

The Christmas Story From Paul's Perspective
Philippians 2:5-11
Part Five

What was your expectation when you committed your life to Christ? Did you expect that your life would be easy? That the circumstances of your life would become better? That everything that you became involved with would prosper? If it was, then I believe that your expectation was very misplaced. How do we know this? Remember the verse that I shared with you from **Matthew 10:24-25**, **“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. (25) It is enough for the disciple that he become as His teacher, and the slave as his master. If they called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household.”** Christ is making it very clear to His disciples that if they chose to follow Him, they should not expect their lives to be easy.

We do not come to Christ in order to enjoy great circumstances. Why do Christ's disciples come to Him? Christ's disciples come to Him to be delivered from sin. In what specific ways do Christ's disciples experience deliverance from sin when they come to Him?

Christ's disciples, as they come to Him, will first of all experience a deliverance from the penalty of sin, resulting in peace with God. Listen to **Romans 5:1**, **“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Secondly, Christ's disciples will experience a deliverance from the power of sin over their lives. Listen to **Romans 5:10**, **“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”** And finally Christ's disciples will experience a future eternal state that is totally free of sin, a place of glory. Listen to **Romans 8:18**, **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”**

People should not come to Christ and seek to be His disciples in order to enjoy a blissful earthly life. They should come to Him to be delivered from sin; to be delivered from its penalty, its power and one day from its very presence. This is what Christ is offering to those who would choose to follow Him.

If Christ's earthly life was characterized by suffering then we should expect as His disciples that our earthly life will also be characterized by suffering. And Christ's earthly life was characterized by suffering. If there is anyone here this weekend who doubts the truthfulness of what I have just shared with you, all you have to do is consider **Philippians 2:5-8**, a passage that we have been examining over the past month. This passage gives to us a detailed account of the early phase of the Christmas story from Paul's perspective. It is a passage that details for us where the servant attitude of Christ led Him and will in a similar way lead us as His disciples. It is a riches to rags story. Philippians 2:5-8 is a description of Christ's humiliation, which is the early phase of the Christmas story according to Paul.

Let us read this passage once more, **“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a**

thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Christ’s descent, which took Him from the glories of heaven into the deep poverty He experienced on earth, involved four steps. Let us quickly review those four steps.

The first step that Christ took in His descent was that although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. In other words, though Christ was God, exactly equal with God both in form and appearance, He was willing to veil His glory. This led to the second step. The second step was that He emptied Himself taking on the form of a bondservant. In other words, Jesus acted upon His willingness to veil His glory and gave up His rights as God. This led to the third step. The third step He took was that He was made in the likeness of men and was found in appearance as a man. In other words, Christ became 100% human. But though He was 100% human He was not just human. He was also 100% God. This led to the fourth step. The fourth step was “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” When Christ took this step He had hit rock bottom. He could not go any further down. He could not suffer any more physically or spiritually. Why was He suffering in this way? He was suffering in this way because He was willing to be God’s sacrificial lamb. He was willing to take upon Himself our sin and suffer our judgment so that we would have the opportunity to be saved, that we would have the opportunity to be delivered from our sin, that we would have the opportunity to become spiritually alive and to know God.

The descent of Christ from the glories of heaven to the sufferings of earth was the path of the ultimate servant. If we as Christ’s disciples have this same lowliness of mind attitude, this same humility of mind attitude, the attitude of a servant, we should assume that our life on earth also will not be easy.

If we follow in the footsteps of Christ, our lives will be devoted to serving our wives, husbands, children, grandchildren, family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, and even enemies. If we follow in the footsteps of Christ, our lives will be devoted to advancing Christ’s kingdom in a hostile world. This life of service will make our lives at times difficult. But if we are following in the footsteps of Jesus we must understand that this is what we should expect. This is why Jesus shared with those who were considering choosing to follow Him these words in **Luke 9:23, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”** If you have chosen to become a disciple of Christ then you should not expect your life to be easy. But don’t become discouraged. Don’t become disheartened. There is a very bright light at the end of this earthly tunnel for the disciples of Christ. Just as there was a very bright light at the end of Christ’s earthly tunnel. This morning we will begin to examine this light.

This weekend we will be continuing on in our study of Philippians 2:5-11 but this time we will consider the later phase of the Christmas story from Paul’s perspective. A much more upbeat and hopeful story. Let us read **Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. (11) And**

that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is a rags to riches story. Philippians 2:9-11 is a description of Christ’s exaltation which is the later phase of the Christmas story from Paul’s perspective.

Hopefully this weekend God will use **Philippians 2:9-11** not only to cause us to rejoice in the triumph of Christ but also to give us hope for something far better as we set our affections on things above and not on things of earth. Hopefully because of our time that we spend in this passage this morning, the light at the end of our tunnel will become a little brighter. In our study of this passage we will be considering four basic areas of truth concerning the exaltation of Christ.

The first area of truth that we will consider are the steps involved in Christ’s exaltation. Let us read the first part of **Philippians 2:9**, **“Therefore also God highly exalted Him.”** God the Father’s response to all that Christ gave up was to exalt Him (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). This should not surprise us. This is exactly what we should have expected. Why? What did Jesus tell His disciples in **Matthew 23:12?** **“And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”** This same truth is repeated in **Luke 14:11, 18:14.** James shares the same truth in **James 4:10**, **“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”** Peter shares the same truth in **1 Pet. 5:6**, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you at the proper time.”** Christ had humbled Himself as He descended from the riches of heaven to the poverty He experienced on earth, which was described for us in **Philippians 2:5-8**, and in response to that Paul is now telling us that God exalted Him.

What does the word “exalt” mean? The word “exalt” (HUPERUPSOU) is a compound word which means “to super-exalt, to raise someone to the loftiest height.” What was the result of this exaltation? The remaining portion of verse 9 through verse 11 will describe the amazing result of God the Father’s act on behalf of God the Son. But for right now I would like to detail for us the various steps that were involved in God the Father putting God the Son in that lofty position. Just as there were four steps involved in Christ descending from riches to rags there are also four steps involved in Christ ascending from rags to riches. What were these four steps?

The first step involved in Christ’s exaltation was His resurrection (Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18). When Christ suffered as God’s sacrificial lamb on the cross of Calvary, he died. He died both spiritually and physically. He had hit rock bottom. In order for Christ to begin His ascent back to the glory that He once knew, He had to become alive. His crucified body needed to rise from the dead.

And Christ’s resurrection is exactly what happened according to the eyewitness accounts of the disciples. How long did Christ remain in this world after His resurrection? According to **Acts 1:3** Christ was with His disciples after His resurrection for forty days. Why so long? He was here that long in order to convince the disciples beyond a shadow of a doubt that He had in fact risen.

Was it difficult for the disciples to embrace the resurrection of Christ? And the answer would have to be yes! We are all familiar with the story of doubting Thomas as recorded for us in **John**

20:24-28. Christ had, on a particular occasion after His resurrection, appeared to all of His disciples except Thomas. After the disciples had seen Christ they reported to Thomas that the Lord had risen and Thomas's response to them was, **"Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."** And of course you know what happened, after eight days had passed, when the disciples were again gathered but this time with Thomas. John tells us that Christ suddenly appeared in their midst even though the doors were shut and said to Thomas, **"Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing."** And Thomas answered, **"My Lord and my God."** Was this the last time we see a disciple or disciples struggling to believe? The answer is, no! Listen to **Matthew 28:16-17**, **"But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. (17) And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful."**

Why was it so difficult for the disciples to believe? I believe for the very same reason it would be difficult for us to believe. The resurrection of Christ, though prophesied in the Old Testament and by Christ repeatedly, was simply too big for them to fully take in at a single moment in time. It would have been surreal. It would have been dreamlike. All of us at some point in time will experience something like this in terms of some event in our lives but nothing could have compared to what the disciples were experiencing. And because of this even though Christ was now among them and they were able to see Him, touch Him, and speak with Him, they were struggling to come to grips with the reality of His bodily resurrection. But there were no options; they had to be convinced. How long did Christ think it was necessary to stay with them in order to remove any shred of doubt? Forty days! This is what **Acts 1:3** tells us. They were now convinced that He was alive but were they now ready to proclaim it to the world? And the answer is, no! A second step is now necessary.

The second step involved in Christ's exaltation was His ascension (**Acts 1:9-12**). We might tend to overlook the importance of the ascension of Christ but we shouldn't. How important is the ascension of Christ? Extremely. Just prior to Christ's death He shared with His disciples these words in **John 16:7**, **"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."** The disciples of Christ, through the post-resurrection of Christ, were fully convinced of His resurrection and they knew what they were to do but they were not ready to embark on that mission. They could not go forth until Christ had ascended and sent the Holy Spirit who would then empower them. This is why in **Acts 1:4**, after His forty day post-resurrection ministry amongst the disciples, we are told that **"He gathers them together and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Holy Spirit."**

After He gives them this command we then find a description of Christ's ascent in heaven in **VV. 9-11**, **"And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (10) And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; (11) and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go**

into heaven.”

If you were one of the disciples how must you have felt at this particular time? Do you think that they would have wanted to share all that they had seen and heard? Do you think that they would have wanted to tell their family and friends? They were excited. But they were not prepared.

Let me ask you another question, “How about Jesus, what do you think that He felt?” I don’t believe that words are adequate to express what He must have felt as He was ascending out of their sight in the clouds of heaven. Something very special was about to happen to Him. And this leads us to the third step.

The third step involved in Christ’s exaltation was the unveiling of His glory (Hebrews 2:9). The day before His crucifixion, Christ in His high priestly prayer, prayed to His Father to restore to Him the glory He enjoyed with the Father before His humiliation after His ascension, this prayer was answered. **Hebrews 2:9** tells us that after He ascended He was crowned with “**glory and honor.**” How important was this for Him? It was this future of hope that helped Him get through the pain of all that He suffered on our behalf.

Listen to **Heb. 12:1-2**, “**Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**” The resurrection of Christ certainly was stupendous. The ascension was spectacular. But it was His return to heaven and once again being crowned with glory and honor that made it possible for Christ to endure the cross. Christ’s earthly life was not easy but what made it bearable was that bright light at the end of the tunnel.

CONCLUSION

The same thing should be true of us as well. If we choose to embrace Christ as our Savior and Lord by faith and are willing to follow in His footsteps by humbling ourselves before the Lord and others, there is a very bright light ahead of us, the light of glory. Are you excited about that light? If you are then the trials and troubles of this life will be much easier to bear. But let us not get the cart before the horse.

As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus let us remember that before we can enjoy the crown we must be willing to take up the cross. Have you done this? Or have you tried to become a disciple of Christ without committing yourself to walk in His footsteps? If you have never truly committed yourself to Christ to follow in His footsteps I would encourage you to do it now. In doing this your life will not be easy. But you will be delivered from your sin. The penalty, the power, and one day from its very presence. And what a wonderful day that will be!

"When all my labors and trials are o'er, and I am safe on that beautiful shore, just to be near the dear Lord I adore, will through the ages be glory for me."

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"When by the gift of His infinite grace, I am accorded in heaven a place, just to be there and to look on His face, that will be glory for me."

"Friends will be there I have loved long ago; Joy like a river around me will flow; yet, just a smile from my Savior I know, will through the ages be glory for me."

This is what I want. This is what I long for. But before I can enjoy the crown I must be willing to follow in the footsteps of Christ and commit my life to service even though that service may be costly, perhaps extremely costly for awhile.