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EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

Philippians 2:9-11

By

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Philippians Lesson 12

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Suppose you had been out of the country during the recent NBA play-offs between Houston and Orlando. You had not heard that Houston swept it in four games. You had asked me to video-tape the series so that you could watch the games after you returned. When you got back, I proposed that we place a \$100 bet on the series. Would you take me up on it? Only if you wanted to give me \$100! Why? Because the outcome is not in any doubt. Betting against a game where the outcome is certain would be utterly foolish.

And yet millions of people bet their eternal destiny against an outcome that God has declared absolutely certain. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and is ascended to the right hand of God the Father where He awaits all of His enemies to be made His footstool (Ps. 110:1). God's Word assures us that every knee will bow to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. And yet people go on betting their eternal destiny against this sure word from God, living as their own lords and saviors, as if God's Word were uncertain or not true. In our text, the apostle Paul assures us that ...

Because Jesus humbled Himself through the cross, God has exalted Him above all, so that all will submit to Jesus as Lord.

I want to set forth what this text of Scripture teaches; deal with some potential objections to that teaching; and, offer some applications.

THE TEACHING:

1. The crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus is now at the place of supremacy over all creation (2:9).

"Therefore" takes us back to verse 8: Because Jesus was willing to humble Himself and be obedient to death on the cross, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above every name. As we saw last week, Jesus willingly left the height of

heights, laid aside His glory that He had with the Father from before the foundation of the world, and took on the form of a lowly servant, adding genuine humanity to His eternal deity. His deity was not diminished or laid aside, but rather was veiled during His earthly ministry, like an eclipse of the sun. But verse 9 tells us that after that time of veiling, God restored Him to that place of supremacy (John 17:5). "Highly exalted" is a word that occurs only here in the New Testament, and may be translated "super-exalted." Thus Jesus went from the height of heights to the depth of depths and back again to the height of heights.

Jesus did not exalt Himself (although He could have), but the Father exalted Him, thus putting His stamp of approval on Jesus' death as the satisfaction of the penalty for our sins. As Peter proclaimed to the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 5:30, 31): "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 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." The exaltation of Jesus proves that He defeated Satan, who could not keep Jesus in the grave (Col. 2:13-15).

Men did not exalt Jesus. They cast insults and abuse at Him. They jeered and spit upon Him and called Him names. But the Father gave Jesus the name above all names, the name "Lord," which is equivalent to the Old Testament name of God, Yahweh, a name so sacred that the Hebrews would not even pronounce it. When they were reading the Scripture and came to Yahweh, they would read, "Adonai," which means "Lord." "Jesus is Lord" means "Jesus is Yahweh," eternal God.

That this is Paul's meaning becomes obvious when you compare Philippians 2:9 with Isaiah 45:22, 23: "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 swear allegiance." To whom? To God! Citing these verses, Paul says that every knee will bow to Jesus. Jesus is God, Yahweh, Lord!

Peter affirmed the same truth on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33-36): "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy

Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

Thus any teaching, such as that of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, which diminishes or denies the full deity of Jesus Christ, goes against the clear apostolic witness to Jesus. The Jesus who humbled Himself to the death on a cross has been raised up, ascended into heaven, and placed at the right hand of God the Father, in the place of supremacy over all creation.

2. Every creature will bow before the exalted Lord Jesus Christ (2:10).

To emphasize the universality of Christ's exaltation and lordship, Paul adds, "of those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth." Every created being will submit to Jesus Christ. *In heaven*, the angels will bow willingly before Jesus. The angels are awesome creatures of great power and glory. The mighty angel Gabriel, who brought visions from God to the prophet Daniel, struck such fear into Daniel that he fell on his face (Dan. 8:17). On another occasion when Daniel saw the angel, he grew pale and lost all his strength. When the angel's hand touched Daniel, it set him trembling on his hands and knees and rendered him speechless (Dan. 10:8, 10, 15). But the mighty Gabriel bows before the Lord Jesus Christ.

On earth, those who have tasted His sovereign grace will bow willingly before Jesus. Others, including many of the mightiest, most powerful men who have ever lived--great kings, wealthy tycoons, evil drug lords--will bow against their wills, but they will bow. *Under the earth*, Satan and all his powerful demonic forces will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ. These demons have been granted tremendous power. The Book of Job shows how Satan can move wicked people to commit slaughter, he can cause a powerful wind to knock down a house, and he can inflict a man with illness (Job 1:15, 19; 2:7). Certain demons apparently have territorial power over entire nations (Dan. 10:13). But they all will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Years ago the well-known missionary, Don Richardson, spoke at our church in California. Over lunch after church, he shared an interesting theory he has about hell. He said that often hell is pictured as the demons and the damned blaspheming and cursing God. But, Don said, God isn't going to allow that to go on throughout eternity. Rather, those in hell will forever acknowledge the lordship of Jesus.

He explained by using the analogy of the threshold of pain. Some people can endure only a small amount of pain before they will submit to anyone torturing them. Others can endure much more pain before they are broken. As a boy, you may have wrestled with a bigger boy who got you in a painful hold and increased your pain until you would agree to do or say what he wanted. If he let up on the pain, you would defy him and say, "I'm not going to do it." So, he would increase your pain until you said, "Okay, I'll do what you want!"

Don speculates that in hell, God is going to inflict on every person or demon the amount of pain necessary to bring that being into submission, where under duress he cries out, "Jesus is Lord." If God were to lessen the pain, the person would defy God. So God increases the pain to the point where they submit and then holds them at that level throughout eternity. I don't know that you can prove his theory from Scripture, but it does make sense. However God does it, there isn't a rebellious creature on earth or in hell who will not acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. It will be a forced confession, but every knee shall bow before Jesus.

3. Every tongue will confess the lordship of Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father (2:12).

I've just alluded to this fact. But also we need to understand that to honor Jesus is to honor the Father, because Jesus is God. As Jesus told His Jewish critics, "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23, 24). Because Jesus and the Father are one, to glorify Jesus is to glorify the Father. God's glory is the aim of His eternal purpose in Christ. If people will not willingly give glory to God in this life, they will do so against their will throughout eternity.

That's the teaching: Because Jesus humbled Himself through the cross, God has exalted Him far above all, so that all will submit to Jesus as Lord, to the glory of God the Father. This teaching raises some questions or objections. Perhaps there are more, but I can think of two:

OBJECTIONS TO THE TEACHING:

1. If Jesus is exalted as Lord, why does He allow evil and suffering? Why doesn't He squash all rebellion now?

Of course, this is the age-old problem of evil that theologians and philosophers have wrestled with. We can't ultimately answer the question, "Why did God allow evil and sin in the first place?" except to say, "It was a part of His inscrutable plan and it results in greater glory to God than any other plan." To attribute evil to the fact that God gave freedom of choice to the angels and later to human beings does not really solve the problem, because obviously God knew the sinful choices that would be made. He even ordained the cross before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8). And yet the Bible clearly affirms that God is not responsible for sin and that He is apart from all sin (1 John 1:5).

The Bible is equally clear that the current reign of Satan as god of this world and the abundance of evil in no way disproves the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation makes it clear that evil will abound and seemingly be winning the war right up to the end. Saints will be martyred (Rev. 6:9-11), wicked Babylon will be prospering (Rev. 17 & 18) right up to the end. And then, "in one day, in one hour" (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17, 19) God's judgment will destroy her. That final book of the Bible shows that the fact that evil abounds does not in any way thwart the plans of God or the triumph of Christ.

The Bible is also clear that any delay of God's judgment is only because of His great patience, in not wanting any to perish, but to bring all of His elect to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The final salvation of God's elect and condemnation of the wicked will demonstrate God's perfect justice and bring glory to Him (see 2 Thess. 1:6-10).

So, the Bible acknowledges the presence of evil, but also clearly affirms that it in no way disproves the lordship of Jesus,

who in God's perfect timing, will suppress all evil and reign in absolute triumph. That leads to the second question or objection:

2. How can we be sure that Jesus will ultimately triumph, especially when we see evil winning in our day?

As I pointed out, Scripture is clear that evil will seemingly be winning right up to the final hour. Then God's axe will fall. But, how can we know that those prophecies about the future will come true?

Look at the many prophecies that were fulfilled in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Peter mentions how the Old Testament prophets sought to know what time or manner "the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). The risen Jesus told the men on the Emmaus road, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then, "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27).

Not only do we have the witness of the Old Testament prophets who spoke of Christ's sufferings and glory, but also the witness of the many apostles, men of integrity, who saw the risen Lord Jesus, who saw Him ascend into heaven and heard the witness of the angels to His promised second coming (Acts 1:11). Those witnesses went out and gave their very lives based upon what they had seen and heard. We can trust their witness.

So we can know that even though it seems as if evil is winning, Jesus is risen and He is Lord. His kingdom will be established and every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow before Jesus as sovereign Lord.

APPLICATION OF THE TEACHING:

1. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is an encouragement to humility.

This is Paul's primary application in the context. If Jesus is the exalted Lord, we've got to dethrone self. We are to follow our Lord in His example of laying aside His rights and taking the form of a

servant. Because He humbled Himself, God highly exalted Him. Jesus taught, "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). It would be wrong to think that Jesus was motivated to go to the cross by the thought of being exalted afterwards. He went to the cross out of love and obedience to the Father and love for you and me. But being exalted was His reward. Our motivation to humble ourselves should be love for God and others, because of His great love for us. But, if we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, He will exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet. 5:6).

2. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is an encouragement in trials.

Jesus endured the cross, and the Father strengthened Him and gave Him grace for that awful ordeal. The cross, the resurrection and subsequent exaltation of Jesus shows that God can transform the most grotesque of human sins against us into the greatest of divine triumphs. Any suffering or tragedy we face can redound to the glory of God.

The great British preacher, Charles Spurgeon, knew this encouragement from Christ's exaltation. When he was only 22, his popularity had spread throughout London. Thousands were flocking to hear him preach. To accommodate the crowds, his church rented the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, which seated at least 10,000. The opening service there was Sunday, October 19, 1856. Word spread and when they opened the building, people crowded in, taking every seat, packing the aisles and stairways, while thousands more stood outside, hoping to hear through the open windows. When Spurgeon arrived and saw the crowd, he was almost overwhelmed. The service began, and everything seemed to be going well.

But just after Spurgeon began to pray, the place was thrown into confusion. Some in a gallery shouted, "Fire!" Another on the ground floor shouted, "The balconies are falling!" A third voice cried, "The whole place is collapsing!" People panicked and began rushing for the exits, but there was no room. Some fell through the balcony railings to the floor below. As some rushed out the doors, the crowd outside saw it as their opportunity to get a seat and began rushing in. Spurgeon tried to calm everyone, but before it was

over, seven people had been crushed to death, and 28 others had been severely wounded. The whole thing had been orchestrated by enemies who were jealous of Spurgeon's popularity and wanted cause to bring him down.

Spurgeon himself was devastated by what had happened, so much so that a man who knew him well reported that 25 years later, when the event came up, Spurgeon was overcome with emotion. His critics used the event to bring all sorts of slander against the young preacher. Spurgeon withdrew for over a week, unable to preach or do anything. But as he walked in a friend's garden, our text flashed into his mind: "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." As he meditated on the exalted Christ, he found strength, and when he returned to the pulpit, he spoke on these verses. Let them comfort you in a time of tragedy.

3. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is an encouragement to evangelism.

The fact that every knee shall bow before Jesus as Lord, either willingly in this life, or forcibly at the judgment, should impel us to warn others to flee the wrath to come. The ultimate lordship of Jesus is the culmination of what God is doing in history, and we have a part in the work of His kingdom. Lost people need to see the serious consequences if they continue in rebellion. They need to repent of their sins, trust in Christ as Savior, and yield to Him as Lord.

4. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is an encouragement to salvation.

If you have not bowed before Jesus as your Lord and Savior, do not delay! Today is the day of salvation; tomorrow you may have to face Him as Judge! Believing in Christ as your Savior and Lord requires that you humble yourself, because you must let go of the proud notion that you can save yourself. Your good works are not good enough. Only Christ can save. Let go of any thoughts that you're good enough for the holy God. Turn from your sin and flee to Jesus.

"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. They will say, 'Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him shall be put to shame. In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and will glory" (Isa. 45:22-25).

The outcome is certain. The question is, On which side are you?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we minister to a believer who has gone through some tragedy and asks, "Where was God when this happened?"
2. If Jesus is highly exalted over all, why is there so much evil in this world?
3. Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' but do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Can a professing, but disobedient, Christian have assurance of salvation?
4. Why is it impossible to separate belief in Christ as Savior from submission to Him as Lord?

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