

Jesus' Humility and Exaltation

Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13
Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 3:13-18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **ANALYZE** Paul's description of God's exaltation of Jesus based on sacrifice and selflessness rather than power; **VALUE** selfless behavior rather than power; and **ADOPT** Christ-like humility as our personal lifestyle.

In Focus

Rev. Williams couldn't understand why Sister Jenkins had such opposition to the new facility the church was about to purchase. She had always been such a loyal supporter of the church's programs. He knew he could not always have the backing of every church member, but he prayed for understanding and insight in this case.

A couple of weeks later, he went to visit Mother Turner, a longtime member of the church who was not able to get to church very often. Without mentioning Sister Jenkins' name, he talked with Mother Turner about his concern and asked her to pray for him and the church.

"Pastor," Mother Turner said, "I don't get out much, but I do keep up with what's going on at my church. I know Myrtle Jenkins has been opposed to the new building. She's had her mind set on opening a daycare center, and she wants to use space at the church to save money. She can't use the new church because of the way it's set up."

Pastor Williams shook his head. "All that fuss was about what's good for her, not what's good for the church."

Many things come into our lives that challenge our public witness. People are watching to see if we are for real. Paul advises us to have the mind of Christ.

Keep in Mind

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"
(Philippians 2:5, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Philippians 2:5** Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The People, Places, and Times

Philippi. A city that was located in the Roman province of Macedonia where Paul did a great deal of missionary work. Paul's first visit to Philippi took place during his second missionary journey, an outgrowth of his Macedonian vision. He and a group of companions sailed from Troas to Neapolis, located on Macedonia's eastern shore. After they docked, the group traveled a few miles inland to Philippi. It was at Philippi that Paul was miraculously delivered from bondage and the jailer was converted. Upon discovering that Paul was a Roman citizen, the magistrates there became nervous. They pleaded with Paul to leave both the jail and the city. (See Acts 16:12–40.)

Background

Chapter two begins Paul's second appeal to the Philippians. Apparently, division was brewing within the Philippian congregation. Co-workers in the church had become openly divided. Paul had already had the experience of seeing a church riddled with controversy and dissension. The biggest battle facing the church at Philippi was their internal battle. In the previous lesson, Paul stated his refusal to let external circumstances control his attitudes (Philippians 1:12–18). The congregation could

ill afford to let internal strife afflict their witness for Christ.

Paul spoke of his imprisonment in terms of its effect on the Philippian mission. He told them that his imprisonment had special significance for them because of the nature of their relationship to the apostle. The church was kind and loyal, but its status was threatened by dissension. It was in the midst of this exhortation to be one in spirit that Paul launched into this beautiful hymn of praise to our Lord Jesus and His humility.

At-A-Glance

1. The Humility of Jesus (Philippians 2:5–8)
2. The Exaltation of Jesus (vv. 9–11)

In Depth

1. The Humility of Jesus (Philippians 2:5–8)

From the previous chapter, we know Paul was faced with the delicate task of rebuking the congregation he had just praised. He sought to enlist the Philippians' loyalty and faithfulness against the divisions that had arisen within the church. The concern at Philippi was not

so much about instruction in right and wrong as it is encouragement and guidance in the right will or spirit. Paul's appeal is for unity and self-denial as exemplified in Christ. Paul was not calling for the Philippians to despise themselves. He was calling for a refusal to let personal interests or advantages govern the course of one's life. He knew that the success of his appeal was dependent upon the degree to which the Philippians abided in the Spirit of Christ. If they were united in His bond, they would seek the unity and self-denial that is essential to the Christian's existence.

If they could do this, Paul's joy would be complete in that they would be like-minded, with the same love and on one accord. Many times people misinterpret the meaning of verse five, thinking that it means there must never be a difference of opinion. It does mean, however, that the body is committed to supporting the work of the church and that the will of God is fulfilled, regardless of personal opinion. Love would provide the incentive for the desired goal of unity, humility, and concern for others. Love (*agape*) is to do good for another regardless of the cost to self. Paul fully understood the importance of self-effacement or self-denial. More often than anything else, it is the self that gets in the way and causes conflict. It is impossible for Christian unity to exist in an atmosphere of self-centeredness.

Paul was concerned that the Philippians give themselves over to a mindset governed by Christ. The mindset was already present within them because they were believers in Christ Jesus. Paul's admonition was that they activate (or reactivate) this already present mindset among themselves. Paul wanted to address those in Philippi given to self-exaltation. He wanted them to have a true image of humility, as demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ. In Christ, the perfect example of self-effacement can be found, having voluntarily given up His

divinity for humanity. Being in the form of God, Christ "made himself of no reputation" (v. 7) and in human form humbled himself and became obedient to the Father, even to His death on the Cross.

2. The Exaltation of Jesus (vv. 9–11)

While the foregoing section dealt with total debasement of Christ to the lowest depth of humiliation, this section deals with His unprecedented exaltation to the highest point of honor. While the last segment dealt with Christ's voluntary self-humiliation, this section deals with God exalting Him. In the former, Christ is the actor, the subject of the verbs; in the latter, God is the actor and the subject of the verbs, while Christ is the object. Peter and James echoed this same teaching in their epistles when they wrote: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6) and "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).

Search the Scriptures

1. After whom did Paul advise the Philippians to model themselves (Philippians 2:5)?
2. What role did Christ choose for Himself (v. 7)?
3. To what extent did God exalt Christ (vv. 9–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we teach young people to be proud of their ancestry and at the same time to be humble and serve one another?
2. What are some ways we can exalt Jesus today?

Liberating Lesson

Humility is not valued or praised very much in our society. Among the rich and famous, those who have given themselves to humility

and service seem to garner little attention. Conversely, those who have earned a reputation for arrogance or self-absorption often become media darlings. This is all the more reason that the Christian community must understand who we are and Whose we are. Our calling, as disciples, is to follow our leader and fashion ourselves to be like Christ as much as we can. Our efforts to do this will rarely earn us human praise. It will, however, be pleasing in the eyes of the Lord.

Application for Activation

Churches tend to have personalities, just as people do. In spite of its troubles at the time Paul wrote his letter, the Philippian congregation seemed to have a loving spirit with an inclination toward obedience. The humility in today's passage is immediately followed by encouragement from Paul to move forward based on the various abilities they already possessed. What assets, gifts, or talents do you already possess that can be polished and enhanced to make you of greater benefit to the work of God's kingdom? Ask yourself whether you are willing to be used in this manner. If so, what steps must you take to get to that point? Are you willing to, as Paul did, offer yourself as a sacrifice for the benefit of fellow Christians and those who have yet to come to know Christ?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Butler, Trent, ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991.
- Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.
- Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of Philippians: New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1962.
- New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed October 25, 2011).

Say It Correctly

Philippi. fi-LIP-ahy, FIL-uh-pahy.
Philippians. fi-LIP-ee-uhnz.
Praetorian. pray-TOR-ee-uhn.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Sower, Seeds, and Soils
(Matthew 13:1-9)

TUESDAY

Hear and Understand the Word
(Matthew 13:18-23)

WEDNESDAY

Avoid Envy and Selfish Ambition
(James 3:13-18)

THURSDAY

Overcome Evil with Good
(Romans 12:14-21)

FRIDAY

Become a Servant and a Slave
(Mark 10:35-45)

SATURDAY

Look to the Interest of Others
(Philippians 2:1-4)

SUNDAY

Seek the Mind of Christ
(Philippians 2:5-11)

Notes
