

INTRODUCTION

Last week we talked about the importance of unity. Paul calls for there to be unity in the church. He says there are two ingredients that build unity: love and humility. He gives four examples of humility that we're going to talk about today. We're going to be looking at what many have called the most elegant and eloquent passage in the Bible describing the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever noticed there are some passages in the Bible that although you've heard them all your life, it's a hard experience to try to live up to? Some time ago, someone gave me a Peanuts cartoon strip and in the first panel, Linus is in front of the television with his blanket. Lucy comes in and walks right in front of him and changes the channel. Linus is incensed and says, "What gives you the right to change channels? I was here first." Lucy looks at him with one of those every-brother-is-dumb looks and says, "Jesus said the first shall be last and the last shall be first." Matthew 19:30. In the last panel, Linus looks at the reader and says, "I'll betcha Jesus never had an older sister."

Have you ever heard or read those passages? "The first shall be last," "You've got to deny yourself," "If you want to find your life, you've got to lose it, but if you lose your life, you'll find it." What do those mean to us today? This is another one of those passages. It talks about some things that are absolutely contrary to our culture.

Many of you are familiar with the term "upward mobility." It describes the ambition, the American Dream, the hopes and goals of many Americans. It is a dream to move on up to the top. A few years ago there was a television show with that name. Even a Christian like Zig Ziglar has written a book, *See You at the Top*. There is something in each of us that always wants to be pointing up, "I want to increase." We like to talk about things like promotion, increase, winning, enlarging, bigger, better—better cars, better house, better job, more money. But when someone comes along and starts talking about things like demotion, downscaling, decreasing, losing, dying, our pulse rate increases and our blood pressure rises. We don't want to talk about it. That's what this passage is all about. I think the Lord Jesus Christ goes straight into the face of our culture and says, "Upward mobility is not what's important." I'll tell you up front: This is not going to be a popular message. There probably won't be any tape sales of this message, because it deals with something we don't like to talk about.

The sermon is verse 5. All the rest of the text is simply an illustration of the sermon.

Philippians 2:5-11. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in 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. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the 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 Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

That doesn't mean we can be intellectually equal to Jesus. It doesn't mean we can be the moral equivalent of Jesus, who was without sin; it means when it comes to humility, we ought to display the same kind of attitude he displayed.

I. THE VOLUNTARY HUMILIATION OF JESUS

There are two completely counter movements in this passage. First is the great descent of Christ before we see the great exaltation of Christ. In verses 5-8, let's study the voluntary humiliation of Jesus. Jesus voluntarily descended from the very pinnacle of glory of heaven to the very basement of human debasement. He was at the top of the universe and he came all the way down to the bottom, which I call the "downward mobility of Jesus."

What do we believe about Jesus? What does the Bible teach about who Jesus Christ is? I believe this is the best passage in the Bible to tell us who He is. Jesus descended five steps down the ladder from heaven to earth.

A. Jesus released his grip on His heavenly position

Notice the Bible says Jesus was equal with God. Jesus was not some junior partner in the firm of Trinity Incorporated. He was not some trainee or the Dan Quayle of heaven. He was not an assistant God, He was totally and absolutely co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. We believe that there has always been God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus, who became flesh on that morning in Bethlehem, didn't come into existence at that point—He's always been. The Bible teaches the preexistence of the Lord Jesus. He was there at Creation. He spoke the universe into existence. He didn't just come on the scene there at Bethlehem.

The Bible says Jesus didn't consider this equality with God something he ought to exploit for himself selfishly. He was willing to release it. How different than human nature that is! Human nature always grabs for something. Even that commercial says, "You only go around once in life so grab for all the gusto you can get." Most of us can relate to Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob's name means "grabber." When he and his twin were born, he grabbed the heel of his brother and he spent his entire life grabbing for everything he could grab: His brother's birthright, the blessing and all the riches he could. That is a picture of human nature. There is something in each of us that makes us want to grab for more and more.

This past week, Laura Grace and I were studying social studies for her class. We were talking about compass directions and I showed her a compass and how on a compass, the needle always points to the North. There's just something about the nature of a compass that makes it point North. There's something about our human nature that always wants us to point up, for bigger and better and higher. Where do we get that? That is our sinful nature. That is the nature of the devil himself. In Isaiah 14, there was an angel named Lucifer who decided one day he wanted more. "I will ascend. I will be like the Most High." That is our nature—to grab for more.

Have you learned that sometimes in life you've got to let go of some things before you can truly own them? Parents sometimes learn a very painful lesson when their children become teens and young adults. Sometimes when they try to hold them too tightly, they lose them. But when

they're willing, with maturity and trust in God, sometimes releasing that grip and letting them go, sometimes they find that they win them.

There may be some things in life you're holding onto tightly that, like the Lord Jesus Christ, you may need to release your grip on it. Loosen up! Let go, literally, and let God.

B. Jesus emptied himself of His heavenly rights

The second step in Jesus' descent was that he emptied himself of His heavenly rights. It says he made himself nothing. The Greek word is *kenosis*. Sometimes this passage is called the *kenosis* passage, meaning emptying, he poured something out. When Jesus was on the earth, did he lose his deity? No. When he was on earth, he was one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man. What did he give up? He was willing to pour out his heavenly rights. From the beginning of the beginning, Jesus had been the target and the recipient of eons of praise and worship from all the heavenly hosts. Anything he thought was carried out by the angels. It was a right he had by his very nature. But he gave up that right when he came to earth, at least temporarily. He voluntarily made himself submissive to the Father.

Have you ever found yourself demanding your rights? It seems everyone is calling for their rights today; animal rights, gay rights, women's rights, minority rights. I'm so glad Jesus didn't say, "I know what my rights are and I'm not going to give them up." Sometimes spiritual maturity means you give up your rights. That's what this passage is all about. We studied it last week: Consider others more highly than yourselves.

Here's a man standing at a crosswalk and the light says, "Walk." And he steps out to walk across the street. The light is red and the sign says, "Walk," but bearing down on him is a semi that's not going to stop. He's not going to say, "I know my rights! The sign says 'walk,' the light is red. I'm not going to give up my rights." Splat! He was right, wasn't he? Dead right. But he was just as dead as if he'd been dead wrong. Sometimes you need to be willing to give up your rights. That's what Jesus did: He emptied himself of his heavenly rights.

C. Jesus became a person with flesh and feelings

The third downward step is he became a person with flesh and feelings. The Bible says in verse 7, "He took the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man." This is what we call the incarnation, *kreas*, from flesh. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14) The pre-existent Word, the Son, the second person of the Godhead took on flesh and he became a human being. But he didn't come into the world as a 33-year-old man, fully mature and eloquent. Instead, he became a fetus, growing within the womb of a woman named Mary. Then he came into the world as a baby.

Yes, he was really a man. The Bible says he was like us in every way. Can you imagine what it would have been like not to have been restricted by flesh and bones for eons and eons, and to be suddenly have flesh? It looks confining, like wearing a tight pair of clothes. He felt the same way we felt. When someone slapped him, it hurt him just like it would hurt you. When the soldiers drove nails through his hands and feet, it hurt him just like it would hurt you. Not only did he

have the same physical feelings we have, he had the same emotional feelings we have. The Bible tells us in Hebrews that Jesus was touched in every way that we are. Every infirmity we have, there was only one difference between Jesus and us: Jesus never sinned.

Did Jesus get tired? Sure! He had to sleep. Jesus never slept before he came to this world. "He that watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:5) That must have been a little strange for the Son of God to get tired and have to sleep. He also got hungry and had to walk through doors. He became one of us. The Creator became a creature.

All my life I've heard stories trying to make that comparison make sense. In fact, there was a little boy who bought an ant farm. He was so fascinated with ants, that he sat for hours watching them make their own little world and community. He loved his ants. One day he told his mother, "I would really like to tell those ants how much I love them and I'm their friend." His mom said, "I guess the only way you could tell an ant that you love it is to become an ant yourself." The boy realized there was no way he could become an ant, but that's what God did. God wanted to tell us how much He loved us and the only way He could do it was to become one of us. I understand what that story is trying to say, but it falls far short of the true meaning of this passage, because the step from a human being to an ant is a tiny step compared to the distance between the Creator and a creature. There's an infinite distance between those two and God, the Son, became a person.

D. Jesus chose to live as a servant

This was Jesus' fourth step in his downward mobility of Jesus. "He took upon himself the very nature of a servant." (verse 7) He could have come as a king, He could have come as Caesar. He could have come as the world's great political leader. Instead, he came as a servant.

Jesus was born to a peasant woman, lived in the obscure village of Nazareth, became a carpenter—all his life he experienced the same thing boys experience growing up in that part of the world. I imagine there were times that a crude and rude Roman soldier pushed him aside and said, "Get out of my way, Jew boy! Stay in your place!" If only the soldier had known what His place really was.

Jesus became a carpenter and then throughout his ministry he said the Son of Man didn't come to be ministered to, but to minister. He became a servant. There was the night that the disciples had their unwashed, dirty, stinky feet and Jesus Christ was the one who got up and removed his garment and went around and washed the feet of the disciples. Why did he do it? Because he was a servant.

E. He died the death of a criminal

"He became obedient to death, even death on a cross." (verse 8) The fact that He died is saying one thing, but to say he died on a *cross* is a totally different statement. Death is foreign to the very nature of God. The very nature of God implies life. But the Bible says death is the final enemy that needed to be conquered. Here is Jesus, life itself, he faced death on the cross—it was like it was high noon at the OK Corral and Jesus squared off against Death. Here's Jesus in the

white hat and here's Death in the black hat. They faced each other and Jesus looked Death right in the face and then he unbuckled his holster and dropped it to the ground and said, "Hit me with your best shot." And Death fired both barrels at the Lord Jesus Christ and killed him. But Jesus did it willingly.

The Bible says he died the death of a criminal. He did not drink hemlock and lie down on a soft couch to drift off into a stupor and then death. He didn't turn a switch on an I.V. and let poison and narcotics mix together so he could go to sleep. No. He died the most agonizing, painful death that the world has ever devised—on a cruel cross. That's why people were crucified: So the shame and the agony could be combined to make it an excruciating kind of death. Jesus died on the cross. Why? For our sins; so we could be saved.

Notice how he went from the very pinnacle of heaven to the very basement of human debasement. That's what I call downward mobility. What's the lesson? Humility says, "I'm going down, down, down." Pride says, "I'm going up, up, up!"

II. THE VICTORIOUS EXALTATION OF JESUS

When Jesus went down, God lifted him up. If you're the kind of person who says, "I'm going up, up, up." God says, "No, you're going down, down, down." God resists the proud. But if you're the kind of person who is willing to humble yourself before God, God will lift you up. What if you humble yourself because your motive is to be up? Chances are he won't. But if you humble yourself simply to be obedient to God and do what the Bible says, "Let this attitude be in you which was in Christ Jesus," (Romans 15:5) then God will exalt you.

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the 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 Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (v. 7-11)

A. God gave Him the highest position

God did two things to exalt Jesus. On the cross, Jesus really died. They drove the spear into his ribcage and water and blood flowed together. He was dead. His heart stopped beating and his brain stopped functioning. They took him down and put him even lower in a tomb. But God came and raised him from the dead. The Bible says for forty days he was on the earth, talking and being seen by over 500 followers. At the end of that forty day period, God raised him even higher. One day he went with his disciples to the top of the Mount of Olives and he began to ascend in front of their very eyes back into heaven. Can you imagine what it would have been like if you were one of the disciples and had been there that day? All these years you'd been with Jesus; your hopes had been dashed when he was crucified, but your hopes had been resurrected when he was resurrected. For forty days he taught you and you were excited about what was going to happen and then suddenly, you see Him going away. What a tearful departure that must have been! I can imagine they stood there until they couldn't see him anymore, until he was ascended out of their sight.

But the scene changes. Change your perspective. How do you think the angels must have responded? How do you think God the Father must have responded when the Lord Jesus ascended back into heaven, back to his rightful position?

I was not alive when it happened, but many of you were. I heard after World War II, all the little towns and cities in America had welcome home parades for the soldiers who fought. They would parade them down Main Street, "Welcome home!" "Well done!" Those whose uniform sleeves were pinned because they lost an arm or were on crutches because they lost a leg were even more appreciated.

How do you think it must have been that day when Jesus came back into heaven and the Father said, "What are those wounds I see in your hands?" And Jesus said, "These were the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." And the Father said, "Well done my son. Come, sit down at my right hand." The Bible says that's where He is right now. He's seated at the right hand of God the Father. In other words, God exalted Him to the very highest place back into heaven.

B. God gave Him the greatest name

Isn't the name of Jesus wonderful? The name of Jesus changed my life. The name of Jesus gives me strength to get up every day. The name of Jesus gives my life purpose and meaning. We talk a lot about the Lord, but it's the Lord JESUS. I want to misquote a scripture and see if you can catch it: The Bible says in Romans 10:13, "Whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved." What did I leave out of that? "Whosoever shall call upon the NAME of the Lord shall be saved."

His name is Jesus. And as a nine-year-old child I called upon the name of Jesus and I was saved. Whether you're ninety or whether you're tiny, whatever age you are today, if you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, you can be saved. It's the greatest name and the Bible says at that name, every knee is going to bow; every tongue is going confess that Jesus is Lord. I'm doing that willingly right now. But the Bible says one day, EVERYBODY will be forced to say, "Jesus is Lord."

There's something everyone has in common, whatever your religious background, whatever your beliefs: Everyone will bow and everyone will confess Jesus is Lord. The question is, will you confess it right now by choice, out of love and adoration or will you confess it then in Judgement, out of regret and fear? I'm going to confess right now that Jesus is Lord. I wonder how many of you have even said that? You're going to confess it one day. Why don't you just confess it right now? Say it with me, "Jesus is Lord."

It's one thing to say, "Jesus is Lord," but it's another thing to say, "Jesus is MY Lord." Sure, he's the Lord; he created everything. He's equal with God, resurrected from the dead, ascended back into heaven. He IS the Lord, you're right. But it's a different thing to say, "Jesus is my Lord." Would you like to say that with me? I'm going to say it and I'm going to mean it. Maybe you'd like to say it with me, out of joy and out of choice, not because I tell you, but say it out of an act of your will, because one day you WILL say it for sure. "Jesus is my Lord." That makes all the difference in the world. He has the greatest name.

What does this mean to us today?

LIFE-CHANGING LESSON: Our salvation is secured when we accept Jesus and what He did for us on the cross

How can you be saved today? By accepting Jesus and what He did on the cross. If there's anyone today who will say, "I believe Jesus is God and that He became man and went to the cross and died for my sins and now I accept Jesus into my life. I turn from my sins and I'm going to let what he did on Calvary stand in my place," you can be saved.

We love to hear rags-to-riches stories. But this is a riches-to-rags-to-riches story. For us, it is a rags-to-riches. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

How is salvation a rags-to-riches story? The Old Testament says, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags." That means the best behavior you have ever done in your life is nothing but filthy rags compared to the holiness of God. I wouldn't trust the best five minutes I've ever lived to get me into heaven. But when I let go of those filthy rags and I say it's not my righteous, it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ, God says, "Here is all the riches of heaven for you." It is a rags-to-riches story for us.

LIFE-CHANGING LESSON: Our success (before God) is assured when we adopt the attitude of humility

The Bible says in James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." Andrew Murray said, "Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me. It is to be at rest when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord where I can go in and shut the door, kneel to my Father in secret, and I am at peace, as in a deep sea of calmness when all around and above is trouble." That's what humility is. And the Bible says, "I must decrease and he must increase." I don't know about you, but as for me and my house, we'll see you at the bottom.

OUTLINE

I. THE VOLUNTARY HUMILIATION OF JESUS

The steps in the "downward mobility" of Jesus:

- A. Released his grip on His heavenly position
- B. Emptied himself of His heavenly rights
- C. Became a person with flesh and feelings
- D. Chose to live as a servant
- E. Died the death of a criminal

II. THE VICTORIOUS EXALTATION OF JESUS

- A. God gave Him the highest position
- B. God gave Him the greatest name

TWO LIFE-CHANGING LESSONS:

1. Our salvation is secured when we accept Jesus and what He did for us on the cross
"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." 2 *Corinthians* 8:9
2. Our success (before God) is assured when we adopt the attitude of humility
"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." *James* 4:10

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —



David O. Dykes
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David***

Dykes in Texas.” This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes