

March 28, 2010
Lent 6

“Jesus, Humbled and Exalted, Just for Us”

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Dour 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.

The other day I was standing in line at Spencer's, our local grocery store. Two brothers work at the store who are identical twins, wear the same style of glasses and bag groceries. I have even seen them working together, one bagging on one counter, and the other at another counter. How easy it would be for them to switch places with each other as identical twins often do. In fact, a current contestant on the popular television show American idol, Bucky Covington, is an identical twin. When he was 20 years old he got into trouble with the law for pretending to be his brother Rocky who was arrested for reckless driving. Bucky was willing to take the driving ticket for his brother Rocky who had a bad driving record.

Jesus is like a twin brother to you and me. He came to this earth as our Lord and God, took our flesh and bones and skin and hair upon himself. He became fully human and yet he remained our Lord and God. He did this to take the rap or blame or punishment just for your sin and mine so we could go free and escape eternal death and punishment.

On this Palm Sunday we think of Jesus riding into Jerusalem to take our place for us. There is even joy on his face as he thinks of giving his life for us. The book of Hebrews says of Jesus, "with joy he endured the cross and the shame." Let's look more closely at what these words in Philipians tell us about Jesus being humbled and exalted just for us.

Jesus humbled himself just for us

The Apostle Paul encourages the Christians in Philippi to find even greater joy in this life by having the mindset or attitude of Jesus. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Think of how different your life and mind would be if we had the attitude toward other people that Jesus had. We fall so short of God's glory in our selfishness. "Stop tailgating me, you buzzard!" "Give me the remote, I am in control." "Why, do you always yell at me?" "I can handle it." "Why do you mean, I can't send 10,000 text messages a month?" Little children do not have to go to pinching school and hitting school to learn how to pinch and hit. We need the attitude of Jesus to rescue us

from the punishment our sin deserves.

What do you see in Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem? You see someone who is your Lord and God! Paul writes, "Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Jesus did not have to grasp equality with God because he had this equality with his heavenly Father from all eternity. As we confess in the words of the Nicene Creed, "Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being one with the Father." Look at the paradox. The hands of Jesus, the mighty God, the creator of the universe, who formed the mountains and seas, and holds the universe in his hands, must hold on to the lowly donkey to keep from falling as it makes its way from Bethphage to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus doesn't look like God as he rides into Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah said of Jesus, "He had no beauty of majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men." Remember what Pontius Pilate asked Jesus. "Are you the King of the Jews?" One look at Jesus and he drew the hasty conclusion, "This man cannot be a king. This is a joke." How different it was when Jesus performed mighty miracles, miracles of raising people from the dead, healing the sick and opening the eyes of the blind. The Bible records these miracles to show that Jesus is the Son of God. We see our Lord and God riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. How amazing is that!

Jesus made himself nothing. Look at your brother, your twin brother, your Lord and God with human hair and bones and skin, tempted in all parts as you are yet without sin. He makes himself nothing. He empties himself of his power as God and yet he remains our Lord and God. Jesus does not use his power as God to make it easier to ride the lowly donkey. He does not use his power as God to make the temptations easier than our temptations. He does not use the power as God to make the pain from the nails less as they are pounded into his hands. Jesus could have used his power so that a railroad spike such as this driven into his hands would have no pain at all. He emptied himself of his power as God.

He took on the form of a servant. See Jesus with his disciples on the night before he died as the Passover Meal is prepared. He takes a bowl of water and a towel and bends down to wash their feet. Listen to the sound of the water pouring over the dirty feet. Look at Jesus wiping the feet. Hear him say to his disciples and to you and me this morning, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Jesus was willing to humble himself and become a servant just to serve me and just to serve you. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many."

Oh, dear Christian, look at your brother take the punishment of your sin for you, just for you. "He became obedient unto death even death on the cross." Jesus knew what was coming. It is said of people who are executed that they begin to touch their neck where they will hang, or touch their wrists where they will be tied to the electric chair, or touch their skin where the lethal injection will be administered. Being fully human I am sure Jesus thought of the nails that would be pounded into his hands. He thought of the cup of suffering he would go through because of our sin. The book of Isaiah had predicted that he would "be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." He prayed to his heavenly Father, "O Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me, not my will but

yours be done.”

Look at Jesus your brother willing to do whatever is necessary to save your. Look at Jesus as your Shepherd who was willing to give his life for sheep that love to wander. Ezekiel 34 speaks of this love in such glowing words. The Lord describes us as sheep that are scattered. “So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill.” We read these words and with tears in our eyes say, “That describes me! That describes me! Then the Lord says, “I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.” There is my brother Jesus. He is coming to rescue me.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder.

The Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wander.

The Master pays the debt his servants owe him.

Who would not know him.

Have you heard of the man whose blood has saved 2.2 million babies? His name is James Harrison from Australia. He has rare antibody in his blood that stops babies from dying of Rhesus disease, a form of severe anemia. Mothers give birth to health babies because of the antibodies from his blood. He is also called the man with the golden arm. A week after his wife Barbara died recently he was back in the hospital giving more blood to save more babies. Jesus looked forward to shedding his blood on the cross to save us, to save people like us. “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, and for a good man some might possibly die. But God demonstrates his love to us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us.”

Jesus was exalted just for us

Look more closely at your Jesus, your brother, your Lord and God as he rides into Jerusalem. Look at that joy and that smile on his face. It is the confident smile of a Savior who knows he will be exalted. “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” We know that Jesus was thinking about this glory because of the prayer he prayed to his Father the night before his death. “Father the time has come, Glorify your Son, that he may glorify you.” He prayed fervently. “And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Our heavenly Father has exalted Jesus to the highest place and given him a name that is above every other name. Ephesians 1 says that “God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and ever title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.” There is a name that is above every other name as the thief on the cross prayed, “Jesus remember when you come into your kingdom.” As we often pray while facing problems of life the simple yet powerful prayer, “Lord Jesus, forgive me” or “Lord, Jesus help me.”

Some day every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. When Christ Jesus comes in glory, even those who rejected him will have to admit the truth about Jesus, but for them it will be too late. The opportunity to have him as their Savior will have passed them by. They will only see Jesus as their Lord and Judge. The Revelation says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!"

Jesus does not want people to mourn when he comes on clouds of glory. He wants all people to lift their palm branches and wave them in glory in the place he has prepared for us. In the Revelation John saw a large multitude of people from all over the world standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb. "They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice; 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" Because of Jesus, who was humbled and exalted for you, just for you, you can lift up your heads when he comes in glory to take you home. You can look forward to praising him with palm branches in the place he has prepared for you. Amen.