

***The path to glory***  
***Phil. 2:5-11***

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In the first four verses of chapter 2, Paul has appealed to the Philippians to follow perhaps the hardest command of all -- to love one another and count one another as more significant than oneself. Precisely because this is such a hard command, Paul finds it necessary to back it up by rooting and grounding it in the example of Christ Himself, and the way in which He fulfilled this command. And so verse 5 declares, "***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...***" What this means is that we are to have the same attitude in our conduct toward one another as Christ Jesus did toward us. And it is ours, our possession. The following verses develop this thought by presenting Jesus as the supreme example of the sacrificial, self-giving servanthood Paul has been urging the Philippians to practice toward each other. In it he shows us that the way of the cross is the path to glory.

In verse 6, he tells us that Christ was God. The statement "***He was in the form of God***" means He had the status of God, or the identity of God. He was truly God. He was the One who said to the Jews, "*Before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:58), identifying Himself with the very name of Yahweh, the eternal God, whose name means "I am He who is". That is why they picked up stones to stone Him. They knew the claim He was making. They knew He never gave us the option of considering Him a philosopher or great moral teacher. We must accept Him as God or consider Him a lunatic who claims to be God. Yet in spite of this, He did not consider the fact that being God was something to be used for His own advantage, something to be held onto, "***a thing to be grasped***". No, in the presence of God the Father, in the counsel of eternity, He made a decision, which is what makes the birth of Christ unique. It was not just that He was born of a virgin, but that for the first and only time in history, a man decided to be born! And this was His decision: He "***made Himself nothing (emptied Himself), taking on the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men.***" He chose to take on the form of a slave, an expression for the lowest form of human life in the world into which He entered. To take on the form of a slave does not mean He simply took on the external appearance of a slave or disguised Himself as one, but rather that He actually became a slave. To be in the form of God meant actually being God. To take on the form of a slave meant actually being a slave, having the identity of a slave, the status of a slave. And in this form of a slave, *He manifested the very identity of God*. These verses show more than what Jesus was like as a man. They show what it means to be God.

And what did it mean for Christ to empty Himself? The next words tell us. He did so by "***coming in the likeness (image) of men***" (verse 7). This is an amazing thought. Gen. 1:28 tells us that God made man in His own image. Man lost that image of God, that perfect image, through sin and rebellion. Now the solution is for God to take on man's image, our ruined, dirty and soiled image, with all our limitations, yet somehow without sin. And He did this so that we could get God's image back. And in doing so He fulfilled God's plan, for before the foundation of the world, God predestined us to be confirmed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Before

we lost the image, God had a plan for the image to be restored! This was the only way it could happen. Someone had to pay a price. And to empty Himself meant giving up the ability to exercise authority by His own power. Every day He lived, He lived in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit: "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the desert*" (Matt. 4:1). His authority came from the Holy Spirit: "*Behold, my Servant, whom I Have chosen... I will put my Spirit upon Him...*" (Matt. 12:18). His power over the enemy was by the Spirit: "*If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (Matt. 12:28). Every miracle He did was by the Spirit: "*And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee*" (Luke 4:14). His entire ministry was carried out by the power of the Spirit: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*" (Luke 4:18-19). And so Christ emptied Himself by giving up all His rights as a Son and becoming a slave, one who was without any rights whatsoever. To tie that towel around His waist, as Jesus did, and wash His disciples' feet (John 13:3-5), shows for us what it means to be God, and in that revelation of what it means to be God comes the revelation of what it means to follow His Son.

But this has an amazing consequence for us. We come to the Holy Spirit the same way Jesus did. He had no special access to God except through the same Spirit by whom we come to God. That is why Jesus said that when we received the Spirit, we would do greater things than Him -- greater, because now we are His worldwide Body, hundreds of millions strong. However, in order for what He has given us to be released in our lives, there is one vital condition: *we must have the same attitude as Jesus had*. We come to the Lord not to be filled up, but to be emptied, to be poured out. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "*Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you*" (Matt. 6:33). If we come to God with the same attitude and heart, having this mind in ourselves which is our inheritance in Christ Jesus, we also will be able to access the same power that He had access to, because God knows that that power will then be used to glorify Him. What about us? Are we looking how to give away what He has given us, or are we simply trying to accumulate more and more for ourselves? And we cannot super-spiritualize our faith to declare that we are slaves to God, when there is little or no evidence that we are prepared to express that servanthood toward others. Perhaps this lack of servanthood in the church is the reason for the lack of power in the church or harvest in the nation. What a paradox, and only true in the kingdom. Only the servants have the power! The biggest obstacle to revival is not the opposition of the world, but the lack of the character of Christ in the church.

And having emptied Himself, He humbled Himself: "***And being found in form as a human being, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the extremity of death, even death on a cross***" (verse 8). Note the difference between emptying Himself and humbling Himself. The eternal Son of God made the decision to empty Himself by entering this world. But it was Jesus, as a man, who made the decision, in human history, to humble himself. Although in His death no one was humiliated more than Christ, no one ever brought lower, yet in truth Jesus was not humbled. He humbled Himself. He set Himself on the road to the cross, and refused to turn back from it. The cross was so loathsome and degrading it was forbidden to speak of it in polite

Roman society. And for the Jew, anyone hung on a tree was considered to be under the curse of God. In His identification with men, at Calvary Jesus reached the very lowest point of human existence, but He did it of His own free will.

But now comes a turning point. The “**therefore**” at the beginning of verse 9 marks a decisive change in the passage. The previous three verses have spoken of Christ’s humiliation, but the next three speak of His exaltation: “**Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**” (verse 9-11a). Notice the contrast: Christ humbled Himself, but God exalted Him. The exaltation is a consequence of the humiliation. This expresses a profound Biblical principle: *humility leads to exaltation as surely as pride leads to downfall*. Jesus said it Himself: “*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted*” (Matt. 23:12). At the end of verse 8, we are left with the Son of God hanging on a cross. But then, in one dramatic intervention – in resurrecting Him and seating Him at His right hand – God raised Jesus from the depths to the heights. His resurrection means *He lives for ever* --- His exaltation means *He reigns for ever* (Murray J. Harris). The word Paul uses to express this occurs only here in the entire New Testament. It means to “super-exalt” or “raise to the highest heights”. It is not just that Christ is raised higher than anyone else, but that Christ, who made Himself so very low, has now been lifted so very high He is in a realm totally different from anyone or anything else.

And as part of this exaltation, He has been given a new name. In Biblical thinking, a name was used not merely to distinguish one person from another, but (as with Jacob in Gen. 25:26 or Nabal in 1 Sam. 25:25) to reveal something in the person’s character or nature (one of the reasons we should be prayerful in the naming of our children). The name “Jesus” (a variant of Joshua) means Saviour or Deliverer (Matt. 1:21). But this is not a name like Jesus, for it is a name above or unlike any other name, a new name, unlike even the name Jesus bore in His earthly life. The greatest name of all can only be the very name of God -- Yahweh. When Moses asked God His name, God replied in one Hebrew word, “Yahweh” (Exod. 3:14), meaning “I am who I am”. Centuries later, God spoke through Isaiah, saying, “*I am Yahweh, that is my Name*” (Is. 42:8). The Jews referred to God’s name as “Lord”, for they would not even pronounce the name Yahweh. Notice God’s declaration in Is. 45:23: “*By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’*” Now notice what Paul says in verses 10-11: “*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...*” God says through Isaiah that to Him every knee shall bow, and this prophetic declaration is now fulfilled in Jesus. The phrase “*the name of Jesus*” does not mean “the name ‘Jesus’”, but “the name belonging to Jesus”. The identity of this name is given in the next phrase, where it is said that every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is *Lord*. Remember that “Lord” is the name the Jews used to refer to Yahweh. So Jesus of Nazareth is now Lord. he is Yahweh. That is the only name above every name. It is the name of God Himself. And this is of enormous importance, because like any name Biblically, it reveals who Jesus is. It reveals to us that the son of Mary, the carpenter of Nazareth, the Galilean Rabbi, the prophetic preacher Jesus, in His

earthly role and according to His earthly name Saviour and Deliverer of mankind, this man Jesus has a new name and a new identity -- foreseen centuries before by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "*For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given... and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end*" (Is. 9:6-7). Jesus -- now revealed as Almighty God, as Yahweh -- has taken up His place of government, just as Isaiah prophesied. Yet perhaps beyond what the even prophet saw, He has been raised up to rule the entire universe. The resurrection means He lives forever, the exaltation means He rules for ever. That is why we are a people of the kingdom. We are a people who expect to see the government of God come in our lifetime, who believe God reigns and rules over this present world, who are prepared to live and die for the advancement of that kingdom, for we know that even if it costs us our lives, we will reign forever with Him in eternity.

Our response is so important. According to these verses, God's purpose in exalting Christ is that every knee should bow before Him and every tongue should confess Him as Lord. What does it mean to bow the knee? It means a lot more than saying a prayer of commitment. It means a lot more than just showing up in church on Sunday. It means a life of discipleship. If you follow someone, the person you follow sets the pace and determines the direction. The only decision you can make is to obey or not to obey, to bow the knee, or not. So many are like the rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus on his own terms. You can't do that. It has to be on His terms if you want His reward. Are we prepared to follow this Jesus who has done so much for us? If so, we will be ready to follow Him in radical discipleship, to rise above the selfishness of our own self-interest, to come to the cross, and to be ready to carry it wherever it leads. For each of us, the ground rules are the same: we follow, He leads. But here is the basis for our confidence: if we follow Christ in this way, we will be losing what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose. We will find God's purposes for our lives. And God has a reward for those who follow Him in this way. For even as Christ first humbled Himself and then was exalted, so we also humble ourselves in our serving of Him, but one day we will also be exalted, by the very same power that exalted Christ Himself, for as the very next chapter reminds us, "*Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour; the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself*" (Phil 3:20-21). No matter what we suffer here, how much we share in His humiliation, we will in due course be raised with Christ to the highest heights, enter the presence of the exalted Ruler of the universe, and find our destiny for all eternity at the foot of His throne.

The way of the cross is the path to glory. That is the message of these verses, and that is our destiny.