Philippians 2:5-11 5Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. 6Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, 7but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, 8he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is true! Being a child of God, a follower of Jesus Christ is a most difficult task. Just out of curiosity I determined to go online and do a simple search on the topic of “Persecution of Christians.” Now, I am not saying that Christians are the only persecuted groups, but if I am to believe the information that I found then I could conclude that Christians are the group most persecuted in the world. Here are a few interesting statistics I would like to share with you.

“In 2022, the advocacy group Open Doors said that at least 360 million Christians experienced “high levels of persecution and discrimination.” This was 20 million higher than in 2021.”

It is estimated that the number of Christians killed worldwide for their faith was 5,898 in 2022 and 4,761 in 2021.

Again, statistics from Open Doors. 322 Christians are killed every month. 214 Churches and Christian properties are destroyed every month and 772 forms of violence against Christians occurs because they are Christians, every month.

I will tell you, the number of websites attributed to defending against persecution and martyrdom was a bit surprising with quite of few of them sites supposedly from countries with high persecution rates. For the most part, I didn’t look at any of those particular sites, especially if it was clear that the real purpose of the site was to raise money for the persecuted. I avoided those sites simply because fudging information for the raising of money would be huge temptation for that site and I felt made the site, for me, a bit less reliable in its reporting. But no matter what, I think I can stick with my opening statement. “Being a child of God, a follower of Jesus Christ is a most difficult task.”

And in truth, to begin, I was really only thinking of my own experience as a Christian pastor with now about 41 years of experience. You would be astounded at the things said to me in the course of my life, said because I was a Pastor and said because I was a Pastor doing my duty as a Pastor in administering God’s Word to members and none members alike.

Yet I want you to know that I don’t take any of it on a personal level, well, I try not to take it on a personal level. I do that because I believe what Jesus said to us. Take Matthew 10 and some of what we are told will be as followers of Jesus. Verse 16 says, **“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves.”** Seriously, just think of the fierce truth of these words and what they truly say. Just imagine what you would face as a “sheep” among “wolves.” Or how about verses 24-25? **“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor is a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the member of his household!”** Isn’t Jesus our Master and we his servants? Isn’t it true that the Jewish religious leadership declared that Jesus did his miracle by the power of the Devil, also known as Beelzebul?

Or just take in John 15:18-20. **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. However, because you are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of it, for that very reason the world hates you. Remember the old saying I told you; ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too.”** Being a child of God, a follower of Jesus Christ is a most difficult task.

And it is our task! Sometimes we a God’s children forget that truth. We sometimes just get to thinking that as long as I call myself a Christian, well, that is all that counts! No, being a Christian is really an action, a way of life. The Scripture makes it clear that to know and believed in Jesus will bring and does bring about change in our lives. We are “new Creatures.” We are children of faith not children of unbelief.

One of the finest passages that helps us to grasp the meaning of what I have just said is the one that lies before us today. It is an awesome “sanctification” section that not only points us to why Jesus is worthy of following but also why we would do well to imitate Jesus in our lives. Our theme: **LET THIS ATTITUDE BE IN YOU!**

That theme is exactly how our text starts out. **“Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”** Here is the Lord encouraging us to be like Jesus and at the same time here is the Lord showing us that Jesus is worthy of imitating. What a rather simple premise. Our lives are to in imitation of, with the same attitude of the Lord Jesus. I want you to know, that striving after Jesus will never be a thing you will regret! Listen to why.

Our text says, **“Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed.”** The words here are so interesting. First, recognize a highly prized truth for us, **“Jesus was by nature God.”** He had all the attributes and powers of God. Jesus was divine and eternal, the very Creator of all that was and is and will be. But note that Jesus did not abuse this divine nature and power when he came to this earth. He does not use his power and authority to usurp the authorities of the world or to even attempt to gain dominion and power over them. These words simply tell us that Jesus had a whole different purpose and goal in mind when He came and that goal was not the forced subjugation of humans to the unlimited powers of God. You barely saw those powers of God in Jesus because of what Jesus came to do for us and that is where the next line comes in.

**“But he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant.”** Again, just think of what those words declare of Jesus. Here he is, total and absolute God and yet Jesus does not come to Lord it over us in any way. Jesus came to be a servant. His purpose was to help us, to minister to us, to take care of the problems that plague you and me. Just let it sink in that Jesus has set aside his awesomeness as the Divine and eternal God to be a servant for us.

Our text goes on. **“When he was born in man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”** There it is. There is the whole point of Jesus. Jesus stepped away from the glory and exaltation of heaven to enter into our world. He entered our world by becoming a man, by being conceived and born of the virgin Mary. In utter uniqueness God entered man, took on the nature of man and yet as God he retained his full nature of divinity and power. But as our words say, **“He humbled himself.”** That means that Jesus set aside the full use of his heavenly power and glory to be our Savior. He put himself under the law. He faced all the demands and commands of the law. He kept every facet and nuance of the law. As the Epistle of Hebrews says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.”** That’s Jesus.

Jesus did all of this to be our Savior. Jesus did all of this that we might be offered the forgiveness of sins and with that forgiveness of sins the gift of eternal life and salvation. But make no mistake, this gift of heaven comes to us through the gift of faith. Faith means we trust in Jesus. Faith means we follow Jesus. Faith means we walk in the light and don’t decide to accept the deeds of darkness as what we will do. God calls us to faith, calls us to see the sacrifice and love of Jesus and then faith calls us to have the same attitude as Jesus. We don’t exalt ourselves and determine what we think religion and faith is. God is the one who defines what religion and faith is, not us. God is the one who has done all things necessary for our salvation. Once we grasp this wonder of Jesus, our attitude becomes that of Jesus. We too, humble ourselves to the majesty of God. We yield our very souls to the directions and encouragements of God. Where did you ever see Jesus pursue and lull about in sin? Where do you find Jesus saying, “I know God says this, but I’m going to do that!” When we grasp the gift of Jesus, the faith that we are given is a faith that says we will imitate, we will have the same attitude as Jesus.

Our text goes on. **“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.”** Here is the final result of what Jesus has done and now is. Jesus has been established as the very point of faith. In other words, Jesus is the line that God draws. We are to believe in Jesus. We are to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, that means we know Jesus is God. What He says goes. What He wants is the way it is. What He commands and demands (and he does) is the path of faith! And why?

As the text tells us: **“every knee will bow…and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”** I don’t care who you are or what you think you are, what I can tell you is that Jesus counts. Some day, one day, every single person is going to bow and give worship and praise to Jesus. You may, because you have rejected faith and Jesus, be doing that from hell but you will do it. I pray you will be doing that from heaven because the gift of faith that God has given and the redemption that Jesus has won for you is the foundation of your heart. You are a child of God, an heir of eternal life. You understand that Jesus offers you the forgiveness of sin and as such, you willingly and eagerly give up your clinging to sin and with humble heart yield to the majesty and wonder of Jesus!

I will tell you I was wrestling with just how to get the lesson and wonder of faith across to you and then I had a Confirmation class and ran across the perfect section to teach this lesson. Question 210 of our Catechism asks: *“Why is this life of service to my Redeemer one of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness?*” The answers are very revealing.

1. *“My life of service to my Redeemer is one of righteousness because he covers all my sins with the robe of his righteousness.”* I have eternal life and salvation because of Jesus. I believe in Jesus. I know Jesus has died for me and risen to grant me forgiveness. But did you pay attention to the very crux of this answer. MY LIFE OF SERVICE! If you are not interesting in serving, in following, in imitating or having the attitude of Jesus there is a problem. And the problem means you have thrown off the robe of righteousness.
2. *“My life of service to my Redeemer is one of innocence because in my new man I hate sin and desire to live a godly life.”* How simple can this be? When I am a Christian and I believe Jesus is the Lord and Savior then I hate sin and I only want to do what is good and right in the eyes of God. When I like sin, when I pursue sin, when I demand my right to sin and take that attitude that God will just have to accept that…that is entirely opposite of what this says. You have rejected your Redeemer and no longer serve him.
3. *“My life of service to my Redeemer is one of blessedness because I gladly serve him in thankful love.”* Again, how very simple. As a believer, I serve Jesus. And Jesus clearly tells me how I serve. I serve in giving him worship, glory and praise. I serve by sharing my blessings with His Church that His Word and truth continue to be proclaimed. I serve by loving my neighbor in the very ways God commands. I serve the Lord filled with his love and wonder because He has called me to be a child of God. So what happens when you don’t serve? What happens as you skip church and withhold your offerings? What happens when instead of love you have hatred or some sort of loathing attitude toward your neighbor? Then you are not really serving, believing or following your Redeemer are you?

Dear people, seriously our faith is that simple. Jesus came and gave his life for us. Jesus has been shown to be Lord and Christ. Jesus lives and rules over all things. Either you believe and follow Jesus or you don’t! There is no middle ground here. Either he is God and Lord or he is not. There is no such thing as “Well, I believe Jesus is half god and and half rules and half saves, etc.”

The truth is simple and wonderful and brings peace marvel and joy. But that is found in Jesus our Lord and our Savior. So, in Jesus, let your attitude be the same as that of a child of God who grasps the wonder of Jesus. Amen.