

Jesus is God

Humility, Part 6

Philippians 2:9-11

Some years ago, a distinguished publishing house brought together a panel of 28 educators and historians and asked them to select the 100 most significant events of history and then list those events in order of importance.

After months of labor, the panel reported that they considered the most significant event of history to be the discovery of America. In second place was the invention of movable type by Gutenberg. Eleven different events tied for third place, and five events tied for fourth place. The events that tied for fourth place were the writing of the U.S. Constitution, the development of ether, the discovery of the x-ray, the invention of the airplane, and the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus tied for fourth.ⁱ

Just recently, I read about an event on the Game Show called Family Feud. It was – as usual – asking contestants to guess how 100 people responded to various survey questions. They contestants were asked this question, “According to 100 people surveyed, when someone mentions ‘the King’, to whom might they be referring?” And according to the survey there were four top answers. Two people said, “Burger King”; three people said, “Martin Luther King; seven people said, ‘Jesus’; but 81 people said, “Elvis Presley”.ⁱⁱ

For the past several weeks we’ve been learning a new hymn – a hymn about the true king . . . and it isn’t Elvis.

And He doesn’t come in fourth place, either.

It’s a hymn lyric from the first century that sings of God the Son in His pre-existence equality, His humiliation in death, and His future reign.

In just a few stanzas, this early hymn virtually spans from eternity past to the very edge of eternity future.

It’s found in *Philippians chapter 2* – a chapter we’ve been studying together and it just so happens to contain the perfect text for today. Imagine that?! I love it when it works out like this.

A man came up to me in the store this past week and asked me – “What are you going to preach on Easter Sunday?” And I said, “The next verse.”

He laughed . . . out of expectation and joy.

Now if you’re just joining our hymn study, let me bring you up to speed and to just the right place in these lyrics:

- The first stanza sings of His pre-existence in heaven (**2:6**)
- The second stanza sings of His humility in coming to earth (**v. 7**)
- The third stanza sings of His death on a cross (**v. 8**)
- The notice this – the fourth stanza will sing of His resurrection and exaltation (**v. 9**)
- And the fifth and final stanza will sing of His vindication and that final terrifying, sweeping act of judgment (**vv. 10-11**).

In case you’re wondering where we are on this sheet of music, at this moment in church history, we happen to be located in time, just between the fourth and fifth stanzas – in between the 9th and 10th verses of this hymn text.

In our last study we looked at the rights which Jesus gave up in order to give us a right – the right to become the children of God – for those who believe in His name.

And that third stanza ended at the cross, where Christ suffered and died, where the Sovereign became the ultimate Sacrifice.

But that wasn’t the last stanza of the hymn . . . it’s really just beginning.

Let’s go back and look closely at these two final stanzas – and from them, let me make several observations.

1. First, Jesus Christ is given divine confirmation

Notice at the beginning of verse 9. For this reason also, God hath highly exalted Him

Which is another way of saying, He doesn’t tie for fourth place . . . He is actually ahead of and beyond first place – in a league of His own. ***God has highly exalted Him.***

When Paul writes of His exaltation, it includes His resurrection, His ascension and His reception

back to Heaven. He has sat down at the right hand of the Father – and the right hand speaks of sovereign, divine authority.

Keep in mind that this is not a promotion. Jesus isn't being given higher status than before – this hymn is now simply singing that God the Father has returned Jesus Christ to the highest throne there is.ⁱⁱⁱ

The throne He'd left – co-equal with the Father – in order to die on earth.

But on the Lord's day – that first Sunday after His crucifixion – the stone was rolled away by an angel who literally translated, rolled it off its track – and then Matthew records that the angel just sat there on top of that stone and announced that He wasn't there anymore – He had risen just as He said He would. (Matthew 28).

That stone wasn't rolled away by the angel to let Jesus Christ out, but to let us in – and Peter and John were the first to inside (John chapter 20) and they found the tomb almost empty – Jesus had left behind the cocoon of linen strips of cloth that had already begun to harden, and the face napkin folded nearby – but no there was no body inside.

This hymn implies that moment 40 days later when Jesus ascended and gloriously returned to His throne.

He is alive . . . resurrected . . . exalted!

The word here for *exalted*, by the way, is used only here in the entire New Testament. It is compound word made up the verb to raise up and the prefix which gives us our word “hyper” (υπερψωω).^{iv}

In other word, God the Father hyper-raised Him – that is, He went above and beyond in exalting His Son back to glory in the most magnificent way possible.

God doesn't reveal through Paul what that ascension back to His throne looked like or how it must have sounded with the choir hosts of heaven and all the Old Testament redeemed, but Kent Hughes wrote on this text that he could just imagine cosmic fireworks, astral explosions and starbursts – and an awesome fanfare of an unrestrained celebration as the eternal Son reenters the glory that had always been His – but that which He humbly set aside in order to come to earth.^v

This exaltation is nothing less than the confirmation of whom He was and where He truly belonged.

Hebrews chapter 1 tells us that *when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . but of the Son, He*

says – that is God the Father says, listen to this – *Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever (Hebrews 1:3-8).*

Imagine, from the cross Jesus calls God the Father “My God” – and after his exaltation, you have God the Father calling Jesus Christ, God.

Let me tell you something . . . Jesus isn't tied for fourth place.

Which leads me to my second observation of Christ's exaltation. **Not only does He receive divine confirmation, secondly:**

2. Jesus Christ is given a sovereign designation

Notice verse 9 – Not only did God hyper exalt Him, but notice, *He bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.*

You might think – well yes, that's the name “Jesus”. Not at all.

The name Jesus had already been given to Him – you may remember the angel coming to Joseph and telling him that his fiancé was already pregnant but that the child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit overshadowing the womb of his virgin bride; and this baby was actually the coming Deliverer and that he was to named Jesus – because Jesus – Yeshua – Joshua in the Hebrew language – was in fact coming to *deliver His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).*

He had already been given the name, Jesus at His humiliation; now we're told there is a new name emphasizing His glorification.^{vi}

In fact, a careful reading of *verse 9* and following will help – it'll really mess up some gospel songs and choruses, but here's what it actually says – notice; *Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus* – would you notice how your English translation is careful here and it doesn't say “at the name (comma), Jesus (comma), every knee should bow.

Listen there were hundreds of little boys running around the hills of Judea named Jesus – Ιησους - Yeshua – named after their Old Testament hero Joshua – the deliverer.

Nobody would stop twice at the name Jesus – and they certainly wouldn't bow.

But Paul is actually writing here, “that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – what is that name? Paul withholds it until you reach *verse 11* –

skip there – and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is – here it is – Lord. Kurios.

No other Israelite would be named Kurios – Lord.

The Caesar’s lay claim to this title in their campaign to be worshipped as deity – but they all discovered soon enough that they weren’t God after all.

Here’s why this early church hymn was not only powerful, but combustible.

The Jews considered God’s name to be too holy to speak – and so instead of saying Yahweh – or in English – Jehovah – they used the title Adonai – or Lord – all capital letters in English.^{vii}

In fact, 300 years before the birth of Christ, the Jews translated their Old Testament scriptures into the Greek Language – it’s called the Septuagint. Both Jesus Christ and Paul will quote from it. And more than 6,000 times, the Greek translation uses Kurios in the place of Yahweh – the designated and divine title of their living God.^{viii}

In other words – get ready for this – Lord and Jehovah are equivalent names.^{ix}

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Jehovah . . . He is Lord.

Paul gives us His full name here in verse 11:

- Jesus – the name of the Deliverer
- Christ – the designation for the anointed one, the Messiah
- Lord – Adonai – Jehovah – fully and equally divine.

Here is the early church singing that Jesus bears in His exaltation the unique and proper name of God.^x

This is shocking!

This hymn is singing of our bedrock truth of the gospel – but it doesn’t even make an attempt at explaining the mystery of the unity of God the Father and God the Son – the Lord Jesus Christ. Probably because it is simply incomprehensible. Yet these hymn lyrics do nothing less than radically redefine monotheism in terms of one God in at least two distinct yet equal persons – God the Father and God the Son; the third person of the Godhead – the Holy Spirit – will make an entrance later on as He descends and creates the Church. And then it becomes even more incomprehensible.

Beloved we believe far more than we understand. But we believe because God has revealed it in His word. And the more incomprehensible it is, the more we take pleasure in it because it could not have been conceived of by human invention.

But there’s more here to this divine designation.

Not only is this text a staggering declaration of Jesus Christ’s deity and equivalency with Yahweh – which is tragically overlooked by the Jews and completely refused by the Jehovah’s Witnesses among others – in fact, if they understood this early creed, the Jehovah’s Witnesses would actually become Jesus’ Witnesses.

But you need to know as well that Paul here is quoting lyrics that actually originated from the lips of Yahweh Himself.

You might write into the margin of your text here as a reminder, ***Isaiah 45.*** God is speaking through His prophet and he says – and while I read it by the way – keep your eyes on ***Philippians 2:10 & 11.*** ***God says through Isaiah 45:21. Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me. 22. Turn to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. 23. 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, and every tongue will confess/or acknowledge – 24. They will say of Me, Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.”***

Taken right out of the pages of prophecy – now fulfilled at Christ’s exaltation.

The early church is singing what would become the first doctrinal statement – in four words – Jesus Christ is Lord.^{xi}

He is indeed equal to and of the same essence as Jehovah . . . Lord . . . God.

That leads me to the third observation of His exaltation:

Jesus Christ not only receives divine confirmation;

He not only is given a sovereign designation;

3. Jesus Christ will be given a universal vindication

Just as this ancient hymn text began by taking us into eternity *past* and showing us the preexistence of Jesus Christ as equal to God the Father, now the hymn ends by taking us to the brink of eternity *future*.^{xii}

Be careful to notice that Paul is now singing about something that has not yet happened; notice, that at the name of Jesus – Lord – every knee will bow

It hasn't happened yet . . . but it will.

And if you're wondering if every knee means every knee – Paul comprehensively includes everyone – notice:

- ***Of those who are in heaven*** – that includes the holy angels and the redeemed believers of all ages
- ***And on earth*** – a reference to all of humanity both redeemed and unredeemed at the end of human history and the great judgment of God;
- Then Paul makes one last sweep – and those who are ***under the earth*** – this was a common reference to the grave – which will include all the unredeemed dead who await their final resurrection and judgment; the phrase “***under the earth***” also referred to the underworld – the “under-earth world” – this is a reference to the demonic kingdom of fallen angels and their leader Satan who all await their coming and final judgment; which means that all of the demons and the Devil himself will one day be compelled to admit that Jesus Christ is indeed victory – they will prostrate themselves before the throne of the risen Lord.^{xiii}

This hasn't happened yet.

The church is singing of a coming final vindication of the Lord – and those who believed in Him have entered into His eternal kingdom and those who denied Him now face their eternal punishment.

And no one will be judged on that final day without being brought to a confession – ***notice verse 11 again – every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

The word for ***tongue*** here is *glossa* – which gives us our word glossary. Every language – every dialect – every tongue – will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.^{xiv}

This doesn't mean that there will be a worldwide, mass conversion. The verb “confess” here isn't the usual word for agreement or confession.

Here Paul uses a word (exomologeō) that refers to openly admitting – publically acknowledging [that Jesus Christ is Lord].^{xv}

This is the gospel in a nutshell – we are inviting unbelievers with this doctrinal distinctive – ***If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe***

in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

Listen, when we worship Jesus Christ as Lord – as we're doing today – we are actually previewing the coming universal admission of every human being and every angelic being that Jesus Christ is triumphant, majestic, sovereign God.^{xvi}

And for those who denied Him – to their everlasting horror will this admission be made. And for those who believed Him – to their everlasting joy will this admission be made.

You see, one of the things the Father gave to Jesus at His exaltation – we learn from other passages – is the right to judge the world (***John 5:22***).

Ask the average person on the street what they think about the coming judgment of God and you will get less than an enthusiastic response.

Suggest that one day Jesus Christ will sit upon a throne and render eternal judgment and they will say, “You're making that all up.”

Don't talk to me about judgment and certainly not eternal judgment in Hell.

One Newsweek article reported, “Today, hell has become theology's H-word – in other words, good people never say it – it's rude and impolite. Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School believes this is a good trend – he wrote, “I don't think there is any future for . . . hell.”^{xvii}

The Apostle John writes in the Bible's final Book called Revelation of this judgment scene the early church is actually singing about in Philippians chapter 2.

Where on some future day ***every knee will bow and every tongue*** brought to publically admit that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And for the unbeliever, that final judgment is irreversible as Jesus Christ Himself sits upon that Great White Throne.

Revelation chapter 20 and verse 11 reads, Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away . . . the middle part of verse 12 – and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life . . . verse 15. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here at the Judgment of all of humanity, John sees a book opened called the book of life. This is the registry of humans who've been allowed into heaven forever.

And John records the horrifying reality as these unredeemed of all time recognize – rightly so – that their names have not been recorded.

Now John’s first century audience would have immediately understood this concept because every community had a registry of citizens. Every Emperor had a roll-book of living citizens under his reign.^{xviii}

If your name wasn’t in his roll-book, you weren’t a part of his kingdom and he wasn’t your king.

The registry of the King of Heaven is now opened at the final judgment of all the unbelieving throughout all of human history.

By the way, this is not a book of religion; this isn’t the roll book of church activity or membership.

No one is going to step forward and say, “Wait a minute – I never missed Sunday school one time.” That isn’t going to matter. No one will step forward and say, “Listen, I’m a Baptist and I’ve been baptized; or, I’m a Catholic and I’ve been catechized; or, I’m a Methodist and I’ve – I’ve – been mesmerized.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ never once commanded “Believe on the church and thou shalt be saved.”

No – ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16:31)***

And if you do – your name is recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Paul will later write to the Philippians in chapter 3 – we’re going to get there eventually – ***For our citizenship is in heaven – that’s another way of saying – we are in the King’s registry of heaven – from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20)***

But here . . . the early church sings . . . here, standing before the Holy and Just throne of God the Son’s sovereign judgment are millions upon untold millions of people – the unredeemed from all of human history – and they will hear the unpardonable sentence read against them by this living and Divine Judge as they are then cast into the lake of fire.

Listen, the first part of this hymn has all come true – this last stanza will come true as well; and for the unredeemed, there is:

- no parole from this place;
- no appeal;
- no pardon;
- no early release;
- no second chance;
- no escape.^{xix}

This is the final word from God the Son. This is the verdict and with it the vindication of the Savior who was denied.

I’ve had numerous people tell me over the years – “Listen, if God sends people to Hell I’d do not want to worship Him.”

They will get their wish.

These lyrics refer to that tragic moment when they get their wish – and they will all fall to their knees and they will all – not worship, mind you – but publically admit that Jesus Christ was indeed:

- more than just another prophet;
- more than just another teacher;
- more than a nice man who gave us the golden rule;
- more than a Jewish philosopher;
- more than a crucified victim of His own Messianic delusion;
- more than glorified man who’d lived a good moral life.
- He was more than someone who tied for fourth place of significant events and people.

Listen, no tongue [in this audience today] will be silent . . . no knee [in this audience] will remain unbowed.^{xx}

This ancient hymn effectively presents an invitation, doesn’t it? Come and join us in singing; believe in His exaltation and his designation; claim Him as your living Lord . . . avoid being on the wrong side of that coming universal vindication as this final courtroom scene delivers an irrevocable judgment.

This hymn invites you to effectively settle with Jesus Christ out of court . . . don’t go to court with Him as Judge; settle out of court, settle out of court – today – while He can still become your Savior.

And then join the redeemed forever who sing before Him as He is seated, not on His final throne of judgment, but on His eternal throne of glory.

John records that scene which is yet to come for all who have believed and now in heaven sing; John writes, ***“[They] will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne saying – literally chanting in song – Worthy are You, our Lord and our God... (Revelation 4:10-11)***

Can I ask you a question? At which scene in the future will you openly declare this truth?

Will it be at that throne of pure and holy judgment where your admission will be empty and

forever too late; or will it be in the glories of heaven
where your confession will still be the lyrics of
eternal worship as heaven forever reverberates your
singing to the majesty and mystery of God, who is
your Savior . . .

your Redeemer,

your Jehovah . . .

your exalted, risen Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/5/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Bruce Thielemann, "Christus Imperator," *Preaching Today*, Tape 55.

ii James Gilmore, *We Have No King but Elvis*, White Horse Inn Blog (9-14-12)

iii Adapted from Tremper Longman & David E. Garland, gen. editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 12* (Zondervan, 2006), p. 221

iv Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 551

v Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians* (Crossway, 2007), p. 91

vi Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Philippians: Be Joyful* (Victor Books, 1978), p. 58

vii John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 145

viii G. Walter Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Apollos, 2009), p. 167

ix James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Baker, 2000), p. 130

x Hansen, p. 168

xi William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Westminster, 1975), p. 39

xii Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians* (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 148

xiii Adapted from Rienecker & Rogers, p. 551

xiv Adapted from MacArthur, p. 146

xv Rienecker & Rogers, p. 551

xvi Adapted from Hansen, p. 165

xvii Erwin Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Moody, 1997), p. 97

xviii William Barclay, *The Revelation of John Volume 2* (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 196

xix Sam Gordon, *Worthy is the Lamb: A Walk Through Revelation* (Ambassador, 2000), p. 418

xx Grant Osborne, gen. editor; *Life Application Bible Commentary: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* (Tyndale, 1995), p. 62