

## The Exaltation of Christ

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

I have some vague memories as a very small child of going up to the top of the Hillbrow Tower, now the Telkom tower. Before it was closed because of the bombings that began in that time, you could go to the top, where there was a restaurant, and several coin-operated lookout telescopes. From that height you could see pretty much most of Johannesburg. The tower is 270 metres tall or ninety stories high. There was more than one restaurant, one of which was revolving. The patrons in that restaurant didn't notice that the tower sways by about 45 centimetres. And that was actually quite a feat, because buildings as tall as that usually sway several metres. The way they achieved such stability lay in the foundations. They sunk the foundations 42 metres down – which is a 14 storey block of flats that could fit in that hole.

To go that high, they needed to go that low. To have such an exalted and yet stable tower, they needed a hidden and very deep foundation. That physical principle pictures the deeper, and ultimate spiritual principle: the greater the exaltation, the deeper the humility that goes before it. The more one will be praised, admired, and glorified as supreme, the lower and deeper the humility will have been. The reverse is also true: the more a person has tried to exalt himself and reach up into the heights of self-glory, the deeper and lower will be his shame and humiliation.

That principle was all over the Old Testament:

**Pro 11:2** When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.

**Pro 18:12** Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.

Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov. 16:18)

**Pro 29:23** A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.

It was illustrated in accounts like the fall of proud Haman, and the exaltation of Mordecai, or the humiliation of proud Nebuchadnezzar, and the exaltation of humble Daniel.

Jesus himself taught it <sup>11</sup> "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 14:11)

<sup>11</sup> "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Matt. 23:11-12)

And not only did He teach it, He lived it. This passage in Philippians 2 is the greatest passage for understanding how this principle of humility bringing exaltation applied in the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus descended to the lowest depths of humility, and the result, as we'll see, is exaltation to the highest heights.

But all of this is here in Philippians to make a bigger point. It was a point which the Roman citizens living in Philippi needed to hear. Humans who seek their own honour, fame, glory, and power, are destined to see it crashing down. It was Lucifer in Isaiah 14 who said, <sup>13</sup> For you have said in your

heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

<sup>15</sup> Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. (Isa. 14:13-15)

People who pursue their own glory will find that gravity in God's universe will bring you down in exact proportion to how high you puffed yourself up. But the Philippians lived and breathed the idea that life is about competing and winning the race for fame and admiration and achievement. Life is about climbing, and vaulting and getting up there. There's was a culture all about stepping on the heads of others to make yourself taller. And that kind of proud culture brought about strife and divisions and ungodliness in the church.

We live in a fairly similar culture. In fact, the larger the population grows, it seems the more anxious some become to be known, to be a name, to be a someone, to be popular. Whether it is celebrity fame, or admiration of my wealth, or gathering degrees so people see me as the expert, or perfecting my body and looks (both physically and with Photoshop) so that I become the Instagram sensation, these are all signs of a culture where people seek their own honour. And we too can bring this kind of worldliness into the church.

But conversely, for Christians, the message is, "Don't seek your own honour. Don't try to get men to praise you. Don't chase titles and celebrity and notoriety and fame. Don't pursue the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, because you know the real secret, the true principle of honour. You know the real glory, the real wealth, the real power, the real strength is what is permanent and ultimate. You know that your identity and your future is wrapped up and bound up with that of Christ. What ever happens to Him is what will happen to you. But that means we follow Christ both in humility and humiliation, and trust Him for exaltation. We have to embrace being forgotten, being anonymous, being despised, misunderstood, ridiculed. We have to surrender some of our rights and prerogatives.

So here in the last section of Paul's glorious hymn to Christ, we see the exaltation of Jesus. That sevenfold humbling of Himself leads to a promotion, a glory, a success that is unequalled and unrivalled. And as we read this, we are supposed to rejoice, both in the exaltation of Jesus, and in the fact that this is the reward for humility. If we practice humility and mutual service of each other, we can expect promotion, and reward and joy.

Now just as Paul showed us that Jesus went as low as He could go, in verses 9 through 11, he shows us that Jesus has gone and will go infinitely high. He does this by showing us three simple things: the person of the exaltation (who exalts Jesus), the place of the exaltation (the rank or position) and the point of the exaltation (what will result).

## **I. The Person of Jesus' Exaltation**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

The subject of these verses suddenly shifts in verse 9. Up to now, we've been told that it is Jesus who emptied himself and humbled Himself. But now we read that God has done something. Here, as in many places, when Paul uses the term God, he is referring to God the Father. In verse 6 he just showed you that Jesus is undeniably God the Son: He existed in the form of God. But this is now a reference to God the Father, as is verified in verse 11.

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

Who is exalting Jesus? Not mere humans, not angels, not archangels, but God the Father.

Now this would have been very significant for the Romans in Philippi. Amongst Roman elites, you wanted to be honoured by another aristocrat. The more prestigious the person honouring you, the more your honour. One of the ancients wrote that the ideal was to be praised by a praised man. Some ancient inscriptions found in Philippi specifically state the the emperor himself bestowed some title or office upon them. Honour was a public thing: the more people honoured the person honouring you, the more honour you got.

We know some of the same thing. When people name-drop that they were having a conversation with someone powerful or well-known, or important, it is supposed to add the “ooh-ah-wow” factor to their reputation. The fame of the person you know kind of rubs off onto you.

Well, Paul is saying, who was it that bestowed honour and glory upon the God-man, Jesus? It was none other than God the Father, the Triune Godhead represented by the Father.

If your honour depends on the honour of who is honouring you, you cannot have higher honour than God the Father.

Amazingly, the Bible says that Christians will one day also receive a commendation from God.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Cor. 4:5)

One day, God Himself will say a word to you. What difference will all the world's praise make on that day? If you must go your whole life being forgotten and despised by the world, to have God commend you, would that not be worth it? All the scorn, ridicule, misunderstandings, all the surrender and meekness and humility of Jesus led to a moment at the resurrection and at the ascension, when God the Father commended and exalted him. So what was that place?

## II. The Place of Jesus' Exaltation

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

God the Father has done two things, which are really one action. He has highly exalted Him, and with that exaltation given Him the highest name.

To understand this properly, we need to ask two questions. One, does this mean Jesus has been exalted to a place He did not occupy before, i.e. promoted? Two, what is this name which God has given Jesus?

The word for *highly exalted* is a word found only here in the New Testament. It means to exalt to highest rank or supreme position (Ambrose translated it into Latin as *superexalto*) – supreme majesty and position. He has given Him first place. In so doing, God has given Him the name which is absolutely first and highest. There are two other places where Paul describes this exaltation.

<sup>20</sup> which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, <sup>21</sup> far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. <sup>22</sup> And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, (Eph. 1:20-22)

<sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. <sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the

beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. <sup>19</sup> For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, <sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Col. 1:16-20)

In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us on two occasions that Jesus is exalted not just to Heaven, but above Heaven.

<sup>14</sup> Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. (Heb. 4:14)

<sup>26</sup> For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; (Heb. 7:26)

In the first place, it does not mean that God the Son now occupied a place He had not enjoyed before. If Jesus is fully God, which verse 6 tells us He is, then you cannot be promoted above infinite glory. He always had that place. It simply means that God returned God to the highest possible place of exaltation.

The one thing that was different was this: in taking on a true human nature, Jesus was bringing back to heaven something that hadn't been there before: a true human nature. God was now exalting the God-Man to the supreme position. What had not been the case before was that there was a human exalted above every archangel, and every principality and power. There is now a man – the God-Man, in the position of supremacy. There is now a man named Joshua, Yeshua, exalted to the place of absolute supremacy.

What is this name then that has been given to Him? Commentators are divided. Some have said it is the name Jesus itself, and that the name of Jesus is now exalted. Others have said it is the title Lord, or possibly what the term Lord always stands in for: Yahveh, the name of God.

But it is more likely that Paul is here using the word name to mean reputation. Name represents who you are, your character, power, position. God has given Jesus, the God-Man, the reputation that is above every reputation. He is Lord, He is Jesus, He is Messiah, all in one, and the words Lord Jesus Christ refer to the infinitely high God and King.

Here were these Roman Philippians wanting nothing more than to have their name known, and honoured, and celebrated, and doing everything in their power to get a name above the other names in Philippi. Paul says, the one who emptied himself, became a slave, and became obedient, obedient to death, death of the cross, whose name should have been forever smeared and dirtied and crushed and forgotten, He has ended up with the single greatest name of them all.

And look what Paul does with his own name in chapter three: <sup>4</sup> though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

<sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

<sup>6</sup> concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Phil. 3:4-8)

You want your name remembered? Then let your own name die and be submerged into His name. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)

That will be the true fame, the real honour, the right kind of boasting.

Jesus was exalted by the person of the Father. Jesus was exalted to the place of highest honour. But all of that is for a point.

### III. The Point of Jesus' Exaltation

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here is where this is going. There is coming a day when the living beings from the the three realms of creation will all acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus.

Those in Heaven refers to all angelic beings, all unfallen spiritual creatures in Heaven along with the redeemed of humanity. Those on earth refer to mankind dwelling in physical bodies. Those under the earth refers to fallen spiritual creatures, fallen angels, demons, as well as the unsaved lost forever in Hades, and ultimately in the Lake of Fire.

Does this mean that one day every living being will be redeemed and saved? No, that would contradict Scriptures that have the rebellious lost separated from God forever. Does it mean that demons, fallen angels and the unsaved are going to have a big change of heart, and see the glory of Christ and willingly admit that He is Lord? I doubt it, because if the heart is unchanged, why would it declare that Jesus is Lord. I think the unsaved and fallen angels will admit this as defeated armies admit defeat, with angelic swords hanging over their heads, remaining rebels, but admitting defeat. This doesn't mean that everyone will be saved in the end. It means God has decreed that every living moral being will confess the identity and Lordship of His Son.

For the saved, it will be a voluntary, happy repetition of what we have been saying all along: Jesus is Lord! He is our Lord! He is the only Lord!

This has always been the great confession of the church. The great confession of the early church: <sup>36</sup> "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36)

<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom. 10:9)

When the early church baptised, the basic confession in the water was simply, Jesus is Lord.

Here is the main point of this exaltation. Jesus is going to be publicly acknowledged as Yahveh, as Sovereign Creator-King, and in so doing will exercise absolute authority over all. In fact, when it comes to your salvation, like it or not, you have to deal with the name of Jesus. When it comes to worship, the focal point will be Jesus. When it comes to authority, the name you will submit to is Jesus. Whether you arrive there willingly or unwillingly, all roads lead to the name of Jesus.

As God the Son does this, as the Word does this, it will redound to the glory of God the Father.

John 5:23 "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Here in Philippi were people who wished that their names were up in lights, that their names were on other people's lips, and that their names were central and preeminent. But while some of those

Romans had their names written on stone monuments, those soon fell into ruin, and their names were forgotten. Now they survive as archaeological curiosities. Rather like the poem Ozymandias by Percy Shelly which speaks of ancient, ruined stone sculpture of a king in desert, with nothing left of it except some legs, a half-shattered face buried in the sand, and a pedestal.

*And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”*

In other words, the ridiculousness of a man boasting in his name is there for all to see, when all that is left is a stone ruin.

But what happened to the one who was willing to have his name forgotten in Nazareth, or have it smeared as winebibber, false prophet, blasphemer, servant of Beelzebub, deceiver, rebel against Rome, criminal deserving the death penalty? He has received the first and final name, the ultimate name, the name every living being will one day say out loud.

Why? Because he who humbles himself will be exalted, and he who exalts himself will be abased.

William MacDonald: “If the Savior humbled Himself, **God also has highly exalted Him**. If He did not seek a name for Himself, **God has given Him the name which is above every name**. If He bent His knees in service to others, God has decreed that **every knee shall bow to Him**.”

Paul says, live out this humility amongst each other to show forth the gospel. But it takes faith, doesn't it? Our flesh feels that it is risky to humble ourselves. What if we lose out? What if we are forgotten? What if we just serve and never experience reward? What if our names are just smeared or forgotten? What if I don't make my mark, or don't receive honour, or don't become famous?

You make your choice. The stone ruins of some forgotten Romans in Philippi: that's what becomes of those who exalt themselves, or the name known worldwide, and one day known universally, the name of Jesus, who humbled Himself. The wise will say with Paul: <sup>20</sup> "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)