



Sunday School Lesson for December 31, 2006
Released on December 27, 2006

“Humiliation and Exaltation”

Printed Text: Philippians 2:1-11
Background Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11
Devotional Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-12

Philippians 2:1–11

1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

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.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Tell of ways that Christ humbled himself.
2. Discuss how Christ's humility gave way to His exaltation.
3. Identify one specific area in which he or she will adopt an attitude of service to others.

Introduction

A famous orchestra conductor was once asked, "What is the hardest instrument to play?" Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Second fiddle. I can always get plenty of first violinists. But to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute, now that is a problem! And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

The book of Philippians is about joy —especially the joy that comes from serving Jesus. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, but it is filled with joyful gratitude to God for His goodness. Paul was not about to let his situation rob him of the joy Christ gives. Much of our joy comes from having a humble attitude of service.

The Mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1–5)

1. Why did Paul pose rhetorical questions to the Philippians (Philippians 2:1)?

Paul begins this section with four rhetorical *if*-statements. These are rhetorical in the sense that Paul does not question whether these things are true but wants his readers to ponder them for a moment. Can we find *consolation* (or encouragement) in knowing Christ? Yes. Can we find *comfort* in living a life of love? Yes. Can we find sweet *fellowship* through the Holy Spirit with God and other believers? Yes.

His presence is a common bond among all believers, which certainly ought to have a unifying effect in any church. It is difficult to comprehend church fights when each member claims to be a child of God. The Holy Spirit promotes unity and fellowship instead. They also had a sensitivity to the needs and hurts of others and compassion for them in times of sorrow. This is the meaning of "bowels and mercies."

2. What were the things Paul wished to be true of the Philippians so that he would have joy in them (v. 2)?

Paul is hundreds of miles away from his beloved Philippian brothers and sisters. But there is still something they can do to bring him great joy. Paul's claim was that if the Philippian believers acted a certain way, he would be filled with joy. Because of the unity among believers that should be inherent in their position in Christ, four things should be true. They should be like-minded (thinking in a similar vein), consistently loving (showing the mind of Christ, which Paul was about to explain), in one accord (united in spirit and attitude), and of one mind (sharing the same purpose of living for Christ).

3. What kinds of attitudes are referred to by "strife" and "vainglory" (v. 3)?

Why do we do the things we do? Almost any action has an underlying motivation. Why do we mow our lawns? One man does it because he loves things to be neat and tidy. Another man does it because he is afraid his neighbors will speak negatively of him if his home looks unkempt. A third man does it because that's the way his dad taught him, and he still wants to do things to please his father.

Paul uses the words *strife* and *vainglory* to describe improper motives. Selfish recognition should never be the motivation for anything a believer does. A self-centered attitude must have arisen among some of the Philippian believers; so Paul pointed out very succinctly what is wrong about that and what should replace it. The word that is translated "strife" (v. 3) is *eritheia*, and it refers to a selfish kind of ambition that does not include the idea of service for others as part of the motivation behind action. It is the kind of selfishness that causes factions and rivalry instead of peace and cooperation.

The word "vainglory" means "empty glory" and refers to a conceited opinion of self. It is a vain attitude that causes a person to look down on others because they are viewed as being inferior. This kind of attitude cannot fulfill the like-mindedness Paul mentioned in verse 2, for it promotes only the self with little or no consideration for others.

"Many people—even Christians—live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. But self-centered living, selfish ambition, or conceit brings discord. Paul therefore stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose. When we work together, caring for the problems of others as if they were our problems (v. 4), we demonstrate Christ's example of putting others first, and we experience unity" (Osborne, ed., *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Tyndale).

The antidote to selfish living is a humble attitude of willingness to consider others better than ourselves. When that is the case, we will not only have concern for our own interests (which is not inherently a bad thing), but we will also have a sincere concern about the interests of those around us.

4. How are we to exhibit the mind of Christ in the way we live (v. 5)?

All of our attitudes should be patterned after the attitudes of *Jesus*. This is why it is important to study His life; that is the only way to understand what He did.

This is a consistent message in Paul's writings. Earlier Paul warned the Christians in Rome to avoid being "conformed" to the selfish ways of the world. Instead, they were to be "transformed" by having new minds, minds that were in line with the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2). He told the Corinthian church that even though Christ in Heaven was rich beyond all measure, He became poor for our sakes (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Christ's Preexistence (v. 6)

5. What did Paul mean by Christ "being in the form God" (v. 6)?

Last week we studied John 1:1 which says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In that verse we are told that Jesus Christ is, and has always been, God. Paul now informs us that Jesus did not selfishly cling to that designation.

Being in the "form" of God means that Jesus was of the same nature, or essence. He has been God from eternity past and remains God today, though in a glorified human body. Jesus did not consider His equality with God the Father as something to cling to at all costs. Rather, He willingly became a man in order to provide salvation for all of us.

Christ's Incarnation (vs. 7, 8)

6. What does it mean that Christ "made himself of no reputation" (v. 7)?

The statement that Jesus "made himself of no reputation" can literally be translated, "He emptied Himself," which has led to verses 6-11 being referred to as the "kenosis" passage (Greek, *kenoo*). The statements that follow explain how He did this. He did not empty Himself of any part of His essence as God but rather gave up some privileges as God to become a man and go through the death necessary for the redemption of our souls. He remained completely God while taking on human form.

In fact, Paul took this one step further by saying that Jesus took on the form of a servant when He was made in the likeness of men. He took a position of lowliness and humility, completely submitting Himself to His Father's will.

7. What was Christ's ultimate act of servanthood (v. 8)?

As a man He so completely humbled Himself to His Father's will that He submitted Himself obediently to death. As if that were not enough, the death to which He submitted Himself was death on a cross. This was Rome's most hideous and torturous means of taking someone's life.

"No better example of humiliation and a selfless attitude for believers to follow could possibly be given than that of Christ. With this example before them, the saints at Philippi should be 'like-minded' (v. 2) and live humbly before their God and each other" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Victor). Mark 10:45 clearly states Jesus' purpose in coming to earth: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

8. The ultimate test of Jesus' humility came as He submitted to the atrocities leading to the cross. How will you use Jesus' humility as a model in your own life?

An amazing thing about Jesus' humility was that He underwent such brutality when He had the power to put a stop to it at any time (Matthew 26:53). Often we speak of someone in a certain situation as being "brave" or "courageous." But if we examine that situation carefully, we may discover that the "brave" choice the person made was his or her only real option. This is quite different from the situation of Jesus. His humility best serves as an example for us when we have alternative paths from which to choose.

The discussion can help your class understand the amount of control that Jesus had to show as He yielded himself to the mocking crowds and taunting soldiers. We can note that the types of humiliation and sacrifices we make pale by comparison.

Christ's Exaltation (vs. 9-11)

9. How did God honor Jesus' willingness to submit (v. 9)?

The word "wherefore," which is the same as "therefore," indicates a cause-and-effect relationship. The voluntary humiliation of Christ led to His exaltation by God. God honored Jesus, first by raising Him from the dead (Acts 2:32) and then by exalting Him to God's right hand, a position of honor and authority (Acts 2:33). He has a position unchallenged and unequalled by any other: King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16).

The author of Hebrews wrote, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (1:3-4). It is clear from these verses and many others that following Jesus' obedience of His Father to death, God gave Him a name higher than all others.

Highly Exalted

Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper* tells the story of Tom Canty and Edward Tudor. Tom was born into poverty; Edward was born into the royal family, the son of King Henry VIII, and was the heir to the kingdom. Becoming acquainted in a chance meeting, the boys traded clothes, and circumstances soon traded their experiences. Edward, dressed in Tom's rags, was thrust from the palace; Tom, dressed in Edward's finery, dwelt in luxury.

Edward soon experienced the deprivation of the impoverished. Beaten, starved, and humiliated, he learned what it was like to become part of the urban poor. Through various experiences he discovered how the other side of England lived. When Henry VIII died, Edward was able to make himself known and was placed on the throne as king. From barely existing in the lowest levels of poverty, he was exalted to the highest station in the kingdom.

Although Jesus was in quite different circumstances, the change in His position also was startling. He gave up His position in Heaven to live in economic poverty on earth. He became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). Living as a man among men, He came to know firsthand our struggles and failures. He was beaten, humiliated, and even crucified. Yet God took Jesus from that lowly position, raised Him from the dead, highly exalted Him, and restored Him to His rightful place in Heaven. This is the one we serve. —James B. North

10. In what ways will the world one day acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord (vs. 10,11)?

Someday, at the name of Jesus, and not at anyone else's name, every person from all the ages will bow before Him. Sadly, for those who refused to receive Him as Saviour during their lifetime on earth, their forced admission of His primacy will still not allow them access to heaven. They will, however, have to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of the universe. Those who know Him as Saviour will then remain with Him forever.

First, we should understand this bowing as more than a mere act of respect or courtesy. It is an act of worship (see Revelation 5:14). The Bible teaches that worship is for God and God alone (see Revelation 22:9). For the hymn to envision universal worship of Jesus is a strong affirmation of His deity.

Second, the worshipping will be accompanied by a confession. This word *confession* is sometimes misunderstood. This is not a confession of our sins or crimes. It is confession in the sense of acknowledgment, a statement of strong and passionate belief. All creatures, including all men and women, thus will acknowledge that Jesus is indeed the *Lord*. The saved will do so gladly, eagerly. The unsaved will have no choice; resistance will be futile. The truth that they rejected in their earthly lives will be all too clear, to their eternal disgrace.

Conclusion

Thinking as Jesus Thought

Have you ever heard a tune that stuck in your head for days? How do certain thoughts (or tunes) get stuck in our minds? Why do we think some things to be trivial and other things to be important? What causes us to care about some things and ignore other things? To push this even further, why do we sometimes have thoughts we don't want to have (or, at least, that we regret later)?

"The unwanted thought" seems to be part of the human condition. We get angry and think terrible things about an irritating coworker. Later, though, we may be ashamed at what we thought. We see an attractive person and our minds flash inappropriately. Later we are ashamed for thinking that way. We lose patience with our spouse and blame him or her for our inadequacies. Later, when we reflect, we are ashamed of such thoughts and appreciate this person deeply.

Paul speaks elsewhere about bringing every thought captive to our obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). What he means is that we must make Jesus the Lord of our thought life. Our minds are not fortresses of solitude where Jesus is not welcome. If He is truly our Lord, then our minds must be open to His presence without shame or fear.

How can we accomplish this on a practical level? The Philippian Hymn outlines a very clear strategy: we begin to think like Jesus. This does not mean we try to imagine what we would do if we were the King of kings as He is. It means we look for ways to serve others. We think of how we can help others, not just help ourselves.

Jesus declared that He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28). When we adopt this attitude, we have made a giant leap toward adopting the mind of Christ. Paul described this attitude as the difference between being "carnally minded" and being "spiritually minded" (Romans 8:6). Those thoughts that cause us to be ashamed will not be welcome in the mind that is set on Christ and acknowledging His presence.

How can you improve your thought life in the new year ahead? Are there things you need to avoid, things that pull you from having your mind open to Jesus? Specifically is there an area in your church or family life where you have been selfish? Take a minute to think of a concrete example; then be resolved to eliminate this unchristlike attitude by fixing your mind on Jesus and adopting the desire to serve others rather than to be served.

Prayer

Loving God, help us to begin the new year with a deeper desire to serve You by serving others. May Your Spirit always be working within us to remake our minds to be like the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray this in His name, the name above all names, amen.

Thought to Remember

Submitting to the lordship of Jesus means we are willing to humble ourselves and serve others.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

The good news for lost people is that Jesus can make them free! Study John 8:31-59 "I Am from Above."

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