

Joy in Humility

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Date: 14 September 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder what you did during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stuck in your house, daily walks, in your PJs, on Zoom calls with a smart top half, but your! shorts and flip-flops underneath. What did you do during the COVID pandemic? Well, let me tell you about Princess Sophia of Sweden and what she did during COVID-19. You may already know, but during the pandemic, she helped by volunteering in a hospital. She chose to reduce her royal duties in order to serve at a hospital in Stockholm. And apparently she completed some intensive training and she took on the role of a medical assistant. And so she swapped her crown and her royal gown for some navy blue scrubs and a face mask. And she supported medical staff by disinfecting equipment.

She worked in the hospital kitchen and she cleaned all around the hospital. And it's just a great example of humility of a princess laying aside her royalty in order to serve people who are sick and who are dying. Now, I'm sure from our Bible reading in Philippians chapter 2, you can see where I'm going with this illustration. Because in Philippians 2, we don't just get a great example of humility. What we get is the supreme example of humility in the Lord Jesus Christ. And this passage that we're looking at this afternoon is one of the great New Testament passages. In fact, one of the great Bible passages on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some think that this was originally a hymn for the early church or maybe a confession that people said about Jesus and what he had done. But whatever, Paul, who wrote this letter to the Philippians, he sets before the Philippians this magnificent portrait of Jesus Christ. And there's a sense in which it can be visualized with the letter U because it begins with Jesus in the highest position in heaven. And then it goes down as Jesus humbles himself to the lowest position on earth, which is death. And then the curve turns upwards again. And Jesus, we read, is exalted by God to the highest place where Jesus is to be worshipped as Lord. And so what the Apostle

Paul wants to do in writing these words to the Philippians is basically to show the depth of the humiliation of Jesus Christ as well as the exaltation of Jesus Christ by God the Father. And so this is a powerful proclamation of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. But it's interesting because Paul expresses all of this to the Philippians for a pastoral and practical purpose. So this is less of a systematic theology lecture, if you like. He's not teaching doctrine in the seminary. What he is doing is teaching practical theology or pastoral counseling in the church because what Paul wants to give here is instruction on living as a Christian. And so if you call yourself a Christian, Paul is saying you need to be Christ-like to look at him and see what he has done for you and seek to emulate him as you follow him.

Because if we are in Christ, and that's one of Paul's great themes, being in Christ, what it means to be a Christian, then we will become more like Christ. And that includes, of course, how we relate to one another. A relationship with God also involves not just the vertical but the horizontal and how we relate to each other. And so remember, Paul is writing to Christians in Philippi, and he is addressing specific issues. He's talking to real people in a real place, and he really wants to help them.

And so he's already said in chapter 1 verse 27 that they are to stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. So he's concerned about unity in the church, because of course we know that disunity is harmful. It's harmful to the church's fellowship on the inside, but division or disunity also hinders the church's witness on the outside.

[4 : 4 6] Whereas a church where members can live together in unity is a beautiful witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ to change human lives like ours. And so Paul wants to shine the spotlight on Jesus, not only for us to worship him, but to show us Christ's example so that we'll be conformed to his likeness.

And so we need to see Jesus as the supreme example of humility so that we will have the same mind that we find in Jesus Christ. And that's really the application in this passage for us. In our relationships, we are called to be humble. Why? Well, because Christ humbled himself. And so I'd like us to look at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First, Christ humbled himself, there in verse 6 to 8.

Second, God the Father exalted Christ, verse 9 to 11. And then the application, you should have the mind of Christ, comes from Paul's words in verse 5. In other words, we're going to think about the mind of Jesus and what he did, and the mind of God the Father and what he has done, and therefore the mind that we should have and what we must do. So if you like, Christ, number one, God the Father, number two, and then you and me, number three. So first, Christ humbled himself. Let's look again at verse 6 to 8.

So let's look at these words together, because Jesus, Jesus being in very nature God, or in the form of God, Paul's simply meaning there that Jesus is divine. It's another way of saying that Jesus is God. So as God the Son, he has always existed.

And Paul's saying, yet despite possessing equality with God, he didn't hold on to this. Instead, he willingly gave up his status and he came down into our world. So Jesus is God, but he emptied himself, not by becoming nothing, but by taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. So Paul doesn't mean here that Jesus somehow ceased to be God by giving up his divinity. No, it was his status he gave up, not his being. Just like Princess Sophia gave up her royal status, but she was still a princess as she served in a hospital. And so it wasn't that Jesus emptied himself of certain abilities. No, Jesus has always been and will always be fully God. But he emptied himself or he poured himself out by giving up all his rights as God when he left the glory of heaven. So the Lord of glory took on human nature and became a servant. So God the Son added humanity to his divinity. The King, if you like, covered himself with his servant's robe. So he's still the King. He remains fully God, but his glory is covered.

[8 : 42] And so the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ, took to himself a human nature and became a servant. That's what Paul is saying. And in the context in which Paul was writing, servants or slaves were basically nobodies. They had no rights in the ancient world. And so Paul's saying that this is the eternal Son of God. And that's what he was prepared to become, a nobody. Now that's one stage of Christ's humiliation. His incarnation is coming to earth, God taking on human flesh. But there's another stage to his humiliation because he descends further into the depths of humiliation. Because Jesus Christ was not only born as a man, he was born as a man in order to die. And so his journey took him down from glory to this world and then further down still to death itself. So from heaven to earth and then from womb to tomb, Jesus laid aside his throne and in obedience to his Father, he took up his cross in order to die.

Now Paul's language here echoes the prophet Isaiah in chapter 52 and 53 when he speaks about the suffering servant. The suffering servant is Jesus. And as Isaiah says, the one who poured out his life unto death. And so Paul here is pressing home the staggering extent of Christ's humility. Because crucifixion you would know in the Roman world was the worst form of humiliation. It was cruel. It was a revolting death and it was reserved for the very worst of criminals. And as well as the excruciating pain of being nailed to a wooden cross. It was also the ultimate in shame and degradation.

And so what Paul is saying here about the humility of Jesus should shock us. Because the Lord Jesus humbled himself in order to die in that particular way. And so we're meant to see the astonishing contrast between his true identity as God, as Lord, as King, and yet his humiliation. And coming in nakedness and shame and being condemned to die on a cross. And that's why Jesus is the supreme example of humility. Because he willingly stooped to the depths of extreme suffering, shame, and death.

Now some people I think who perhaps don't understand fully about Jesus think that Jesus was some kind of poor victim. That his death was some kind of accident. That he was a just a victim of circumstance.

But that's not true. Never. Jesus came to face this humiliating death on a cross. And he did it for us and for our salvation. So Jesus willingly died in our place to forgive our sin against God by taking the punishment that we deserve. So in humility, Jesus valued others above himself. As Paul says there in chapter 2, verse 4. And Jesus certainly wasn't looking out for his own interests as he went to the cross.

[12 : 28] But he was looking out for our interests. People like you and me who deserve God's punishment for our sin. But yet Jesus was willing to come and die so that we could be forgiven.

And we need to see the extent of his humility for us if our lives are ever going to be any different. And that's why Paul forces us to look at Jesus. He's saying to the Philippians, he's saying to us, look at Jesus Christ, do you see who he is? Do you see what he has done for you?

And yet that's not all because his humiliation is only half of the story, if you like. We also see his exaltation. And that's the second point because Christ humbled himself, but God the Father exalted Christ. Verse 9 to 11. So we know that Jesus' death on the cross was not the end of the story because God raised him to life and exalted him. And so that's the second part of this magnificent portrait of Jesus. As Paul moves from his humiliation onto his exaltation.

So Christ humbled himself and God the Father exalted Christ. Let's see that in verse 9 to 11.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Remember the picture or the image of the life story of Jesus like the letter U? Well, as Jesus goes down from glory to grave in verse 6 to 8, we then see him go from the grave back up to glory again in verse 9 to 11. Where right now, what's Jesus doing? Well, Jesus is sitting enthroned with all authority. But just notice the use of the word therefore at the beginning of verse 9. Because every time we read a therefore in the Bible, then we need to stop and ask, well, what's it therefore? Well, here we're being told that Jesus' humiliation is actually the grounds for his exaltation. So there's an integral connection, which is more than just one follows the other.

[15 : 06] And so Paul is speaking here of God's approval of Christ's work on the cross. So God the Father responds to Christ's death, his act of obedience and humbling himself to die, God responds by exalting him to the highest place. And so Christ came down to the lowest place on earth, that's death.

But then the Father restored Christ and rewarded him with the highest place for finishing his ministry here on earth by doing what was necessary for us and for our salvation. And so there's a sense in which Jesus earned his exaltation for his humiliation. That's why the Father gave him the name that is above every name. But what is the name that is above every name? Well, Paul goes on to talk about every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. And so the name is thought to be the name Lord. Now, of course, Jesus has always been Lord, but Paul's saying here that Jesus has been publicly exalted as Lord by God the Father. So his universal rule and reign is recognized by God and God's exaltation of his son Jesus. So he is seated right now at the right hand of the Father, enthroned and crowned as Lord forevermore. And that's why we read that the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. We're being told that the whole creation will bow in worship before the Lord Jesus Christ. So the day is coming when every human being, including all of us, will bow in submission to Jesus. And it's going to be done willingly by some, but unwillingly by others. So those who believe in Jesus as their Savior and follow Jesus as their Lord will gladly bow the knee. And yet others who don't believe in Jesus, who don't recognize him as Lord and God will be forced to bow the knee.

Either way, everyone will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And so when people these days use the name Jesus as a swear word, and like me, you hear it every day from all kinds of places and all kinds of people, people don't realize perhaps that they're insulting the Lord of all creation, before whom one day they will have to bow and they will meet him and have to give account for what they have said about him. And so those lips that might curse Jesus in this life by using his name as a swear word will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

And so the issue for us is, well, has his humbling of himself for us on a cross resulted in me humbling myself before him? Where I acknowledge my sin against God, knowing that I deserve his punishment, and so I need to go to him for mercy and for forgiveness. That's the only right response to Jesus Christ.

Because if we don't bow to Jesus with joy and with gratitude in this life, then we'll have to bow with fear and terror on the judgment day. Well, why? Because Jesus Christ is Lord.

[18 : 55] But just see how the Lordship of Christ doesn't diminish the glory of the Father. It actually enhances it. Since we read there at the very end of our passage, the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus are to the glory of God the Father. So everything Jesus does brings glory to the Father. Now, as a father, along with the rest of you who are fathers and mothers, you know that the glory that you

get, you sometimes get because of the way that your children behave and the good things that they do, it reflects on you. So it might be your child baking a lovely cake for somebody, or drawing a beautiful picture for others to admire, or saying a kind word to someone, or saying thank you, helping somebody in need, maybe running down the pitch, scoring a great goal in football or a try in rugby, or your child playing a beautiful instrument. All of this somehow gives glory to us as parents. And of course, we always love our children. We always delight in our children. But when we see them fulfill their potential as our child, then we are filled with joy. And it just so happens to be to our glory.

And so often, as you do, as I do, as parents, we just want to acknowledge our children's selfless acts, or their great achievements, and we want to praise them, or we want to reward them as their mom or dad.

And so in an infinitely greater and perfect way, Paul's expressing here how God the Father exalted his son Jesus Christ because he humbly and obediently laid down his life for sinners like us. And it gives glory to God the Father. So Christ humbled himself, God the Father exalted Christ, and God the Father gets all the glory. It's wonderful not just to know God's plan and the humiliation and the exaltation of Jesus Christ, but also to realize that it all happened for your sake and for mine. And that's why we need now to go back to what Paul said first to see how this applies to us. That's the reason we've taken these verses in this order, because first of all, we need to see how Christ humbled himself, his mind. We need to see how God the Father exalted Christ, his mind. Thirdly, so we can see what our mind should be. We should have the mind or the mindset of Christ. Let's think about that now. Verse 5, Paul says, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. We need the mind of Christ if we're to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, because only then can we seek to emulate his humility and his example. Because Paul's purpose here in expounding the person and work of Christ's remember is to show the Philippians how to live, how to live each and every day. Because the Christian life always follows the same pattern as the life of Jesus Christ. And so we must be humble because

Christ humbled himself. And so how do you become humble then? I know it's a question that we're all asking. How do we become humble? Because we know we aren't. Well, notice that Paul doesn't actually tell us what to do here, does he? He doesn't give a list of things that you need to do in order to become or be a humble person. There's no set program that you need to follow. There's no do this, this, this, this, this, and this, and the end result is this, a humble person in every way.

Now, Paul here, notice he's not giving us something to do. Rather, he's giving us a way to think. He wants us to have the right mindset, in other words, an intentional way of thinking that will result in a way of being. And that mindset is to be the same mind as Christ Jesus. And it comes from our union with Christ. Because when we are in Christ, then we are to become more and more like Christ.

[23 : 44] So our union with Christ should lead to a mind that is Christ-like and therefore imitates Christ in how we live our lives. And this is not something, of course, we are able to do by trying harder or with our own resources. But what Paul is doing is helping us focus on Jesus Christ, to see this magnificent portrait of him, to look at him and see him and see what he has done so that the mind of Christ will be reproduced or reprogrammed, if you like, in us.

Because as we see Jesus for who he is and see all that he has done as the one who humbled himself to death for us and who has been exalted by God the Father and is Lord, and so we will bow before him as Lord one day, then, well, we must bow before him now. And it says we bow before him and gaze upon him in all of his glory, seeing his beauty and his brilliance and then submitting to his Lordship, then the Holy Spirit will conform us to his image and likeness. And so with the mind of Christ, we are motivated to live for Christ. In seeing him, we see how we should be. And that's how our lives are transformed. So we become more like Jesus. And we'll not only seek to, but we'll want to emulate this Christ-like humility. And so if you're still looking for a simple answer to the question, how do you become humble? Well, Paul does, in a sense, give the answer here. In a word, it's death, isn't it? Death. Jesus served us by willingly giving up his own life for the sake of others.

And so the ultimate expression of humility for you and for me is death. What does that mean? Well, what it means for Jesus, death to our so-called rights, death to all of our privileges, death to our status, death to my enjoyment and my pleasure, death to my time, because we want to serve others and not just ourselves. And so humility is always going to involve sacrifice, where we go without so that others will benefit. And only the mind of Christ can cure us from our self-centered approach to

life and motivate us to give our lives in a self-sacrificing way.

There's nothing else that can produce Christ-like people in this world. Only Jesus can work in us to produce in us what we should be. And in that mind of Christ or with that mindset of Christ, what follows will be the lifestyle that brings glory to God the Father. Not perfectly, but one that continually is conformed so their lives are more like Jesus. So if the Father exalted his Son because of his humility, then won't the Father do that for all his children as they become more like Jesus?

And so let's never stop looking at Jesus Christ. He is the Lord who is high and exalted because he humbled himself. And let's worship Jesus. Let's adore Jesus. Let's love Jesus. Let's praise Jesus. Let's delight in Jesus. Let's follow Jesus. And let's share Jesus because Jesus is Lord.

[27 : 54] Let's pray together.