

The Exaltation of Christ, Part 1

Scripture: Philippians 2:9

Code: 50-17

INTRODUCTION

Philippians 2:9-11 says, "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

A. The Great Theme of the Passage

In Philippians 2 Paul takes us from the humiliation of Christ (vv. 5-8; see pp. xx-xx) to the exaltation of Christ (vv. 9-11). It is likely that verses 6-11 were a hymn of the early church. It contains the great theme of the Christian faith: the humiliation (vv. 6-8) and exaltation (vv. 9-11) of Christ. Like this passage from Paul, Peter affirmed that the great theme of Old Testament prophecy was the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow (1 Pet. 1:11). The writer of Hebrews says of Christ that because of "the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Christ understood His sufferings in light of His exaltation.

B. The Purpose of the Passage

Paul's purpose in Philippians 2 was not simply to detail the humiliation and exaltation of Christ but to use those truths as a practical illustration. Paul began his illustration with the words, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (v. 5).

The main idea in this section of Philippians is unity. In verses 2-4 Paul calls for unity produced by humility. In verses 5-11 we see Christ as the preeminent example of humility. But beyond the humiliation of Christ, Paul also affirms He was exalted. The implication is that when we willingly humble ourselves like Christ, God will lift us up.

That principle was not taught exclusively by Paul.

1. Matthew 23:12 --Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." Humility and exaltation are reciprocal--if you exalt yourself, God will humble you; if you humble yourself, God will exalt you. Exaltation is the promised reward for faithful humility.

2. Luke 14:11 --"Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

3. Luke 18:14 --Jesus, contrasting a proud Pharisee with a humble tax collector, said, "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

4. James 4:10 --"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."

5. 1 Peter 5:6 --"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."

It is a truism that the man who humbles himself is the one whom God exalts; the man who exalts himself is the one whom God will humiliate. In the divine economy it is by giving that one receives; by serving that one is served; by losing one's life that one finds it; and by dying to self that one lives. One follows the other as surely as night follows day.

C. The Promise of the Passage

Jesus is an example of the exaltation that God will grant to every humble believer. When God said through the apostle Paul, "Let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Phil. 2:3), it is not without promise. The promise is seen in the illustration Paul used--Jesus Christ. Christ humbled Himself and was wonderfully exalted by the Father.

LESSON

I. THE SOURCE OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION

A. The Basis of His Exaltation

The source of Christ's exaltation was God (v. 9). Whatever Christ was given came from God. The word translated "bestowed" (Gk., *charizomai*) means "gifted." God exalted and gifted Him. The word "therefore" at the beginning of verse 9 connects it to verses 5-8. It was because of Christ's humiliation that God exalted Him--the two are inseparable.

God "highly exalted" Christ (v. 9). The Greek preposition *hyper* is used here as a prefix. We get the English words *hyper* and *super* from it. In a moment of redemptive history God highly exalted Christ.

B. The Elements of His Exaltation

Peter said Jesus was "raised up again" and "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:32-33). The exaltation of Christ includes both the resurrection and His coronation--His exaltation to the right hand of God. Peter and the apostles said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus.... He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30-31). Both the resurrection and coronation of Christ are affirmed, plus the forgiveness of sins that comes with Christ's intercession for His people.

Ephesians 1:20 affirms both the resurrection ("He raised Him from the dead") and the coronation ("[He] seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places"). Paul described Christ's coronation as one "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not

only in this age, but also in the one to come" (v. 21). The final element is described in Hebrews 4:14: "We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." That refers to the ascension of Christ.

Christ's exaltation was thus fourfold: resurrection, ascension, coronation, and intercession. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. There He was seated on the throne of God to intercede as High Priest of His people. He sympathizes with us (Heb. 4:15); who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26); and "always lives to make intercession for [believers]" (Heb. 7:25). Just as the descent of Christ into humiliation was in steps (He was in the form of God but willing to let that go; humbled Himself; became a servant; was made in the likeness of men; was found in fashion as a man; and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross [Phil. 2:5-8; see pp. xx-xx]), so His resurrection, ascension, coronation, and intercession show the steps of His exaltation by God.

We Will Be Like Him!

All believers will follow Christ in His exaltation. We will experience resurrection. We will also ascend--and not only the believers at the time of the rapture, but all believers. When in heaven we will experience coronation, for we will sit with Christ on His throne. We will no longer need our Lord's intercessory ministry for the work of transformation will be complete. The path of glory Jesus followed beginning with His resurrection is the path we will follow as well. That's God's promise.

C.The Meaning of His Exaltation

A question that often springs to mind regarding the exaltation of Christ is, How could Jesus be exalted since He is already God? We find the answer in Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John 17, where He asked the Father to restore to Him the glory He had with the Father before the world began (v. 5). Christ's request shows He gave up something God would give back to Him. Christ gave up His glory in the incarnation. Beyond glorification, in His exaltation Christ would receive more than He had before.

How is that possible? God has it all. Christ didn't become any more God or any more perfect; He was already the most-high God--King of kings and Lord of lords. But as the God-Man, a new state of being for Him, He had suffered things and was given things He would not otherwise have had if He had not become the God-Man. For example, He would never have had the privilege of being the interceding High Priest of His people if He had never been touched with the feelings of their infirmities--tempted in all points like them. If He had not become the God-Man, He would never have become the substitute for our sin by bearing our sins in His own body on the cross. As God He was incapable of elevation, but as the God-Man He could be lifted from the lowest degradation to the highest degree of glory. So there's a sense in which He received from the Father privileges He didn't have before--things He gained because of His incarnation.

Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). At His ascension He was surrounded with myriads of holy angels and was seated at the Father's right hand. He was elevated to that position as the God-Man--a state of being that was His only because of His incarnation. Thus He entered upon the rights and privileges not only of God as God, but of God as the God-Man. His exaltation was not with regard to His nature or eternal place within the Trinity, but with regard to His new character as the God-Man.

D.The Privileges of His Exaltation

When Jesus came into the world He entered into a state of being He had never experienced before. His exaltation was the reversal of His humiliation--He who was poor became rich; He who was rejected became accepted; He who learned obedience entered upon the administration of a power that calls all others to obey Him. The Commentator William Hendricksen wrote, "As king, having by his death, resurrection, and ascension achieved and displayed his triumph over his enemies, he now holds in his hands the reigns of the universe, and rules all things in the interest of his church (Eph. 1:22,23). As prophet he through his Spirit leads his own in all the truth. And as priest (High-priest according to the order of Melchizedek) he, on the basis of his accomplished atonement, not only intercedes but actually lives forever to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him" (Philippians, Colossians and Philemon [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], p. 114). And God was the source of Jesus' exaltation.

1. Romans 14:9 --"For this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Christ humbled Himself that God might exalt Him as Lord of all.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:24-25 --Paul said that after all are made alive in Christ, "then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." Christ is now functioning under authority given Him by God. God exalted Him to the place where He is the sovereign of everything.

3. John 5:22 --The Father "has given all judgment to the Son." That was God's gift to the Son, which was part of the Son's exaltation.

E.The Reason for His Exaltation

In Philippians 2:9 Paul says that God "bestowed on Him the name." The Greek word translated "bestowed" means "to give graciously" or "wholeheartedly." Christ so fully and completely accomplished God's plan of redemption that God wholeheartedly and graciously poured out on Christ the gifts of exaltation. Though He could not be made more than God, He now enjoys all the privileges of God and all the privileges of the God-Man that He now is.

II. THE TITLE OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION

A.The Significance of His New Name

The key point of Philippians 2:9-11 is the title of Christ's exaltation. Verse 9 says, "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." Paul used the definite article before the word "name." So the question arises, What is the name that is above every name? According to Hebrews 1:4 it is a more excellent name than the angels have. To be consistent with Scripture, it has to be a name that goes beyond merely distinguishing one person from another. It has to be a name that is descriptive of Christ's nature--revealing something of His inner being. Only such a name would cause Him to be clearly ranked above all others. Paul wasn't referring to a comparative name but a superlative name: one that would set Christ above and beyond all comparison.

Change of name in Scripture indicates the commencement of a unique relationship. When God established His covenant with Abram, He changed his name to "Abraham" (Gen. 17:5). When God entered into a unique relationship with Jacob He gave him the name "Israel" (Gen. 32:22-32). In the New Testament a man named Simon was called by Jesus to follow Him. Jesus gave him a new name: Peter (Matt. 16:18). To the churches at Pergamum and Philadelphia the Lord promised that those who overcome would receive a new name (Rev. 2:17; 3:12). Those names are given to mark a definite stage in a person's life. God has done that throughout redemptive history. Philippians 2:9 affirms that God gave Christ a name. He had had many names--Jesus, Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah--but He received a new name.

B. The Authority of His New Name

Some assume that the new name is Jesus because verse 10 says, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow." But that wasn't a new name; it was bestowed at birth--"You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people" (Matt. 1:21). Nor is the name Jesus above every other name. There have been a lot of people named Jesus. The only name mentioned in Philippians 2:9-11 that is above every name is Lord. In verse 11 Paul says, "Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." That is the only name God gave Christ that is above every name. Whoever is Lord is in control.

That name is a New Testament synonym for Old Testament descriptions of Yahweh (the Old Testament name of God), which show God as sovereign ruler. It signifies rulership based on power and authority. The gospels clearly show that Lord was to be His new name. Christ acknowledged before Pilate that He was a King (Mark 15:2; John 18:37). Thomas looked on the resurrected Christ and worshiped Him, saying, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Though it was always evident that Christ was the living Lord, it was in His exaltation that He was formally given the name Lord--a title that is His as the God-Man. On earth He was known by many names, but now He bears the name that is above every name: Lord.

Verse 10 says, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Verse 11 continues that "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Verse 10 doesn't say at the name Jesus every knee should bow, but at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The name of Jesus immediately bestowed by the Father was Lord. It is not the name Jesus that makes people bow--that's the name of His incarnation--the name Lord.

C. The Foreshadowing of His New Name

That the name mentioned in verse 9 is Lord is confirmed by Paul's allusion to Isaiah 45:21-23, which says, "Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God beside Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance." God said through Isaiah that He is sovereign--the Lord of all. That is what Paul was referring to when He said that every knee would bow and every tongue confess or admit that Jesus Christ is Lord. Only God is Lord.

D. The Reality of His New Name

Is Jesus Christ Lord? According to the declaration of the Father He is. To be called Lord is to have a name above every other name. It means Jesus is the sovereign God. He is not only God according to His being, but God with all the attributes ascribed to God. Therefore He rules as sovereign.

E. The Implication of His New Name

Some say that all Paul meant was that Jesus is God, apart from exercising sovereignty. But once He is acknowledged as God He must be acknowledged as possessing the attribute of sovereignty. To say He is God is to affirm He is in charge.

We cannot know Christ any other way than as Lord. That's why the first creed in the history of the church, given in verse 11, says, "Jesus Christ is Lord." Every Christian must acknowledge that--it's the bottom line of the Christian faith, the very substance of Christianity. We don't make Him Lord after salvation. Every time I hear someone say, "You need to make Jesus Lord" it is as repellant to me as hearing fingernails scraped down a blackboard. We never make Jesus Lord--God already did that.

The Puritan John Flavel put it this way: "The gospel offer of Christ includes all his offices, and gospel faith just so receives him; to submit to him, as well as to be redeemed by him; to imitate him in the holiness of his life, as well as to reap the purchases and fruits of his death. It must be an entire receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ" (The Works of John Flavel, vol. 2 [London: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint], p. 111).

A.W. Tozer said, "To urge men and women to believe in a divided Christ is bad teaching for no one can receive half of Christ, or a third of Christ, or a quarter of the Person of Christ! We are not saved by believing in an office nor in a work" (I Call It Heresy! [Harrisburg, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1974], pp. 10-11). Jesus is Lord and those who refuse Him as Lord cannot use Him as Savior. Everyone who truly receives #Him surrenders to His authority.

F. The Testimonies to His New Name

The truth that Jesus Christ is Lord rings throughout the New Testament.

1. Luke 2:11 --"Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Even at His birth it was affirmed that Christ is Lord. That's who He is and He rightfully bears that name. But it is a name bestowed by the Father when Christ's atoning work was done.
2. John 13:13 --To the apostles Jesus said, "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am."
3. Acts 2:36 --On the day of Pentecost Peter preached, "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."
4. Acts 10:36 --The message of God "sent to the sons of Israel ... [was] peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)." To preach Christ is to preach Him as Lord. Over ninety times in the book of Acts Jesus is referred to as Lord.

5. Romans 10:9-13 --Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all."

6. Romans 14:11 --"It is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'" Who was Paul talking about? Verse 9 says, "Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." Romans 14:9-11 quotes Isaiah 45:23, the same passage Paul used in Philippians 2. His emphasis is that Christ is Lord.

7. 1 Corinthians 8:6 --"For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ." The epistles were written after Jesus ascended into heaven, so they always refer to Christ.

8. 1 Corinthians 12:3 --"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." The Spirit moving on the heart enables one to call Jesus Lord.

9. 1 Corinthians 15:57 --Paul said, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

10. 2 Corinthians 4:5 --According to Paul, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord."

11. Revelation 17:14; 19:16 --Jesus is "Lord of lords and King of kings."

G. The Sovereignty of His New Name

Scripture never speaks of any human making Jesus Lord. It is God who made Him Lord (Acts 2:36). Yet you will often read statements like this: "It is imperative to trust Christ as personal Savior and be born again. But that is only the first decision. The decision to trust Christ as Savior and then make Him Lord are two separate distinct decisions. The two decisions may be close or distant in time. Salvation must always precede lordship. But it is possible to be saved without ever making Christ Lord of your life." In effect that is to say Christ isn't Lord unless we give Him permission--a completely unbiblical assertion. To be saved you must confess Jesus as Lord.

Jesus is called Lord throughout the New Testament. To eliminate the lordship of Christ from invitations to salvation would result in the elimination of numerous passages of Scripture. Peter's sermon in Acts 2--"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21)--would need to be modified. Paul and Silas' method of presenting the gospel--"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31)--would need to be corrected.

H. The Meaning of His New Name

The centrality of the lordship of Christ is very clear in the New Testament gospel. The Jesus who is Savior cannot be separated from the Jesus who is Lord. God cannot be separated from His authority, dominion, rulership, and right to command. When we acknowledge that Jesus is God, we mean He is all that God is.

The Greek translated "Lord" (kurios), primarily refers to the right to rule. Its inherent meaning is not

deity but rulership. Kurios is thus used in the New Testament to describe a master or owner. It was a title of respect for anyone in control. It became the official title of the Roman emperors. They were called kurios in Greek and dominus in Latin, both signifying master or lord. It was used as a title for heathen deities. The translators of the Greek Old Testament used kurios to translate the name of God (the Hebrew word Yahweh). So while deity could be associated with the word, its primary meaning is rulership--secular or otherwise. To say Jesus is kurios certainly implies deity, but it is authority that is the main thought. Regardless of the meaning taken--master, owner, ruler, leader, God--all acknowledge Jesus' authority over us.

CONCLUSION

That Jesus is Lord is at the heart of the gospel. The source of Christ's exaltation was God; the title of His exaltation is Lord. Paul said everyone is going to acknowledge the lordship of Christ sooner or later. It's my prayer that you acknowledge He is Lord by choice and not by force.

FOCUSING ON THE FACTS

1. Who or what was the source of Christ's exaltation?
2. It was because of Christ's _____ that God exalted Him.
3. The elements of Christ's exaltation were fourfold: _____, _____, _____, and _____.
4. Christ gave up His _____ in the incarnation.
5. Christ was exalted with regard to His new character as _____.
6. Why did God wholeheartedly and graciously pour out on Christ the gifts of exaltation?
7. What is the key point of Philippians 2:9-11?
8. What does a change of name indicate in Scripture?
9. What is the only name mentioned in Philippians 2:9-11 that is a name above every name?
10. What Old Testament passage shows us the name Paul referred to in Philippians 2:9-11?
11. Jesus' new name means that He is the _____.
12. What is the bottom line of the Christian faith?
13. Can those who refuse Jesus as Lord use Him as Savior? Why or why not?

15. What New Testament passages confirm that Jesus is Lord?

16. What is wrong with the statement, "The decision to trust Christ as Savior and then make Him Lord are two separate distinct decisions"?

17. If God the Father can't be separated from His authority, dominion, rulership, and right to command, can God the Son be separated from those qualities? Why or why not?

18. What is the meaning of the Greek word kurios?

PONDERING THE PRINCIPLES

1. The humiliation and exaltation of Christ are a lesson for all believers: "As Christ ceased not to be a King because He was a servant, nor to be a lion because he was like a lamb, nor to be God because He was made a man, nor to be a judge because He was judged; so a man does not lose his honour by humility, but he shall be honoured for his humility" (Henry Smith, cited in A Puritan Golden Treasury [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], p. 149). Does your life demonstrate a Christlike humility that God will delight to honor by exaltation?

2. The lordship of Jesus Christ is a crucial issue. Many in our day seem to believe they can accept the work of Christ on the cross apart from worshiping Him as King. Nearly 100 years ago Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "I cannot conceive it possible for anyone truly to receive Christ as Saviour and yet not to receive him as Lord. One of the first instincts of a redeemed soul is to fall at the feet of the Saviour, and gratefully and adoringly to cry, 'Blessed Master, bought with thy precious blood, I own that I am thine,--thine only, thine wholly, thine for ever. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' A man who is really saved by grace does not need to be told that he is under solemn obligations to serve Christ; the new life within him tells him that. Instead of regarding it as a burden, he gladly surrenders himself--body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord who has redeemed him, reckoning this to be his reasonable service" (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 56 [Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1979], p. 617). Take a moment now to acknowledge the lordship of Christ in your own life--it is only your reasonable service to do so.

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