



Speaker:  
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## The Exaltation of Christ

◀ Series: Philippians · 6 of 6

5/30/2022 (MON) | Bible: **Philippians 2:5-11**

The last time we were in Philippians, the subject of the message was the humiliation of Christ. Today, the message is about the exaltation of Christ. We looked then at how Jesus humbled himself, and today we're going to look at how he was lifted up to the very right hand of God and got back the glory that was his.

So far in his letter, Paul has encouraged us to grow as believers and have a real sense of unity among ourselves. We saw the example he set while he was in jail, where his thoughts were dominated by the furtherance of the gospel rather than his own predicament.

And it was this gospel he lived for. Yes, he was looking forward to his new resurrected life after death, but he knew he still had work to do and confessed Christ was all he needed for this work.

And Paul urged his hearers, including us, to put other believers before ourselves. It's the very example of humiliation and service made by Jesus Christ which we're to copy.

You can see in our reading today how Paul flows from this great example of humility to Jesus being lifted up and given a name—a reputation—higher than the whole of creation.

My intention today is to consider the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God, think about what it means for him to be given this name above every name, and witness the worldwide submission this brings.

### A Great Ascension

We looked recently in our Easter sermons at the death of Jesus. For you and me, death is a necessity. We die whether we like it or not. The difference with Jesus is he **chose** death. Even though he was divine, he willingly submitted to the will of the father for the purpose of saving others. In his willingness to obey, he made his choice: he would go down to the world of men **and let them kill him**.

But at Easter we also looked at Jesus's resurrection. Having laid down his life for his sheep, he spent a short season in the grave. But it was never possible the grave could hold him. On the third day of his death he was miraculously made alive. He threw off the shackles of Hades and stood once again among his people.

And he was to enjoy fellowship for a short time with his disciples until the day of his ascension. And so it was the bodily presence of the Son of God with us came to an end and he returned to his rightful place of power at the right hand of God.

Isaiah 52:13—Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.

This is talking about Jesus of course. The Great Servant of God would be highly exalted.

So what *does it mean* in v9 that “God has highly exalted him”? The state of humiliation we looked at last time—Jesus humbling himself—ended with Jesus’s death and burial. And then there was this dramatic reversal:

- He came out of the grave, alive
- He was in a body superior to the one he had before
- And his resurrected self saw a further increase in glory as he was made fit to inhabit the heavenly realm.

So we see the ascension to heaven was just part of this exalting of Christ. It began with the resurrection but rose to its highest point when Jesus ascended and God announced this Jesus was Lord of all. In a way, the resurrection and glorious ascension *were part of the one process* where Jesus would be exalted above measure.

We don’t really know what happened to Jesus in his ascension. When he left this world, he certainly did rise up from the earth. But this was symbolic. We shouldn’t think heaven is “up there” any more than we think the Lake of hell-fire is beneath our feet.

Ephesians 1:20–22—he [God] raised him [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come...

Jesus is here pictured as sitting down on large throne next to his father. But God the father is a spirit. He’s not *over there* or *over there* or *up there*. He’s everywhere! And he most certainly does not sit down in heaven—on a throne or on anything else.

**When our text in Ephesians says God sat Jesus at his right hand, it represents power-sharing.** In power—and glory and authority—Jesus was entirely equal with God the Father.

- He ascended *from death to life*
- He ascended *from earth to heaven*
- And he ascended from a state of humility to a state of glory.

A great ascension!

And let me make a brief comparison between Christ and Adam. In our passage, we see how the subject sweeps from absolute humiliation to ultimate exaltation. And we can see in all Jesus did a kind of superiority to what Adam did. Think about how they compare:

- Adam was made in the image of God, whereas Jesus was of the very *essence* of God
- Adam tried to seize equality with God, whereas Jesus *received* it as a *natural consequence of his obedience*
- Adam was doomed to die because of his own sin, whereas Jesus *chose* to die *for the sins of others*.
- All those belonging to Adam die, yet all those belonging to **Jesus** shall be **made alive** at the great resurrection.

Jesus is now back where he belongs. While on this earth, he looked forward to getting back the glory that he had with God before the world was even made. And in v9 where it says Jesus was “highly exalted”, it literally means “hyper exalted”.

In the fanfare of the ascension, the Father welcomed Jesus back as sovereign over both this created universe and the heavenly realm itself.

## A Great Name

We read at the *end* of v9 that in being exalted Jesus received the “name above every name”.

What was this name? The Father didn’t suddenly give him the name “Jesus”, because he already had that. Jesus was also called “the Christ” —but he already had that too. And anyway, that wasn’t a name but a title. (Christ means the same as “Messiah”.)

When someone who’s respected does something bad, we might say he’s “ruined his good name” in the community. If his name was Tom, his name would still be Tom. We don’t mean his Christian name or his surname’s changed in any way, do we? To get a bad name means to get a bad *reputation*.

So when God the Father gave Jesus a name above every name, *it refers to this new status of Jesus’s*. God was seen to have lovingly gifted Jesus with this most glorious reputation. And that reputation will be for ever attached to the glorified person of Jesus of Nazareth.

v9 begins with the word “therefore”. That word tells us that everything which follows comes as a result of what has gone before. So here, the exalting of Jesus is as a result of his absolute obedience. He was obedient, *therefore* God exalted him.

Now this doesn’t mean the honour Jesus received was compensation for his work. We can’t say he earned this exaltation because it was his by right anyway!

It's better then to think of what God did as a **sign of his divine approval of the obedience of Christ**. That status Jesus chose not to assume, that position he chose not to take by force, is **now conferred on him by the good pleasure of his Father**.

So Jesus gets this new reputation, this name that is above every name. And you'll see in v11 the title associated with Jesus is "Lord".

Some might argue this is nothing special. The word *Lord* is commonly used by men. It's used as a term of reverence for those in authority, even in the Bible.

But it's use here to describe Jesus is unique. After his resurrection, the church began to understand Jesus was Lord in its highest sense. He was Lord *of* lords. The mightiest and best.

These half-dozen verses leading up to v11 are magnificent. Some believe it was kind of early confession of faith, a statement the church would say out loud as part of its worship. So it could be Paul didn't invent it but decided to use it here because it was so good. Such high language.

We do know this statement borrows verses from the Old Testament:

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.'

Let's be clear here: the person speaking through Isaiah is none other than God himself, the great Jehovah. We know this because only God may be worshipped. So by using it here with reference to Jesus, *Paul's telling us Jesus is divine*.

Look more carefully at verse 9. Up to now, I've referred to "a name that is above every name". But to be precise, it says "THE name that is above every name". There can only be one name that is higher than every other. **That is the name of God**. That name we don't know how to pronounce, but it translates as "I am".

No wonder the Bible calls this a "hyper-exaltation"! **God the Father announces that this Jesus Christ shares his sacred name, Jehovah**.

That's why, in God giving Jesus a name above every name, the title "Lord" conveys equality with God the Father and absolute rule over all. When it says all will acknowledge Jesus as Lord, it's a confession he is the God of heaven.

This is how Jesus receives this great reputation.

## A Great Submission

Our passage describes the created world's response to the knowledge that Jesus is Lord of all. v10 says every knee would bow and every tongue confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

“Every knee should bow” means of course everyone will *bow the knee*. It’s an act of submission.

But does it really mean everyone? I’ll give you three different views on this text.

1. Some think a day’s coming when the entire human race will have repented and had their sins forgiven. They think everyone who’s ever lived will be eventually be saved. As nice as this may sound, the Bible clearly refutes that idea.
2. Some think every knee bowing refers to the church. That is, *everyone who becomes a Christian* submits to God and confesses him. After all, submission to God and confession that Jesus is Lord is part of our admission into the kingdom of God. And during our lives as believers we continue to submit and confess in this way. I’m quite sympathetic to this view.
3. But others say the text is referring to some point in the future when everyone will acknowledge, or will have already acknowledged, who Jesus is. Some, like us, do it as part of our repentance and faith in this life. But for the rest it’s an acknowledgement of who he is that *isn’t done willingly*. A reluctant admission taking place at the judgement.

As an illustration of this unwilling submission, in the first chapter of Mark’s gospel we read about Jesus encountering a man who was under the influence of an evil spirit. When Jesus approached, the demon spoke to him through the man. He said to Jesus, “I know who you are. YOU’RE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD!” He confessed who Jesus was, but it was done reluctantly.

This verse, v10, continues by describing the scope of this great submission by God’s creatures. It says it involves everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth:

- **In the heavenly dimension, we have the angels.** They’re already in a state of submission to God. As we just said, even the wicked angels bow down before the Lord their maker and are forced to confess Jesus Christ as the Lord of creation.
- **Then there are those on earth.** Throughout the ages, there have always been those who are converted during their lives. The Holy Spirit shines a light into their hearts and they understand their sinfulness before a holy God. They recognise Jesus as the saviour and put their trust in him. They subject themselves to him and confess him to others.
- **Finally, there are those who are “under the earth”.** This refers to those who are dead. Every person you and I know who died without Christ will be resurrected to judgement. For these, this is the point when they realise who the Lord is. Those who heard the gospel from us will have an immediate and overwhelming feeling of regret that they didn’t take notice of us.

And no matter what they say to the Lord in that day, salvation will not be an option.

Like with the demoniac, the very intensity of Christ's glory will finally draw out from these people the confession he is Lord.

And this acknowledgement becomes an admission of guilt. Because they'll be confessing the one they spent their lives in rebellion against **is** the Prince of Glory, and nothing but an eternal imprisonment will be sufficient to pay for that crime.

So the last voices in all of creation to bow the knee before the Christ and confess him as Lord are these wretched creatures raised at the last day. Ancient Romans will lament they called Caesar their Lord, and present-day Muslims will curse the very name of Mohammed, the one by whom they were so utterly deceived.

Every atheist and pagan will bow the knee. Everyone who rejected the gospel will confess. And everyone who never heard the gospel but lived in opposition to the voice of God in their consciences will finally acknowledge Jesus as Lord before the whole world.

This great exaltation of Christ then sets in motion the final act of this ages-long submission to him. And his second coming will see the culmination of it. At the end of the Day of Judgement, every member of the race of angels, and everyone belonging to the race of men, will have surrendered and openly testified to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Our passage concludes with mention of God's glory. **The result of this universal acknowledgement of the divinity of Jesus Christ will bring glory to God the Father. IT WILL BRING GLORY TO HIM!** Glory that's RIGHTFULLY his.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the chief figures in the revival known as the "Great Awakening" of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, describes how God receives glory:

- He creates people
- He deals with them either in kindness or in severity
- In both cases, the creatures bow the knee to Jesus Christ and acknowledge him to be Lord
- **And so the glory which came from God through his act of creation now returns to him from the mouths of those very creatures.**

We've looked at the ascension of Jesus to the heights of glory. We've seen how the Father treated him in response to his perfect obedience. And we've seen how, one way or another, all his creatures will glorify God by acknowledging his greatness.

But in closing, we'll return to where this passage began. v5 tells us to have the "mind of Christ" in us. To have the spirit of humility he had. To serve others as he did.

I want to cheer your hearts with this. Jesus himself said the way to greatness is through becoming everyone's servant. If you've been converted to Jesus Christ, *you've already*

*experienced* some of this greatness. To get into the New Jerusalem, the church of God, you had to humble yourself. You repented of your sin. You begged God that the salvation accomplished at Calvary would be yours.

And what did God do then?

Ephesians 2:6—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

Humility leading to being exalted is something we have in common with Jesus. None of us is the Lord, to be sure! But it says we *sit with him in his throne*. I'm sorry; I can't tell you what that means. Not really. But it's what the Bible says. And it's...huge.

But there remains one final step in our exaltation. **Jesus says all who believe in him will be made alive when he returns**. We'll be so changed as to make us able to exist alongside our glorified saviour forever!

In the meantime, we should accept Paul's encouragement to spend our lives in submission to God and each other, and in continual confession to the greatness of our saviour, the highly exalted Jesus Christ our Lord Jehovah.

Amen.