

Climbing Down the Ladder of Success

Phillipians 2:5-11 (Read)

- **Introduction...**Lewis Carroll's 1871 book, 'Through the Looking-Glass', a sequel to 'Alice in Wonderland'— In it, there are many mirror themes, including opposites, time running backwards, and so on. Everything is a mirror image of reality. A contemporary example of this is with an ambulance—looking at the front of one and reading ek-na-lub-ma is confusing, but not when its read through the rear view mirror of car. Then it makes perfect sense!
- So it is with this passage, and really all of scripture...'give to receive'; 'love your enemies'; 'turn the other cheek'; 'the way up is down'...biblical principles such as these can only make any sense when seen through the looking glass of scripture!
- The world sees these principles like the word on the front of the ambulance, it doesn't read right, it's backwards and that's because they're not looking through God's reflective lens of scripture.
- The world tells us that success is 'going up in the world', 'the first step to success requires one to get their foot on the first rung of the success ladder and to climb it!' Be ruthless in your dealings with others..you got to think of number one!
- The principles and teachings in the Word of God are the world turned upside-down...it flips the things that the world hold dear on its head!

- So let us look at this passage through the reflection of Jesus as He exemplified the meaning of humility. And what the Apostle Paul is saying to the Phillipian Church on this subject, and to us.
- **Background...**So why is the Apostle Paul writing this to the Phillipians?
- Paul writes to the believers not because they are divided and falling to bits—although there is some conflict—but more as an encouragement, and with an eagerness to see loving unity nurtured among them. It was a healthy church in comparison with the churches of Corinth and Galatia.
- Maybe because of what was happening in the other churches, Paul wanted to ensure that it didn't start manifesting in this church. He points out the virtues of self-less love and service to others, using Jesus' example as one to follow by having the mindset of Him. Using Jesus as the plumb line for ultimate humility and the service of others, he shows the believers that because of this, His Father in heaven lifted Him up and gave Him the highest honour.
- **Content...**Lets look together at this letter from v.5, and unpack it and allow the Spirit illuminate it, and to help us to apply it in our own lives.
- So, v.5, to have this mind can be amplified like this...'Adopt towards one another, in your mutual relations, the same attitude which was found in Christ Jesus.

- We are being challenged here to walk in humility as Jesus examples, but not in a burdensome sense, but practically, and by seeing others through the mind, and eyes of Jesus. Who loved the world enough to die for each and everyone!

- **Humility illustration...**Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak at a Large Presbyterian church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as "our illustrious guest." Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, "Dear friends, I am but the little servant of an illustrious Master."

- This was someone who had plenty to boast about, but chose to boast about Christ!

- Likewise Corrie Ten Boom tells this story...When I saw Sadhu Sundar Singh in Europe, he had completed a tour around the world. People asked him, "Doesn't it do harm, your getting so much honour?" The Sadhu's answer was: "No. The donkey went into Jerusalem, and they put garments on the ground before him. He was not proud. He knew it was not done to honour him, but for Jesus, who was sitting on his back. When people honour me, I know it is not me, but the Lord, who does the job."

- When a wine taster tastes a really expensive vintage wine, and they are looking at it as they swirl it around the glass, do you think that they are admiring the glass or its content?
- "They that know God will be humble," —"and they that know themselves cannot be proud."
- Apply your own examples of humility to these examples, times where you've seen or heard of real acts of humility which have humbled you.
- We look know to the ultimate example of humility that Paul uses, and explore this hymn and Christological hotspot from v.6 ff...
- If we think that our examples of humility are contrary to the world, how much more does Jesus flip the world's view, how much more did it wreck the Jewish mindset of the time? Can you imagine, as Trump called it, the 'locker room talk' of the day...The Messiah, a servant...God, born of flesh and blood...it would have wrecked their heads!
- v.6 'form/nature of God...equality with God a thing to be grasped' or taken by force...
- Paul affirms that Jesus is fully God here—this is the top of the 'ladder'—this is a hugely important theological truth on which the Christian faith rests. Jesus had (and continues to have), the same status and privileges as God the Father.

- Whilst having that status and privileges, He didn't have to hang onto them, He didn't put His holy foot down and say: "I'm not going anywhere without my entitlements and rights and privileges" Jesus didn't forcibly look to retain the Glory He had had with the Father before His incarnation...He gave it up!
- Paul is pointing to Christ's self-denial as an example for us, which we read also in 2Cor. 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."
- He took yet another step down the ladder!
- v.7 Then we read; "He emptied Himself, made Himself nothing"...Now this does not mean that He ceased being God, being deity, but rather He emptied Himself, or divested Himself of the Glory and privileges of God, but retained the very divine nature of God. Another vital theological truth is contained here; Jesus is a 100% God!
- And so, He took yet another step down the ladder!
- You know where this is going, don't you? This is one of those sermons that's going to take you to hell and back!
- '...by taking the very nature of a servant' God, the Creator, ruler over all things, takes on the nature of a servant...WOW!! The most excellent illustration of this is found in John 13:3-5...The divine nature of God was on full display here, and most worthily displayed, in this

act of humility that teaches us of selfless service, which Jesus was about to soon exemplify on the cross.

- And so, He took another step down the ladder!
- "...being made in human likeness." This is another major theological truth, He wasn't just 100% God, but He was also 100% man.
- A teaching developed before the end of the 1st Century AD called Docetism, this belief said that Jesus only looked like a human, but wasn't really incarnate, wasn't born of flesh and blood, and wasn't so Himself. A bit like an apparition. Docetism comes from a Greek word that means; 'to seem'; or 'semblance'.
- The Apostle John refutes this in a few places, but particularly so in 2 John 7: "I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist."
- Jesus certainly felt every lash of the whip on His back and every swing of the hammer that drove the nails in through His flesh!
- And so, once again, He took another step down the ladder!
- v.8 so having become man He humbles Himself further, yet another step down...not my will but yours be done...a sacrificial death was demanded for the sins of the world. For our sins, past, present, and future! For the sins of those who would crucify Him, despise Him, not acknowledge Him, sin against Him, and not believe in Him.

- He became obedient to the demands of the covenant unto death...Unto the public humiliation of a criminal's death upon the cross....Reflect on this truth...
- Jesus steps down the ladder again, and off it into the pit of hell!
- Jesus has just travelled from Robes to rags; from the splendour of heaven to the smell of a stable; from being served to serving; from the golden streets of Heaven to the cobblestones of the Via Dolorosa, from the Songs of Heaven's chorus to the cries of an angry mob—crucify Him, crucify Him; from Heaven's throne room to Bethlehem's manger; from being exalted to being executed; from the manger to the tomb!
- And why did He do this? He done this out of obedience—yes, but He did it out of love—out of love for you and me!
- This is the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. It means to lose our life to save it; it means to be emptied of ourselves, of self-seeking in order that we may be filled with Him and His passion and selfless love for others, for one another—It is by this that people will know that we are His disciples!
- This is not only contrary to the view of the world, but it is also contrary to our fallen nature and it is why the health and wealth gospel has gained such traction—being served, not serving; getting instead of giving; being filled, not emptied; God obeying us, instead of us

obeying God—but this is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we've just read about!

- How contrary is this to what the world has to offer? James (4:10) writes: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
- So when we look at humble service through the looking glass, in the reflection of Jesus, what do we see?
- vv.9-11[Read]
- We see the biblical principle fulfilled to the uttermost: God rewards our humble, obedient service! This is what the Apostle Paul is teaching the Phillipians and it is what the Spirit is teaching us today!
- vv.9-11 Shows us the reward given by at the Father to the Son, the highest of rewards, Jesus is declared Lord from the highest place over the lowest of places and everything in between.
- Everyone will one day marvel at what Jesus has done and like the centurion at the foot of the cross—all will surely know and confess on bended knee: that—“Jesus Christ is Lord!”
- The thief taunted Him—if you are who you say you are save yourself—but Jesus stayed silent, and in that silence you can surely hear—wait till Sunday morning, and see who I AM, and who I've saved! All will know that I AM THE LORD-JESUS CHRIST-SAVIOUR-OF-THE-WORLD!

- The nails didn't hold Jesus on that cross—but obedience to the Father and selfless love for those that put Him there, selfless love for us!
- There is no greater honour that a father can bestow on a son, and this really is mirrored in the story of the Prodigal Son.
- When the son humbled himself before his father, he called for the servants to bring the best robe, to put a ring on his finger, to put sandals on his feet, and to kill the fattened calf were going to have a party! My son has returned!
- **Conclusion...**
- Being a servant is more about being than it is about doing
- There is no genuine life in Christ that is not at the same time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being transformed into the likeness of Christ. (Fee, Pg 101-102) Any religion that puts self above others is not and cannot be true Christianity. If Christ, being God, humbled Himself to become a servant for others, then how can we as His followers, who are not God, in any way exalt ourselves? If He died for others, how can we fail to live for others?
- We tend to look for that one BIG experience where we can demonstrate our faithfulness to God, demonstrate our servanthood by giving of ourselves in some heroic fashion. But in reality that is not usually how it happens. In reality, it happens in the small, everyday, somewhat uneventful occurrences of our lives.

- This attitude, this mindset of serving others instead of being served; of giving rather than getting; of obeying rather than dominating, is lived out in the myriad interpersonal exchanges we encounter every day.
- How we treat the cashier at Tesco or LIDL, how we talk to the person who collects our rubbish, or delivers our post, or the waiter in a restaurant—particularly when things aren't to our satisfaction!
- It is, most often, not seen in how we treat those who are socially above us, but how we treat those who are socially beneath us.
- Jesus was highly exalted for His humility and obedience which was beyond anything that we could ever achieve, but we can achieve the principle that He set out for us.
- God exalts the humble and is pleased when we carry out obedient acts of selfless love among His people and beyond.
- Someone here is today looking for a breakthrough in their life—The Spirit says humble yourself with an act of selfless love and I will lift you up!
- To finish—here are some reflective questions to take away;
- Are you here to serve or to be served?
- Is your attitude/mindset like the world's or like Christ's?
- Are you just going through the motions of service or are you becoming a servant?
- The example has been set by Jesus; the call is clear; all that is left is your response; your decision; your commitment...

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- Will you be like Jesus today?