

THE JESUS STORY AND OURS (Philippians 2:5-11)

It all began in 1993 with the publication of a single book. That lone book turned into a publishing franchise that has released 276 separate titles making it the largest paper book series in publishing history. They have sold more than half a billion copies of their various titles each of which carries a modification of the first title—*Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

Each book contains numerous stories. These are not your run of the mill, self-help books written by experts telling you how to live life, change your habits, and become an over the night success. They are just stories, but stories have great power, the power to help you live your life, change your habits, and become successful.

Stories are not only powerful; they are also necessary. Life is not an equation to be solved. It is a story to be heard, owned, and lived.

We are born with a desire to hear stories. That's why mothers read nursery rhymes and picture books to their children. That is why we tell bed time stories and even scary stories over the camp fire. In children's Sunday School, we teach the great stories of the Bible. Those stories teach us about God, about ourselves, about faith, and about life.

The Bible is far more than a collection of stories. It also tells one grand story. In a very real sense, the entire Bible tells us the Jesus Story. Even though you will not find the name *Jesus* mentioned in the pages of the OT, He is undeniably there. The characters and events of the OT point forward to Him again and again. While the Bible tells us the Jesus story, it also makes clear that we have a part to play in the story, and it invites us to enter into that story.

We often refer to people's lives as a story. Depending on the person, it may be a rags-to-riches story, or a hard luck story, or a Cinderella story, or a success story.

Turn with me to Philippians 2:5-11. Here, we have an invitation to enter into the Jesus story. There is almost universal agreement among Bible scholars that vv. 6-11 originally existed as an early, Christian hymn. Paul, apparently, appropriated that hymn in his letter. It beautifully portrays what Jesus did and then what God did in response to what Jesus did. All the verbs of vv. 6-8 tell us what Jesus did. All the verbs of v. 9 tell us what God did. Then, in vv. 10-11, we get a glimpse of what we should do now or what everyone will do then.

Jesus' life beautifully illustrated what He taught. On four separate occasion, twice in Matthew and twice in Luke, all being different instances, Jesus said, "Whoever humbles Himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be humbled." Jesus was living proof of the truth He preached. Jesus humbled Himself, and God exalted Him.

Let's look at the first part.

In This Story, Jesus Humbly Obeys God

In the verses preceding today's passage, Paul was calling upon the believers to be other-oriented. Using today's language, Paul was saying, "It's not all about you." He

wants those within the church to love and care for one another. He wants there to be unity in the church. Unity and selfishness cannot co-exist. Therefore, he instructs them to have the mind or the attitude that Jesus displayed. That is v. 5.

Beginning in v. 6, Paul begins to unveil the mind and attitude of Jesus by telling us what Jesus did. The version from which I am reading, and many others use the phrase “form of God.” While that is an accurate translation, it runs the risk of losing something in the translation. We usually associate the word *form* with something that is physical. This verse is not saying that Jesus looks like God because God is Spirit. God does not possess a physical body.

I think the way the NIV renders the verse is more helpful. It reads, “being in the very nature God.” The verse is not teaching that Jesus looks like God but rather that Jesus is God. Jesus is not God-like. Jesus is fully God. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Just like with God, there was never a time when Jesus was not. There was a time and a place when Jesus was born into this world and took upon Himself a human body, but Jesus has always existed. He was with God before the creation of the world. He is not a created Being. He is God.

Before telling us what Jesus did in v. 7, Paul tells us in the latter part of v. 6 what Jesus did not do. He did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. The word *grasp* means “to selfishly cling to.” In other words, Jesus did not demand His rights. He did not say, “I’m going to hold on to all of my rights, privileges, and abilities as God.”

So, what did He do? He *emptied* Himself. That does not mean, however, that He ceased to be God.

In the morning, before I head out the door, I fill my pockets. I put my wallet in my back, left hip pocket, my phone in my right, hip pocket, a handkerchief in my left, front pocket, and my keys in my right, front pocket. If I am wearing a jacket, I will put a blue pen in my inside, left pocket. When I come home, out comes my keys. Later, when I get ready for bed, I empty the rest of the contents of my pockets and place them on top of my dresser. When I empty my pockets, all of those things do not cease to be mine, but they are no longer readily accessible if I step outside the house.

Before Jesus stepped outside of heaven and came to earth, He did not fill His pockets. He emptied them. We talk about God being omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. When He took upon Himself a human body, Jesus was no longer omnipotent. On His way to the cross, Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross beam. Someone had to carry the cross for Him. He had been weakened by a severe flogging and the subsequent loss of blood. At that point, He was not omnipotent.

On this earth, Jesus was not omnipresent. He could only be where His body was. The Creator of time and space was now confined by time and space.

A debate could be had as to whether or not Jesus was still omniscient. He certainly knew far more than others but He admitted that He did not know all things because He said He did not know the time His return would be. That was left up entirely to the Father.

In heaven, Jesus was served by angels. When Jesus came to this earth, His country in

which He lived was occupied by the army of a foreign power. He could not come and go and do as He wished. When He was born, Jesus had to be fed, and burped, and changed, and dressed, and taught, and He had to obey His earthly parents.

Jesus worked for a living as a carpenter. He had to pay taxes and obey the laws of the land. Instead of enjoying the glories of heaven, living in that holy environment, and being served by angelic beings, Jesus came to live for 33 years in this grief-stricken world, living among a sinful people, and having to battle demonic beings. Jesus humbled Himself. He did the Father's will. Instead of selfishly holding on to all of His God-qualities, He took upon Himself the responsibilities and duties of a servant.

Why did Jesus, the unlimited God, willingly limit Himself by taking on a human body? This was God's plan, and Jesus humbly obeyed God's plan. In the last book of the Bible, we are told about something that, before the world was even made, it was determined that Jesus would do. The end of Revelation 13:8, in the NLT reads, "the Lamb who was killed before the world was made." That word Lamb is mentioned 30 times in Revelation, and every time it refers to Jesus.

Jesus had a date with destiny, and in order for Him to die, He had to be born. In being born, Jesus identified with those for whom He died. Jesus knew what it was to be hungry. Jesus knew what it was to be thirsty. Jesus knew what it was to be bone-tired. Jesus knew what it was to be disappointed. Jesus knew what it was to be tempted. Jesus knew what it was to be lied about and ridiculed and mistreated. The only thing that from personal experience Jesus did not know about was to be guilty of sin because Jesus was a spotless Lamb.

Before God created man, He knew that man would sin and need a Savior. Jesus knew God's plan, and He knew what would be required of Him, and Jesus said, "I'll do it." And, praise God, Jesus did it!

Not only did Jesus humbly obey God in His birth, He also humbly obey God in His death. Look at v. 8. Jesus, however, didn't just die any death. He didn't die in His sleep. He didn't die from a sudden heart attack. Since Jesus wasn't a Roman citizen like Paul was, He was not given a quick execution. He hung upon a cross for six pain-filled, excruciating hours. I chose the word *excruciating* because that word has the same root as the word crucifixion. There was no more painful means of execution than crucifixion.

Jesus did not die a hero's death in battle. He died a shameful death as a felon, an enemy of the state. That death, as ignominious as it was, accomplished something grand.

One of my preaching heroes is Joel Gregory. In a sermon on John 19:30 he asked:

What do you suppose the most significant word in human history might be? Was a word of wisdom uttered by a philosopher, Aristotle or Socrates? Was it spoken by a poet who—in perfect rhyme and meter—arrived at just the right word? Was it spoken by a statesman, Churchill or Roosevelt? Or was it this word, which Jesus cried out from the Cross that has baffled and inspired for the ages: "It is finished"?

Jesus cried out from the cross seven times between 9 AM and 3 PM. The cry, "It is finished," was Jesus' sixth cry. In the Greek language it is just one word. It is the Greek

word *tetelestai*. I don't want to lose you here. If you will stay with me, you are going to hear some wonderful truths.

This one Greek word which Jesus spoke is a third person, singular, perfect, passive, indicative verb. What in the world does that mean? I'll tell you. Stay with me. Jesus did not say, "I am finished." That would be first person. He did not say, "You are finished." That would be second person. He said, "It is finished." That is third person, singular.

It is perfect tense telling us that something of significance has happened that will have abiding results. Jesus didn't complete a household chore like setting the trash out by the curb. Something monumental has just been accomplished, the consequences of which will remain forever.

The verb is passive. Jesus didn't say, "I finished it." A great force has used Jesus to bring about a great work. God has used Jesus to accomplish His grand purposes.

Finally, it is in the indicative. Jesus didn't say, "This could be finished, this should be finished." Jesus spoke with full certitude, "It is and always will be finished."

Question: What was finished? Answer: Payment for sin.

In the 18th century, in the dry sands of Egypt, a trove of documents was found written upon papyrus. These were business papers, real estate documents, papers from the marketplace. They dated back to the 1st century AD. They were written in the same kind of Greek used by the NT writers—Koine Greek. They found this word *tetelestai* on documents indicating that full payment had been made, that the transaction had been completed. The word was used to sign receipts—paid in full, the debt has been erased.

As Jesus' time on the cross was coming to an end, just before He said, "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit," and just before He died, Jesus looked heavenward and said to His Father, "Dad, the work You gave Me to do is completed. The assignment is finished. The sin debt of My people has been paid in full. Here's the receipt. I've signed it with My blood."

Has Jesus' payment been applied for your sin debt? Or have you ignored it and are trying to erase it on your own. Only Jesus' blood can pay the debt. His blood is the only currency God will accept.

In the Jesus story before us, Jesus humbly obeys God. Then, dear friends, a great reversal occurs. Now, God acts.

In This Story, God Highly Exalts Jesus

Look again at v. 9. According to this verse, God exalted Jesus in two ways. God puts Jesus in the highest place, and God gives Jesus the greatest name.

Consider first the highest place. Do you remember the temptations Jesus faced shortly before He began His public ministry? Matthew tells us, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). Satan tempted Jesus, and Jesus stood firm. Satan tried again, and Jesus resisted him. According to Matthew, Satan tried a third time. "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9). And Jesus said, "No

deal.” Satan was trying to get Jesus to take a short cut. He was saying, “Jesus, You don’t have to go through all that suffering and death stuff. If you want it all, I can give it all to you, quick and easy.”

When dealing with Satan, you need to remember one important thing—Satan is liar. You can’t trust. Never make a deal with the devil. You will always come out on the losing side. Jesus knew that. He refused to bow to the devil. He did God’s will. He paid a great price, but God honored Jesus, and now, every knee will bow to Him.

Do it the right way. Do it God’s way.

Because Jesus did it God’s way, He was able to say at the end of Matthew’s gospel, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” Jesus occupied the throne over it all. There is no throne higher than His throne.

And there is no name greater than His name. To which name is Paul referring? We need to be careful here. You might say, *Jesus* is the greatest name. I think that would be a misreading of the text. Look at the end of v. 9 and the beginning of v. 10. You might argue, “Well there it is right there. The name of Jesus.”

I would say, look more closely. He doesn’t write, “the name, Jesus,” but “the name of Jesus,” in other words, “the name which Jesus was given.” What name did God give Jesus? We are given the answer in v. 11. We will all confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” *Lord* is the name Jesus was given. Lord is the greatest name.

When the Emperor’s of Rome began to be seen as divine, they took for themselves the name Kyrios. That is the Greek word for Lord. The Emperor was known as Caesar. The Greek word for Caesar was Kaiser. The people were expected to say, “Kyrios Kaiser,” which means, “Caesar is Lord.” The Christians refused. Instead, they said, “Kyrios Iasous,” “Jesus is Lord.” He has the name above every other name. He alone is Lord. He is the King.

Some years ago, a pastor by the name of S.M. Lockridge preached a sermon entitled, “That’s My King.” I want to read to you what that wonderful preacher said because he said it so wonderfully, and as best as I can, I want to read his words in the voice he used.

My King was born King.

The Bible says He’s a Seven Way King.

He’s the King of the Jews.

He’s the King of Israel.

He’s the King of righteousness.

He’s the King of the ages.

He’s the King of Heaven.

He’s the King of glory.

He’s the King of kings,

and He is the Lord of lords.

Now, that’s my King. Well, I wonder if you know Him.

Do you know my King?

David said the Heavens declare the glory of God,

and the firmament showeth His handiwork.

My King is the only one whom there are no means of measure to define His limitless love.

No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of His shoreless supplies.

No barriers can hinder Him from pouring out His blessing.

Well, well,

He's enduringly strong.

He's entirely sincere.

He's eternally steadfast.

He's immortally graceful.

He's imperially powerful.

He's impartially merciful.

That's my King.

He's God's Son.

He's the sinner's savior.

He's the centerpiece of civilization.

He stands alone in Himself.

He's august.

He's unique.

He's unparalleled.

He's unprecedented.

He's supreme.

He's pre-eminent.

Well, He's the loftiest idea in literature.

He's the highest personality in philosophy.

He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology.

He's the cardinal necessity of spiritual religion.

That's my King.

He's the miracle of the age.

He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him.

Well, He's the only one able to supply all of our needs simultaneously.

He supplies strength for the weak.

He's available for the tempted and the tried.

He sympathizes, and He saves.

He's strong God, and He guides.

He heals the sick.

He cleanses the lepers.

He forgives sinners.

He discharges debtors.

He delivers the captives.

He defends the feeble.
He blesses the young.
He serves the unfortunate.
He regards the aged.
He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek.
Do you know Him?

Well, my King is a King of knowledge.
He's the wellspring of wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance.
He's the pathway of peace.
He's the roadway of righteousness.
He's the highway of holiness.
He's the gateway of glory.
He's the Master of the mighty.
He's the Captain of the conquerors.
He's the Head of the heroes.
He's the Leader of the legislators.
He's the Overseer of the overcomers.
He's the Governor of governors.
He's the Prince of princes.
He's the King of kings, and He's the Lord of lords.

That's my King. Yeah.
That's my King.

His office is manifold.
His promise is sure.
His light is matchless.
His goodness is limitless.
His mercy is everlasting.
His love never changes.
His word is enough.
His grace is sufficient.
His reign is righteous.
His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Well. I wish I could describe Him to you,
but He's indescribable.
He's indescribable. Yeah!

He's incomprehensible.
He's invincible.
He's irresistible.

I'm trying to tell you,

the heavens cannot contain Him,
let alone a man explain Him.
You can't get Him out of your mind.
You can't get Him off of your hand.
You can't outlive Him, and you can't live without Him.

Well, Pharisees couldn't stand Him,
but they found out they couldn't stop Him.
Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him.
The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.
Herod couldn't kill Him.
Death couldn't handle Him, and the grave couldn't hold Him.

That's my King. Yeah!

He always has been, and He always will be.
I'm talking about He had no predecessor,
and He'll have no successor.
There was nobody before Him,
and there'll be nobody after Him.
You can't impeach Him,
and He's not gonna resign.
That's my King! That's my King!

(So said, S.M. Lockridge)

My question to you is, "Is He your King?"

You have a choice to make. Choice #1: You can choose to bow before Him and confess Him as your Lord, now, while you still can. Or, the only option left is Choice #2: Be made to bow before Him and confess as Lord, then. If you wait until then, you will have forfeited your chance to be saved. Don't wait, trust Him now, and find your place in His story.