

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday – Epistle

CHRIST IS OUR ADVANTAGE

Philippians 2:5-11

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

DIAGNOSIS: Advantage Out

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Advantage Of*

We like to take advantage of favorable situations. We buy when there is a sale. We choose the shortest line at the checkout stand. When we are in a traffic jam, we switch to the faster moving lane. To gain advantage in a situation we need to be quicker, smarter, or stronger than others are. Taking advantage of a situation usually means taking it away from someone else. But that's not our problem; we are concerned about our

advantage. Others are responsible for their own advantage. Actually, most of our decisions are based on whether or not something is to our advantage. We list the pros and cons of our choices and choose the one that is best for us. Cut the last bit of pie into two pieces and the person who dishes up will take the bigger piece.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Advantage Stuck

We are stuck in this 'take advantage of' way of life. It's the only way we know how to operate. Even when we do something nice for someone, the advantage we get is a reward of praise or a good feeling. So we insist that we have the chance to exploit our situations. We trust that as long as we get our fair share of favorable situations, we will succeed. We trust ourselves to create our own favorable situations. We may even pray that God give us sumptuous circumstances. But we trust our ability to exploit the opportunities we are given. We trust those favorable circumstances to make our life better and better and then good. We try to create favorable circumstances by being in the right place at the right time. All our focus is on getting the advantage. We don't focus on Christ as the one who can make our life better with God. We think we already have God on our side by how many favorable circumstances God gives us and by how well we take advantage of them.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Advantage Gone

We have taken advantage of God by trusting God's gifts instead of God. We have taken advantage of others by using God's gifts for our personal gain. By taking advantage of those favorable circumstances we have wrongfully, according to God's Son on the cross, gone against God. What is more, we have wrongfully gone against our neighbor and so again have gone against God. We have exploited God. God, then, is no longer an advantage, but a disadvantage. And, as far as God is concerned, exploiters are awarded with death.

PROGNOSIS: Advantage Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Advantage In

Jesus had the favorable circumstance of being equal to God. Goodness, one can do anything when one is God's equal! That is quite the situation to take advantage of. But Jesus did not regard his equality with God as a situation to take advantage of. Incomprehensibly to us advantage-takers, Jesus gave up his equality with God for our sake. He became a slave like us, stuck in a world of advantage-takers. He himself was not an advantage-taker, but an advantage-giver. He was obedient to God's new way of giving us an advantage. That new way was to die on the cross, taking God's award of death for exploiters as his own. To us, who love having the advantage, such a sacrifice hardly looks like taking advantage of the situation. But little did we imagine that God would raise Jesus from the dead! God uses Jesus' death for our advantage, using Jesus' death to give us forgiveness, to give us God's goodness, and to give us eternal life!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – Advantage Faith

Jesus was obedient to God's new way of giving us an advantage. He was obedient for our sake and for our benefit. God not only gives us Christ, but God also gives us faith in Christ through telling us of what Christ has done. By faith, by having Christ, we have what Christ has-resurrection, exaltation, life with God, peace with God! God honors us as God honors Christ, for Christ is in us. Christ is the new circumstance that we get to take advantage of. This advantage is different in that it is death, but not only death, rising too with Christ. It is death to taking advantage of situations for our own sake. It is a new life that receives Christ as the advantage of God's goodness, God's forgiveness, and God's heaven.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Advantage Yours

Christ is our advantage. In Christ, we live by his love and by his Spirit. That is, we do things the way Christ does them. Instead of being advantage-takers, we are now advantage-givers. We do not think being like Christ is something to take advantage of for our sake. We “take advantage of” being like Christ for other’s sake. We give Christ’s goodness to others. We give Christ’s forgiveness to others. We promise Christ’s eternal life to others. When there is a situation of harm or insult, we take advantage of it by giving Christ’s peace. When there is a situation of sickness or dying, we take advantage of the situation and give Christ’s healing and resurrection. When others trust their advantage-taking prowess and using it, we offer them Christ as a God pleasing advantage. And when the third checkout line is the shortest, we tell the person behind us of the favorable circumstance that is there for them. When our neighbor is hungry, we can empty our cupboards, taking on the form of a slave, and becoming obedient to God’s new way of giving an advantage.