

Down is the New Up

Humble Unity Part 6
Philippians 2:5-11 3-27-2016

Summary: Jesus humbled himself as an example for us, and God therefore exalted him which is also an example for us. We need to understand that God lifting up those who humble themselves is axiomatic. But beyond just an example, our humbling ourselves is adjoining with Christ in his suffering, and we will also be joined with Christ in his exaltation, because our sharing in his exaltation exalts him all the more.

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2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 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.

Introduction

Were you ever that kid that, when they were picking teams you got picked last? Or you were like me – you didn’t get picked at all? You just had to watch. Or did you ever come in dead last in a race? Or you got the worst grade in the whole class? You rank eleventh in a group of nearly a dozen. Sometimes we come in last when there’s only one other person. You get into a conflict with someone and you come out

... on the bottom. One of the hardest things about life is lowliness. Sometimes we're so lame we lose even though there's no other person. I'm all by myself, and I try to do something, and it's a flop. And it's not always something very difficult either. There are times I try to put something in my mouth with a fork and miss – I hit my lip and the food falls off the fork. Talk about a fail. And when we fail, we hate it. Everything in us recoils against lowliness. It's like we just were not designed for that. Animals don't seem to mind lowliness. A dog makes a mistake, or barks out of turn - I don't see him getting all embarrassed. Why is that? What is God's design for us when it comes to being lowly and being lifted up?

God is Supreme in Every Category

Think for a second about the opposite of lowliness. What do you suppose it would be like to hang around the smartest person in the world? Or what about the nicest person? Of all the people alive on earth, somebody has to be the kindest – what would it be like to be around that person? What about the most beautiful person? What about the richest or most generous person? Or the strongest person? What about the most morally upright person - the person with the least amount of evil in his heart of all people alive? Or the most enjoyable person? Whoever it is on this planet that you would get the most enjoyment from hanging around – what would it be like to spend a day with that person? Who do you suppose all those people are?

I can tell you. They are all the same person: God. And I can say that for sure because that's the definition of God. If there is a Supreme Being, then, by definition, he would have to be supreme, which means the ultimate in every category. So if there is a God, he would have to be smarter than the smartest person, nicer than the nicest person, kinder, more loving, wealthier, more generous, purer, holier, more beautiful, more spectacular, more interesting, and more enjoyable than anyone or anything else. That's what *supreme* means. Think of everything in existence as being like a giant mountain. At the bottom of the mountain is everything evil, ugly, or worthless. The better things in life are a little ways up. The really, really good things in life are farther towards the top. On that mountain, something has to be at the peak. There is a word in human language for that, and the word is, "God." The Supreme Being. He is not just supreme in power; he is supreme in every category. The notion of someone or something being better than God in *any* category is absolute nonsense, because it would mean God isn't really God.

That's why if I love anyone or anything more than I love God, something is seriously wrong with me. God is supreme in every way, and he should be acknowledged as such. And to fail to do so is a moral evil.

We have been studying through the book of Philippians here at Agape, and we are just now arriving at the most famous passage in the whole book – 2:5-11. In the weeks to come, the plan is to study this section phrase by phrase in detail, because it is such a rich and important passage. But before we embark on that endeavor, I thought it would be good today to back up and take a look at the section as a whole, and ask three questions:

- 1) What does this have to do with Easter?
- 2) What does this have to do with the rest of the book of Philippians – what role does it play in the argument of the book?
- 3) What is the significance for my daily life?

What Does This Have to do with Easter?

Exaltation = Resurrection + Ascension

Easter Sunday is the day that we set aside to focus our attention on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. And you will not find any passage anywhere in the Bible that gets more to the heart of the significance of the resurrection than this passage. The purpose of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was for God the Father to exalt him.

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

He did that through the resurrection and ascension. Even though there were 40 days in between the resurrection and the ascension into heaven, Scripture speaks of them together to describe the exaltation of Christ.

Acts 2:32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead...31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior

Ephesians 1:20 ... he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not like the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was raised from the dead, not to prove anything about Lazarus, but to prove something about Jesus, who raised him. But Jesus was raised by the Father as an emphatic statement that he was the very Son of God. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, but lots of people make outrageous claims. How do we know Jesus was telling the truth?

Romans 1:4 through the Spirit of holiness [Jesus was] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead

He was powerfully, emphatically, forcefully, unequivocally, definitively declared to be God's glorious Son by the way God raised him. And by doing it the way he did it, with so many eyewitnesses and so much historical verification, God made it absolutely unarguable who Jesus is.

Acts 17:31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

God exalted his Son by unveiling his absolute supremacy. So even though there is no explicit mention of the resurrection in verses 9-11, we know from the rest of the Bible that when it talks about the Father exalting Jesus to the highest place, the resurrection is at the center of that. So this is most definitely an Easter passage. Easter is the celebration of not just the fact that Jesus went from being dead to being alive, but of the fact that he was exalted to the highest place. His supremacy was unveiled.

The Supremacy of Christ

God the Father made it crystal clear that Jesus is the Supreme Being. He is the highest and greatest in every category. He is the wisest, most powerful, most beautiful, most generous, most important, most loving, most holy, purest, most valuable, most satisfying being in existence.

Appearance

He is supreme in appearance. During his humiliation you couldn't tell by looking at him that he was anything special, but if you look at him now there is no question at all that he is the Supreme Being.

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being

Importance

Nothing matters more than his glory and honor.

Revelation 5:13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Authority

In fact, nothing matters at all other than his will – what he desires, and so he is worthy of absolute obedience.

Matthew 28:18 Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, ... 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded

Value

In Matthew 13:44 he is described as being like a great treasure that is so valuable that when you find it, you would gladly and happily trade everything in this world to get it.

Rank

Philippians 2:9 God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name

The whole book of Hebrews is about Jesus' superiority above the greatest of the greatest. Superior to the angels, superior to Moses, to Abraham, to the whole Old Testament sacrificial system - he is superior to every spiritual being in the heavenlies because he is their Creator.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Worthiness

That means he is also supreme in worthiness. Everything exists for him. Everything was created for him. The whole sweep of history is happening the way it's happening for his sake. And because of what he did in purchasing our redemption, only he is worthy to open up the seals and bring about the culmination of all human history.

Revelation 5:4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals

Supreme in worthiness.

Wisdom

Twice in 1 Corinthians 1 Jesus is called the wisdom of God. He knows every thought every person has ever had. He knows every fact there is, he knows everything that has happened, everything that is happening, and everything that will ever happen. He knows everything that won't happen and everything that would've happened if something else happened that hasn't happened. He knows every possibility and every impossibility. He knows every outcome and every implication, and he knows what is best in every situation.

Majesty

2 Thessalonians 1:9 [Unbelievers] will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Daniel 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Love

Romans 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 3:17 ...I pray that you ...18 may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge

Power

Philippians 3:20 ... the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies

He has the power to bring absolutely everything single thing under his control.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

He is the Supreme Being, and the purpose of the resurrection and ascension was for God the Father to make that crystal-clear to everyone.

Where Does This Fit in the Argument of Philippians?

So that is what this passage has to do with Easter. Second question: What does it have to do with the book of Philippians? Where does it fit in the flow of thought? We need to answer that question before we will be able to answer our third question about how it's relevant for your daily life.

The Incarnation

Notice the first word in verse 9: **Therefore** God exalted him to the highest place... Because of what Jesus did in verses 6-8, God exalted him. What did he do in verses 6-8? He humbled himself.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the very form of a slave, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Jesus started out high – equal with God, he was the Supreme Being – and then he lowered himself. Two thousand years ago he became a man, and he was still the Supreme Being, but you couldn't tell by looking at him.

He just looked like some lowly slave. Instead of being in charge and ruling everything, he was obedient – even to the point of death. And it was the most humiliating, disgusting, obscene kind of death.

So Jesus went from the absolute highest to the absolute lowest. And all of that is given as an example for what we are supposed to do toward one another. In verses 3 and 4 he tells us to be humble toward one another. Then verse 5 - **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who...** Then it goes on to describe how Jesus humbled himself. So this is an example for us to imitate. And that makes perfect sense right up through verse 8. But what about verses 9-11? If the purpose is for us to imitate Jesus' attitude, what is the point of verses 9-11? He doesn't say anything about Jesus' attitude in those verses. They only talk about what God the Father did to exalt Jesus. Why include that in a section about how we are to follow Jesus' example of humility?

The Inevitable Outcome of Humility

It's included because it is essential that we understand the outcome of humility. The outcome of humbling yourself is always, always exaltation by God the Father. Look at the first word in verse 9. It's, **therefore**, not "however." You might expect some kind of adversative – "he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death ... *however*, God exalted him..." But instead of that, it says **therefore God exalted him**. The Bible says so many times that God will humble those who lift themselves up, and lift up those who humble themselves – that is such an axiom in the way God works, that it calls for the word **therefore**. The *reason* God exalted Christ was because Christ humbled himself. Paul actually uses two conjunctions together here, and according to one scholar I read, that structure means "obviously," or "of course." Here's what he said, "Together the words may be ... interpreted as saying, in effect, ... that in the divine order of things self-humbling leads inevitably to exaltation. It is an inexorable law of God's kingdom that operates without variance, equally applicable for Christians at Philippi as for Christ himself."¹ Paul says **therefore** because exaltation follows self-humbling like day follows night. God will always take you the opposite way you take yourself. If you work your way to the top, God will bring you down. If you lower yourself down, God will lift you up. There isn't close to enough time for me to show you all the different places in the Bible that teach that principle. You can pretty much just let your Bible flop open to almost any page and see it. And when it's not stated explicitly, we see it in action. Pick just about any Bible story you want. Adam and Eve wanted to exalt themselves to be like God, and God brought them low. Pharaoh, Goliath, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod - they all exalted themselves, and God slammed them down. And he lifted up lowly people like Moses, Gideon, David, the Apostles, Jesus' mother Mary. The higher you lift yourself, the lower He will bring you. The lower you stoop, the higher God will lift you up. Jesus went the lowest, and therefore God exalted Him to the highest place. So verses 9-11 are just as much for our example as versus 6-8.

We All Desire Exaltation

Now, maybe you hear that and think, "I'm actually not all that interested in being exalted. I don't want anybody to pin a medal on my chest or put my name up in lights." Maybe you don't want those forms of exaltation, but everyone wants to be lifted up in some way. That's why we are all selfish. Every single time I'm selfish, that's me exalting myself above others. Every time I put my preferences ahead of yours, or I regard my opinion as more important than yours, that's me exalting myself. Every time I get angry because somebody slighted me or neglected me or insulted me, that's my proud heart reacting against being brought low. We all desire to be lifted up, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to be lifted up. Do you want to hear God someday tell you, "Well done, good and faithful servant?" That's a

¹ Hawthorne, WBC.

desire to be lifted up by God. Do you ever ask God to help you in a time of trouble? That's a desire to be lifted up by God. And that's not a bad thing. It's a good thing – God commands us to seek that. Where we go wrong is when we want to lift ourselves up rather than letting God do it.

What Does This Have To Do with Me?

And that's where this gets really practical. This is where we answer the third question – what does this have to do with me?

Trust God to Lift You Up

Why do we find it so hard to let go of our pride? Because we don't trust God to lift us up. You get into an argument with somebody, it gets kind of heated, now you both said things that weren't honoring to Christ or had attitudes that weren't honoring to Christ, and so now the question is this: who will be the first one to humble himself? Your conscience says, "Those words you just said weren't pleasing to Christ. You should confess that and ask that person to forgive you." And immediately everything in your flesh says, "But, but, but - what he said was even worse!"

"If I back down now, he will just gloat."

"He needs to understand that he can't be treating me that way!"

Or sometimes it's just plain, "I don't want to." I know I should humble myself; I know I should be the first to apologize – but I just don't want to do it. I'm angry right now, and I don't want to show kindness to him right at this moment." All of those are just various expressions of self-exaltation. And we are not going to be able to change that behavior until we really believe that if we humble ourselves, God really will grant us a far better kind of exaltation than what we are fighting for. We need to believe that that absolutely will happen, like day follows night. And we also need to believe that just as certainly, if we keep exalting ourselves, the Lord will humble us, and that will be no fun. Whatever we think we're going to get from lifting ourselves up will not be worth it. The last thing you ever want to happen to you is for the Lord to bring you down.

What God did with Jesus in verses 9-11 is an illustration of the principle from the end of chapter 1.

Philippians 1:28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

God will destroy them and save you. How will that work? The way it works is you humble yourself and God lifts you up. That's how God will save you. And the way their destruction works is they exalt themselves, and God brings them down.

Participation in Christ's Exaltation

So that is a very practical application for daily life. One hundred times a day we are tempted to lift ourselves up, and so 100 times a day we need to remember this principle. This whole world is upside down. It's like we are in one of those snow globe shakers, and the whole thing is currently upside down. So while everyone is trying to climb upward – or what looks like upward inside the globe, that's actually downward. But we are the only ones who know the globe is upside down. And so while the whole world scratches and claws and kicks and fights and steps over each other to get higher on the ladder, God speaks to us in Scripture and says, "Psst – hey, you're going the wrong way. Up is that way." There is no more practical, more relevant principle for daily living that you could ever have, because it affects everything we do. Our natural impulse is always self-promotion rather than humility. Have you ever played one of those games where the controls were set up backwards so that when you move your hand right, the thing you're controlling goes left, and if you move up, it goes down? I have never been able to get the hang of those. But that is basically what we are faced with in this life, because this whole world is upside down.

So it is practical and relevant. But the practicality and relevance of this actually goes way beyond that. Here is what we need to realize: the humiliation and exaltation of Christ is not just an example for you. If you are a follower of Christ – you have placed your trust completely in the Lord Jesus Christ – then you are actually joined with him in his suffering and his exaltation. If the only point of this were to serve as an example for us, it would be kind of a hard example to relate to. None of us can relate to being God and then setting aside your glory to become human being. Nor can we relate very well to the exaltation side. We have desires for exaltation – we want to get our way, we want people to respect us, things like that. But being exalted to the highest place and given a name that is above every name so that every knee bows and every tongue confesses – even the most extreme megalomaniacs typically aren't thinking along that line. If the only purpose were to give us an example, I think a little more down to earth example might have been more helpful. But it goes beyond example.

Joining His Suffering

We don't just follow his example and suffering; we participate in his suffering. We saw that at the end of chapter 1.

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him

Personal Delivery of Grace

When we studied that passage we found that any suffering you experience as a result of following Christ counts as suffering for Christ. And that suffering is an actual participation in the work of Christ. One of the clearest places in Scripture that teaches that is Colossians 1:24.

Colossians 1:24 ...I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions

What could possibly be lacking in Christ's afflictions? Does that mean his suffering was not quite enough to accomplish the atonement? No, that's not what this means. On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished." What he meant by that was this: it was finished. No further suffering was required to accomplish redemption. He didn't have to descend into hell, he didn't have to suffer anything else – it was completed.

Hebrews 10:12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

He took a seat, because after that sacrifice, the work was done forever. And yet, Paul says there was still something lacking. What's still lacking? And what does it mean for Paul to fill up, or fulfill what is still lacking? That phrase, "to fulfill what is still lacking," is only used one other place in the Bible.

Philippians 2:30 [Epaphroditus] almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to fulfill what was lacking in your help.

What was lacking in the Philippians' help for Paul? Personal delivery. That money didn't do Paul any good while it was still sitting in Philippi. What was lacking was the delivery. Epaphroditus fulfilled what was lacking by delivering that gift in person. So back to Colossians 1:24. What is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions? Personal, face-to-face delivery. Jesus paid the full price for salvation, and we don't need to add anything to that. But it is our role to take what Jesus purchased, and bring it to people in person.

Requires Suffering

And doing that will always involve suffering. The gospel cannot be delivered to the unbelieving world without the messengers of the gospel suffering. If you want to get the gospel into the ears of those

who need it, the price you must pay is suffering.² And the same goes for the ministry of the gospel within the church. If you want to see people grow spiritually and make spiritual progress, the price you will pay for that is suffering. It cannot be done without suffering.

And when we willingly, gladly embrace that suffering, we are participating in the very work of redemption. Nobody can see Jesus suffering for them, but they can see you suffer for them. God's plan was for Christ to purchase it through his suffering and for us to deliver it through our suffering.

That's why in chapter 1 Paul told us not to be afraid of suffering. It's all part of the plan, and it is a great honor, and it actually completes the very work of redemption. And when we understand that, it will actually increase our joy instead of stealing our joy.³

The Greatest Evidence

Let me give you just one example of how this works. It really struck me this week how much I benefit from the suffering of the Apostles. When you consider the evidence is for the resurrection, some of that evidence might be explained away. For example, the empty tomb. An empty tomb does not prove a resurrection, because a body can be removed from the tomb. That's why when even the followers of Jesus heard about the empty tomb, they still did not believe the resurrection actually happened. But there is one great fact – one massive piece of evidence that does prove the resurrection because it cannot be explained any other way. I have heard a lot of efforts to explain away the various evidences of the resurrection of Jesus, but I have never heard a critic even attempt to tackle this one. And I can say, whenever doubts come into my head, this one piece of evidence has chased those doubts away more than any other piece of evidence. The evidence I'm talking about is simply this: that the Apostles and the rest of Jesus' followers did not believe even when the tomb was empty, even when the prophecies were fulfilled – none of that convinced them, but then something happened that did convince them. And if you asked them what it was, they all pointed to the same thing – Jesus' appearances to them for a period of 40 days after the resurrection. And how do we know that actually happened? Numerous reasons. We know they were honest men.⁴ We know they were accurate historians. We know their writings haven't been altered.⁵ Lots of evidence along those lines, but the strongest and most powerful, persuasive, compelling proof is simply this – the people who gave us all these eye-witness accounts suffered for their testimony. When your mind starts to wander into doubt, and you get those thoughts, "What if none of this is even true? What if the atheists are right? What if it's a bunch of myths that I believe just because that's what my parents taught me?" – when those kinds of thoughts come into your head, you can ask yourself, "Am I going to believe some modern day atheists, or believe the people who were actually there at the time?" Peter was there. John was there. Paul was there. And they suffered and died for their belief in that it actually happened. People don't willingly suffer and die for something they know to be a lie. People don't endure repeated beatings with rods, stonings, imprisonments, torture, crucifixion, being fed to lions – people don't voluntarily go through all that for something they know to be a lie (or even for something they suspect might be a lie). If those men all had comfy, cushy lives, and they all got great book deals and were really wealthy and comfortable, then it might be a little harder to fight off the doubts when they

² This is one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam. The Koran says to kill the infidels; the Bible says suffer and die for the infidels.

³ It will increase our joy here and now, and even more when Jesus returns. **1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.**

⁴ You can tell that from the way they write. They include details that make them look bad, they include details that don't seem to make their case very well, the historical data that they mention in passing matches up with what we know from other historical documents, the accounts are different enough from each other that it's obvious they did not collaborate, and yet there are no contradictions – all kinds of factors like that have convinced both Christian and secular scholars that these were extremely honest men.

⁵ We know for sure that what we have today is an accurate representation of what was originally written, because every time, all through history, when someone tries to change something, or some copyist makes a mistake, it's really obvious and easy to spot because we have so many ancient copies of the NT and quotations in books and letters that when at some later time someone tries to make a change, scholars can easily spot it.

come. I might find myself thinking, “Maybe they made that stuff up for personal gain.” But when I think about how they suffered, the doubts are immediately gone. When I read the New Testament, and I read about what Paul voluntarily went through, I just think, “Thank you, Paul, for enduring all that so that not only could I hear the gospel, but I could have certainty that it’s really true.”

So that’s just one example of how someone had to suffer in order for the grace that Jesus purchased on the cross to be delivered to me. And there are countless other examples - the suffering of those who are persecuted when they preach the gospel, or when they translated the Bible. The suffering of a wife who stayed in a hard marriage to honor Christ, and she ended up winning her husband to the Lord, and he gave the gospel to someone else who gave it to someone else who gave it to my grandparents who gave it to their children who gave it to me. The suffering of a man who endured all the difficulties of getting advanced degrees in theology to become a scholar, and all the hardship involved in writing a commentary and getting it published, and because of all that hardship that he endured, I can pull that commentary off my shelf, gain insights into Scripture, and pass those along to all of you. The suffering of a Sunday school teacher who was so frustrated with the scheduling or with the curriculum or the classroom that he wanted to throw up his hands and quit, but he hung in there, and ends up leading a child to the Lord. The suffering of the people who have come here for hours and hours on a weeknight and wrestled through the rat’s nest of wires and read soundboard manuals and went and got training so that you could sit and listen to a sermon without all kinds of distractions from the sound system. All ministry requires suffering, and that suffering actually fills up and completes what was lacking in the very sufferings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the Supreme Being, and whose supremacy is shared graciously among all of his people, but that sharing happens only through our suffering.

Joining in His Exaltation

If verses 9-11 sound a little over-the-top as an example for God lifting you up, they are not over-the-top. They aren’t over-the-top, because part of the exaltation of Christ is the fact that he will share his glory with his people.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we believe the gospel message, we will be glorified with him – even physically.

Philippians 3:21 Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

And the pathway to that glory is for us to join in the suffering of Christ.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And the reason that’s important is because our participation in his glory glorifies him all the more. 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would come and suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sins. And God the father would declare his acceptance of that sacrifice by raising the Messiah from the dead and exalting him with great honor. And part of that honor and exaltation would involve the Messiah sharing the spoils of his victory.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death

When Jesus returns with power and great glory and every eye sees him and every knee buckles, part of what will make his appearance so glorious is the spectacular glory of his entourage. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 speaks of that glorious day when Christ will appear in glory **with all his saints**. It’s important that we be glorified along with Christ because our glorification is one of the accents of his glorification.

2 Timothy 2:11 If we died with him, we will also live with him

Why does it bother you so much to come in last, or to be a loser – to be lowly? It doesn't bother animals, but it bothers you because you were designed by God for glory. Your soul craves exaltation because God built you for that. But not for the worthless, lame kind of honor that comes from lifting yourself up. And not the competitive honor of lifting yourself above other people. Those are perversions of this appetite. You were made to be exalted not by yourself, and not by people, but by God. To be lifted up in a way that doesn't compete with Christ's glory, but that magnifies Christ's glory. And the pathway to that kind of being lifted up is for us to join in the suffering of Christ.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Christ will raise us from the dead so that we can share in his glory, but he will do that only for those who have shared in his sufferings and become like him in his death. We participate in both his supremacy and his sufferings. If you humble yourself, God will not only lift you up in various different ways in this life, but he will make you one of the sparkles in the glorious crown of the Son of God so that your glory contributes to his glory for all of the rest of eternity.

Benediction: 1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) In which kinds of conflicts do you find it most difficult to humble yourself?
- 2) In which kinds of situations do you find it easiest to humble yourself?
- 3) Who is the most humble person you know? Describe what he/she is like. In what ways has God lifted that person up?