



SERMONS FOR ADVENT

Sermon Notes

On the Incarnation: the Exaltation of the Son

Philippians 2:5-11

December 23, 2012

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

- We continue this morning in our study of the great Hymn of Christ by the Apostle Paul.
- The beauty of this hymn is that it takes us, in just a few short verses, from the lowest of lows to the highest of highs – from the cross of Calvary and judgment of God to the heights and glory of heaven.
- This morning, we come to the third aspect of the Incarnation, as revealed in this hymn: **the exaltation of Christ**.
- Up until this point, we have learned multiple truths regarding Christ's Incarnation:
 - He was/is fully divine / equal with the Father
 - He “emptied Himself”
 - He assumed human flesh
 - He humbled Himself
 - He obeyed the Father
 - He obeyed the Father to the point of death on a cross

- Now, this morning, we read that Paul says, “⁹ *Therefore God has highly exalted him* and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,” [emphasis added]

I. Christ Humbled Himself
II. God Exalted Christ to the Highest Place
III. God Bestowed on Christ the Highest Name

I. Christ Humbled Himself

- Over the past two weeks, we studied how Christ perfectly obeyed the will of the Father by emptying Himself, assuming human flesh, and humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- What was so critical in understanding each of these elements and aspects of Christ’s Incarnation was that **He actively did them.**
 - In other words, it was not the Father who “emptied Christ,” Christ “emptied Himself.”
 - The Father did not “humble Christ,” Christ “humbled Himself.”
- And then, ultimately, Christ obeyed the Father’s will to the point of death, even **death on a cross.**
 - Even on the cross; however, Christ was actively fulfilling His Father’s will.
 - As we read last week, in Hebrews 9, Christ offered Himself up, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as a perfect sacrifice to His Father:

Hebrews 9:14: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

- It was on the cross that **Christ descended to the lowest point: to the very depths of hell.**
- In fact, when we affirm, in the Apostles’ Creed, that Christ “**descended into hell**” we are not affirming that Christ went to hell after His physical death (on Saturday, so to speak). Rather, the Church has historically, affirmed that **on the cross, Christ fully experienced hell – the eternal wrath of the Father.**

- Consider the words of Psalm 22:

“¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

⁸ “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.”

- Yet, once again, this was the Father’s plan – that the Son would endure hell on behalf of all the Father gave Him. And this, Christ did perfectly, obeying the Father to the point of death, even death on a cross!

II. God Exalted Christ to the Highest Place

- Then, here in Philippians 2:9, Paul says, “⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,”
- **“Therefore God highly exalted him...”**
 - In other words, because of Christ’s perfect obedience and righteousness, His sacrifice was accepted by God the Father.
 - **Therefore**, as the once-for-all acceptable sacrifice, the Father vindicated His Son, exalting Him to the highest place.

- According to John MacArthur, Christ’s exaltation involved four “phases”: His **Resurrection, Ascension, Coronation** [in heaven as King of Kings], and **Intercession**.
- These are certainly all true, but the point we see here this morning in Philippians 2, is that in His exaltation by the Father, **the Son goes from the depths of hell to the heights of heaven**.
 - Christ alone was born in a manger, crucified as a criminal, condemned as a sinner, and descended into hell. All of this, He did, while perfectly obeying the will of the Father.
 - Therefore, God highly exalted Him.
- The word Paul uses here is a **superlative**, for he says that God *hyper* exalted Christ.
 - This was not a comparative way of saying, Christ was exalted to a place *higher* than He had been before His Incarnation.
 - Rather, Paul was saying that Christ **was exalted the HIGHEST place**.
 - In other words, there is no “place” or position in all of heaven and earth higher than what Christ holds.
- Indeed, His exaltation represents the ultimate vindication of the Son by the Father. This was the proof that God approved of and accepted Christ’s sacrifice one for all.
- Furthermore, Christ’s true identity may have been veiled in flesh during His Incarnation – as His deity was hidden in His humanity. Yet, His true identity was revealed fully in His exaltation.
- This idea is beautifully reflected in Psalm 97:9:

Psalm 97:9: “⁹ For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.”

- One author notes that Paul is declaring the “incomparable transcendence and absolute majesty of Christ” Walter Hansen
- **But, Paul notes one more truth concerning Christ’s exaltation: “the Father bestowed upon Him the Highest name.”**

III. God Bestowed on Christ the Highest Name

- In the original Greek, the phrase, "...bestowed on Him the name that is above every name" literally means "*graced* on Him the name..."
- This begs the question, "What is the name Paul is referring to here?"
- There appears to be two options: "Jesus" or "Lord."
- Those who would choose "Jesus" note that "Jesus" is a name and "Lord" a title.
- However, most scholars believe that given the (1) biblical (Old Testament) references to LORD; and (2) the first century context of "Lord" that Paul is likely referring to the name being "Lord." (And I agree with this position).
- In Isaiah 41-45, the Prophet declares boldly and clearly the incomparable majesty of Yahweh and the uniqueness of Him as the one true and living God.

Isaiah 42:8: "I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols."

Isaiah 43:11: "I, I am the LORD,
and besides me there is no savior."

Isaiah 44:6: "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
"I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god."

Isaiah 45:18: "For thus says the LORD,
who created the heavens
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it;
he did not create it empty,
he formed it to be inhabited!):
"I am the LORD, and there is no other."

- But, the evidence in Isaiah is even clearer, for the Apostle Paul even quotes from Isaiah 45:23:

Isaiah 45:23: "By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:

**‘To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.’**” [emphasis added]

- Therefore, it is clear that the name Paul is referring to here is “LORD,” thus declaring Christ being equal in essence to Yahweh. It must also be noted, however, that Paul is **NOT** saying that Christ *became* God in His exaltation, but that He was always God, yet His divine glory had been veiled or hidden until His exaltation. The Father was simply vindicating His Son and declaring Him to be **what He had always been – sharing fully in the divine essence (Yahweh).**
- The other reason what LORD is likely the “name” spoken of here by Paul is due to the historical/contemporary context in which Paul was writing.
 - Paul wrote Philippians as one of the emperor’s prisoners. He also fully understood the belief among the pagan Romans that Caesar was Lord. Therefore, this statement stood as a direct attack against this belief.
- “In a Roman colony, Philippians would hear the acclamation Jesus is Lord as a shocking allusion to the declaration of the Roman imperial cult that Caesar is Lord. In the ideology of the imperial cult, Jupiter and the gods gave divine authority and divine names to Augustus Caesar. In the theology of the hymn of Christ, God gave the divine name to Jesus so that He will be the LORD acclaimed and worshipped by all. By quoting this hymn, Paul presents the exaltation as Jesus is Lord in language that reflects and subverts the Roman imperial cult.” G. Walter Hansen

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- Finally, what are the lessons we ultimately learn from this text?
 - First is that **exaltation is connected to humility.**
 - The Gospel declares that we must come to an “end” of ourselves before we can turn to Christ. The Law is a weight we cannot bear, and so we repent and turn to Christ that we may live.
 - **In this passage, Paul is clear that:**

CHRIST HUMBLING HIMSELF, GOD [THE FATHER] EXALTED HIM.

- So it must be with us. We are to humble ourselves, knowing that, in His time, God will lift us up. [God can do a better job of exalting us than we can ourselves!]

- Yet, this is a fundamentally different paradigm than the world in which we live. In our world, we exalt people who are smart, wealthy, handsome, beautiful, and self-promoting.
 - We even begin to think that “If I don’t promote myself, I will miss out.”
 - But the Kingdom of God is fundamentally different: God exalts those who humble themselves.
 - We must trust in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that we will be exalted with Christ in due time.

Matthew 23:12: “¹²Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

1 Peter 5:6: “⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,”

❖ Therefore, may we humble ourselves, and turn to Christ that we might live.

1 Timothy 6:11-16: “¹¹But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”