to live in harmony with the truths of God. And then comes the marvelous words of our text. It is in these words that Paul is moved to lay forth exactly why Jesus is so important. He lays out the simple and eternal truth of Jesus.

Look at what he says. He begins with an encouragement, actually a command or strong exhortation: **“Let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”** In the next five verses he lays out the entire importance of Jesus. Just to contemplate these words alone is important for us. Our attitude is to be that of Jesus. Jesus was humble and obedient. Jesus was caring and giving. For those of you who wrestle with faith, note that Jesus didn’t cop the attitude: Since I know the Father so well, I will just do whatever I want.” Nope, Jesus served the Lord God in his life. Jesus in his life even served us!

That is what the next sentence proclaims but with a wonderful twist: **“Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant.”**

In many ways these are such deeply revealing words. Jesus was God. Had all the majesty, power, wisdom and authority of God in every way. But Jesus during his life on earth does not Lord it over man or even throw in the face of man his absolute divinity. Jesus appears ordinary. Born of a woman, born to a poor family. Born in a one chariot dirt town (recall Nathanael’s **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there!”**). Jesus, very humble in life. By the way, we call this “the period of humiliation of Jesus.” That Jesus while here, of his own will set aside the full use of his heavenly power and glory to live a humble life and serve as our Savior. This passage highlights that truth.

Now it is true, that Jesus during his ministry did miracles, thousands upon thousands of miracles. But even those miracles are but a shred, a veritable fingertip of the power of God that Jesus actually held. Jesus just doesn’t shove his “godhead” down our throats. And he could have. When the people of Nazareth took him out of town to throw him off the cliff there, Jesus just miraculously walked away from them. He could have with one blink of an eye wiped out the whole lot of them. He could have done many other such things, but he doesn’t. All because Jesus came to serve. He came to serve his Father and us. Hey, that’s the next statement!

**“When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.”** How did Jesus serve? By taking on the human condition, facing every trial and temptation that life and Satan could throw his way (and honestly, you and I know that Jesus had to suffer and endure greater temptations and trials than we could ever have endured. We are told he was tempted in every way and yet was without sin!). All this Jesus did for one purpose. To live pure and holy, to remain perfect and obedient to the Father in every way so that he could serve as the payment for our sins. It was all foreshadowed, predicted in the ceremonial laws of the Jewish faith. And so it was that Jesus then went to the cross.

Going to the cross was no easy task. Going to the cross meant taking on the world’s damnation and punishment of sin. Going to the cross meant enduring not just physical death but the complete terror and horror of eternal death. Seriously, if all we are going to say is that Jesus would willingly take on the pains of crucifixion for us, just that alone would be reason to hold him in high esteem. But He took on more. I don’t know that we can adequately grasp what Jesus endured. We can say, “Yeah, he took on eternal hell or eternal damnation,” but what do we really grasp of that? All we can say is that what he endured was treacherous enough for him to cry out, **“My God, my God, why have your forsaken me!”** The Son of God forsaken, completely abandoned of God. These words speak of the withdrawal of all of the goodness, compassion and care of God for his son. No, I can’t fully grasp it, but what I do grasp causes my head and heart to be filled with total awe and wonder at what Jesus would do for me, for us as our Savior. Yes, Jesus endured even death on a cross for you and me.

The end result is the greatest. **“Therefore God also 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.”** Exalted. It is not the dead that are exalted but the living. Jesus is not exalted because of his dying but rather because He came back to life. The exaltation of Jesus, the fact that He once again took up the full use of his heavenly power and glory began as Jesus descended into hell.

Did you remember that? The exaltation, the glorification of Jesus starts with his descent into hell. He did not go there to suffer for his suffering was done on the cross. Jesus went there to proclaim his victory and eternal life to all who believe. Jesus went to hell to demonstrate his complete majesty and rule even over Satan and his evil angels. And make no mistake, Jesus’ went there to make sure that every soul in hell grasped and understood that what they were suffering and enduring was because they had rejected and spurned Him and the salvation promised and now won in Him.

And then Jesus rose from the dead. He lives. He lives eternally. He has been raised and glorified forever and ever. He now sits at the right hand of God where it is made clear that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of Lords. All authority in heaven and earth is his. Nothing happens without the permission and will of Jesus. Nothing takes place unless it serves the purpose and saving plan of God in Jesus. Jesus is IT!

And I love those phrases: **“Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”** Don’t care who you are or when you live. Don’t care what excuse you have or even what excuse you want to make up, what is said here is going to be an absolute fact. You will bow before Jesus. You will acknowledge His marvel and wonder, his awe and power, his majesty and authority in everything and in every place. You may be a soul suffering in hell, even Satan himself, and yet you will bow in total homage to Jesus. You will acknowledge Him as the One, the one true and saving God!

And you will confess his divinity and glory. You will sing his praise and give thanks for this grace, goodness and love. Again you may do that as a soul in hell, which I believe is an added dimension to your punishment there, but you will do it. And doing it may fill you with hatred and rage but it doesn’t matter…you will do it.

Or you will do it as a saved child of God and heir of heaven. You will be filled, surrounded by and swimming in the grace and love of God in such a way that we still cannot fully comprehend. The perfection of heaven is ours. The joy of living with Jesus, the holiness of dwelling with God, and the status of sitting with him on his throne is all going to be ours. Ours because of Jesus. Ours because he won the victory. So when we bow the knee it will be a joy filled event and the awe and marvel of Jesus will fill our lives and hearts. And when we confess his name, it will be a song of praise and glory that evokes love and peace, praise, honor and wonder for and with Jesus. And this wonder of which I speak will be eternal. It will never cease to be. It will never be dull or drab, dreary or boring, but always be the height of grace, glory and love in God. Forever! Let that sink in. Forever.

Here is the Christian truth. Here is the wonder of Jesus. That Jesus, through what He has done and accomplished makes this joy of heaven, this wonder of eternal life and salvation ours. This is the truth of Jesus.

And you are going to say that it is too much for God to exhort you to imitate Jesus? No, it is not too much considering what Jesus has done and endured for me. Father, give me a humble heart to hear your encouragement. Father, sent your Holy Spirit all the more upon us that this wonder of Jesus fill our hearts and minds and that we do live to him. You cause it as you have even caused our salvation. Yes, to God be the glory! Amen.