

THE HUMILITY OF GOD

BY MARTIN M. DAVIS

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took the “form of a servant,” “made himself nothing,” and “humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV). We usually think of God as the all-powerful Deity who called into being the swirling galaxies, majestic mountains and vast oceans—the mighty one who rules from his exalted throne like a Roman Caesar, commanding the universe with a firm (if not iron) hand. Many people see God as a power-wielding despot, spitting nails in fury, while seeking



every opportunity to punish sinners. Others view God as a disinterested, dispassionate deity who merely watches mankind from a distance. Yet rather than an angry tyrant or an aloof, uncaring deity, at the cross we see the compassionate heart of God in Christ who is the Lamb of God.

Although we are unaccustomed to thinking this way, at the cross we see the suffering Savior who

those who find their lives must lose them. These enigmatic sayings are not a *Zen* riddle to be unraveled in a flash of insight, nor are they simply ethical prescriptions to be followed in obedience to Christ.

Jesus did not turn upside-down the world's ideas of greatness, power and might merely to provide a new form of morality. His teaching comes straight out of the heart of God because this is not

grief. He has entered our pain by coming down from heaven to join us in our sorrow, to engage in our suffering and to endure our plight even to the point of death. Hearing this does not take away our pain, but it seems more bearable to know that our Savior walks this trail of tears alongside us.

The cross of Christ challenges our ideas about what it means to be human. Jesus gave us a direct

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identifies with our plight by enduring scorn, ridicule, shame, abuse and horrendous torture for our salvation.

At the cross, we see one who loves us with such determined, unwavering passion that he pours himself out in utter self-surrender so that, through his death and resurrection, he might share his eternal life with humanity.

According to Michael Jenkins, the power of God revealed in Christ on the cross is “the irresistible force of God’s self-surrender, the strength, the almightiness, of God’s self-emptying and other-centered love.”¹

The love of God revealed at the cross subverts our ideas about power and greatness, especially our wrong-headed ideas about the almightiness of God. In his earthly ministry, Jesus taught us the paradoxical truths of his Kingdom, wherein the first shall be last, the greatest must become servants and

only what God says—this is *who God is*. Jesus said, “...I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). The heart of the Son is not different from the heart of the Father! The willingness to be humbled and become the servant of all is the clear reflection of God’s own inner being, for it is as godlike to be humbled as to be exalted.²

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For many years I worked as a Family Therapist in the largest church in my state, encountering the gamut of suffering—abuse, addiction, divorce, terminal illness and the untimely death of loved ones.

I recall the helplessness I felt when clients cried out with sobbing tears, “Why did God let this happen?” I had no pat answers—such would insult their sorrow. I could only tell them that our Savior does not leave us alone in our

look into the heart of God when he said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). God’s willingness to give himself in love for the whole world has profound implications for those created in his image. To be truly human is to renounce our self-centeredness and to engage the world in other-centered love. When we offer ourselves in self-giving love to others, we clearly reflect the image of God.

This Easter season, as we rejoice in *the love of God* for all humanity, let us practice the other-centered love that is a reflection of the compassionate heart of God living in us. □

1. Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 84.

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, translation edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1957-75), 4/1, pp. 190-191.

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