

Go, Grasp, Glory

Philippians 2:9-10

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⁹ *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*
¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*¹

Lesson Objective: To look at how Jesus set the ultimate example of going to the mission field, grasping the contexts in which he was operating, and establishing His glory above anything humans have an agenda to accomplish.

Class warm up

Follow our example:

Jesus is the ultimate example of one who contextualized a message and demonstrated what is expected of a missionary in the world around us. Philippians 2 is known as a chapter where we see how Jesus humbled himself to walk on earth. He used cultural context to get the message across to crowds and knew His physical demise would bring heavenly glory. The question for Reaching Texas 2018 is, “are you willing to follow Christ’s example as a missionary to your context?”

In everyday life, how are people in your small group approaching people and their need to hear the Gospel?

Have people in this small group ever felt held back from sharing the Gospel because they may not think a person is ready to hear or their lifestyle is not worth the time to share the Gospel?

- Have they ever sensed the Holy Spirit impressing on them to share the Gospel with someone? How did they handle the situation?

If the members of this small group are going to make an impact for the Kingdom of God with the Gospel, we must use Jesus’ example and make sure we are making grace available for all.

Our key passage begins with, “Therefore,” so we need to see what Paul is talking about before getting to the “therefore,” so let us read Philippians 2:5-11.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Php 2:9–10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Go

⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ²

We must “Go” to the all people, not just our friends. Before we read, please do the following drill:

Have class members list 3 people who need to hear the Gospel in the following areas of their lives:

- Work
- Dwelling place (neighbors, roommates, family, etc.)
- Regular amusement locations (restaurants you frequent, sports you may play, communal pool, other communal locations you participate in regularly)

The people named in each of these locations are the direct mission field to “Go to” or self-sacrifice your earthly status, for a chance to share the Gospel of Grace provided by Jesus, as Paul demonstrated in this key passage.

If people do not have names they can list here, then they need to be challenged to get outside their Christian circles. How are we influencing the culture around us if we do not have people who are lost in our circles? A study by Barna (<https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>) has cited relationships matter in today’s culture. If small group participants are going to see people come to know Christ as Savior for Reach Texas 2018, they need contact with unchurched people. A class may need to encourage each other as to how to get connected to a group of people outside their local church context.

For example:

- Sitting on the HOA board or apartment board
- Getting involved in city sports, coaching, concession, umpiring/referring, etc.
- Civic clubs: Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, etc.
- Gym membership or YMCA
- City wide activities – clean the park, adopt a street, etc.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Php 2:5–7). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Grasp

⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*³

Contextualization—Missionary strategy by which the Gospel message is presented in terms that can be readily understood by the people to whom it is addressed.⁴

How are the participants in the group grasping their local mission field and contextualizing the Gospel for their community?

Survey the group:

How many of them grew up in the church?

Who has had a relationship with Christ for more than...

3 yrs

5 yrs

10 yrs

15 yrs

20+ yrs

Has your relationship with Christ become complacent or common place?

Have people in the group not shared the Gospel with someone because of that person's lifestyle?

- For example, in Philip Yancy's, "What's So Amazing About Grace?", 1997, p. 168, he has a quote from a homosexual neighbor.
 - o "As a gay man, I've found it easier for me to get sex on the streets than to get a hug in church."
- Have you kept God's grace to yourself or are you demonstrating it to others?

In this passage, we see how Jesus "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death."

- As a follower of Christ, you have been given the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20)
- Throughout Scripture, one can observe Jesus talking to tax collectors, Samaritan woman, used a coin to drive the point home of who gets taxes, allowed a hemorrhaging woman to touch him, ministered to children, washed the feet of His betrayer (Judas), and other cultural extremes so that Jesus could communicate the hope of God.
 - o Read Luke 15:1-2 – What do people observe in this passage? (Hopefully, the group will see how Jesus was invited to eat with sinners & tax collectors, while

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Php 2:8–9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁴ Gangel, K. O. (1998). [*Acts*](#) (Vol. 5, p. 476). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

the religious were on the outside. This passage leads right into 3 key parables about God's grace: Lost Coin, Lost Sheep, and Prodigal Son.

How can people in the group demonstrate the desire for people around them to know Christ?

When was the last time people in the group corporately prayed for people by name to come to know Christ as Savior?

Glory

¹⁰ so 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. ⁵

Your glory vs. Jesus Glory

What causes more tension in people's lives, what people think of them personally, or how they are demonstrating Christ's Glory?

- This does not mean standing up in work and sharing the Gospel in an arrogant way.
- Instead people of God living a life that is worshipful.
 - o Are they the same person in word and deed on the church campus as off the campus?
 - o How does your social media activity communicate Christ's name is greater than your selfie?
 - o This could mean being the most ethical person at work.
 - o Does it mean people who are not Christians see something different about a person's life so that they find it safe to have spiritual conversations about life.
 - o A life of worship looks like a good neighbor even if other neighbors' actions do not reciprocate in a positive way.

Maybe a reason why people have not shared the Gospel in the group is because they do not have the tools. Here are some helpful tools to use:

- 1 Cross app (<http://sbtexas.com/evangelism/1cross-Gospel-presentation/>)
- One Verse (<https://youtu.be/LAzjWByhBdQ>) (<https://www.navigators.org/resource/one-verse-evangelism/>)
- 3 circles (<http://lifeonmissionbook.com/conversation-guide>)
- One Conversation (<https://www.oneconversation.org/>)

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Php 2:10–11). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Set goals for your class:

- Take the 3 names each person listed from the “Go” section, and spend time over the next 4 weeks to pray for those people and for the Holy Spirit to guide each person to share the Gospel this month with at least 2 of the 3.
- Practice sharing the Gospel in small group each Sunday. Show YouTube videos of the Gospel presentation; give some time in the class to practice sharing with each other.
- If someone from the group shares the Gospel this week, have them give testimony and possibly post the story on social media with the hashtag #reachTX2018.
 - o Take time each Sunday to ask the group if anyone had a chance to share the Gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone not saved already. Celebrate with them and hear the story behind the testimony.

Keep in mind the following from James Vernon McGee, “Bowing down does not imply salvation.” This passage is demonstrating that no matter what man wants to think of himself, we are all equal by bowing down at the name of Jesus in the end. The question that may haunt us, is will we bow down out of celebration because we have a relationship with Christ, or bow down out of fear because we will be cast out from the presence of God.

Every follower of Christ is called to share the Gospel for the Glory of Christ, and not in fear of keeping one’s reputation in good standing with the world. How will this small group expand the Kingdom of God this year with the power of the Holy Spirit?

Notes:

Commentary

Go Philippians 2:5-7

The Introduction to the Hymn (2:5)

2:5 Paul introduced the hymn to Christ by looking both backward and forward. Looking back, he picked up the theme of the proper attitude which he commended in 2:2 (with the word “like-minded”) and 2:3 (with the word “considered,” also found in 2:6). Looking ahead, Paul anticipated the epitome of the proper mind, Jesus.

Two primary questions arise in 2:5. What is the meaning of “your attitude should be the same as,” and what is the sense of “Christ Jesus”? The NIV handles these problems by presenting a highly dynamic, almost paraphrased translation. The KJV says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” The differences come from the Greek text chosen as well as the translator’s preference. The first question relates to whether the verb translated “your attitude should be” (*phroneite*) is active or passive. The KJV takes the passive, “let this mind be.” Most Greek texts have the active form, and that is the better reading. It should be translated, “You think this in you.” The second question concerns “in Christ Jesus,” which occurs at the end of the verse. As the text stands, another verb is needed to make a complete statement, and some translators add “was.” The sense then is “have this mind in you which *was* in Christ Jesus.” Others have repeated the main verb of the first part of the sentence for a translation like: “You think this in you which you think in Christ Jesus.” That means that the Philippians were exhorted to think properly as Christians, as those “in Christ Jesus.” The translation has much to commend it.¹³⁸ Immediately, however, Paul appealed to the attitude of Christ, and the most natural reading is to understand Paul to say, “Think this in you which Christ thought in him.”

The Hymn to Christ (2:6–11)

Paul commended Jesus’ disposition by appealing to his attitude (v. 6) and his actions (vv. 7–8). The order is both logical and chronological. One led to the other. Paul employed the same order in vv. 1–4, where he addressed the attitude (v. 2) first, then actions toward each other (vv. 3–4). Perhaps Paul’s exhortation was based on the hymn which he anticipated. In this text Jesus’ attitude (presented negatively to make a positive point) led to his redemptive actions.

2:6 The main verbs are the key to the structure, and Jesus’ attitude is presented in the first. Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” Precise knowledge of why that was so remarkable comes from the phrases which modify and explain the significance of his attitude.

Two parallel statements show the exemplary nature of Jesus’ thoughts. The first is “being in very nature God,” which is compared to the second, “equality with God.” The former is normally translated by the English word “form,” which is true to the literal meaning of the Greek *morphē*. Commentators have debated hotly the meaning of the word “form.” Basically, the word means “form, outward appearance, shape”;¹⁴⁰ but since it occurs only in 2:6 and 2:7 in the New Testament, the context must determine its precise meaning. Clearly, the “form of God” and the “form of a servant” must mean the same thing. Some take that to mean that the visible appearance of God is not a factor because he is invisible, and therefore the text calls for a nuance of the word. This meaning should not be dismissed too quickly, however. The hymn called the readers to consider the preexistent state of Jesus, when he was in the form of God. Physical eyes cannot see spiritual realities, only spiritual eyes can. Given the context, it would not be uncommon to use the term to state that he actually “appeared as God” to those who could see

him. Nothing in the context requires that human eyes see the form. Similarly, the “very nature of a servant” does not require that human eyes be able to see that form, although with spiritually enlightened eyes one sees it. The question is whether he had that form. Surely the actions described of him here are appropriate to the servant role, and they appear in his death on the cross. The word “form” means an outward appearance consistent with what is true. The form perfectly expresses the inner reality.

The description “very nature of God” parallels “equality with God.” “Equality with God” is, therefore, another explanation of Jesus’ nature. The form of the expression stresses the manner of his existence since the word “equal” is actually an adverb showing how he existed. In the Greek text, the phrase is introduced with an article so that it should read “the equality with God,” referring back to something already identified as equality. Thus “form of God” and “equality with God” refer to the same state of existence,¹⁴⁴ and the NIV correctly translates “in the form of God” as “in very nature God.”

Two other matters relate to Jesus’ preexistent state. The first is the meaning and force of the participle “being.” The word basically meant “to exist originally” but later was used as an intensive form which meant “really exist.” The result is that Jesus “really existed” in that form. The force of the participle (“being”) is debated as well. Most interpreters take it with a concessive force (“although being”), and that stresses the dramatic nature of Christ’s humility.¹⁴⁶

The second matter is the meaning of “something to be grasped.” Some understand the words to mean “something to hold on to,” while others take them to mean “something to rob.” Often Jesus is contrasted with Adam, who selfishly attempted to rob God of what he had no right to possess. He wanted to be “like God.” This contrast may have been in Paul’s mind, but any suggestion that requires the sense of aspiration to “equality with God,” as though it were not Jesus’, cannot fit the passage.¹⁴⁸ With this understanding, Christ would have refused to do what Adam did. He refused to grab what was not his. Two factors speak against that understanding. First, the text more naturally reads “not to be clutched.” Since he already possessed “equality with God,” Jesus had nothing to grasp. He was able to release the appearance of deity. Second, when the word “grasped/clutched” is studied with words like “consider” (*hēgeomai*, 2:3, 6) the “idiomatic expression refers to something already present and at one’s disposal.” The passage may mean, therefore, that Christ did not think of his equality as “something to use for his own advantage.”¹⁵⁰

2:7 The hymn moves from attitude to actions. Two verbs describe successive actions as Jesus gave himself for humanity: “He made himself nothing” and “he humbled himself.” Each has a phrase modifying it. The first of Jesus’ choices was to empty himself. The NIV translation “made himself nothing” captures the spirit of the passage but overlooks many theological discussions of the past. Historically, interpreters have wondered of what did Jesus empty himself? The question shows that a theological interest predominates in the passage. Most modern interpreters, however, point out that the hymn does not speak to that point. The contrasts between “Lord” (v. 11) and “servant,” (v. 7) and “very nature of God” (v. 6) and “human likeness” (v. 7) express the emptying. Thus the emptying is that God became human, Lord became servant, and obedience took him to death. The verb “emptied” (NASB) does not require a knowledge of what was emptied (Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15). Often it is translated simply “to render void, of no effect.” This passage affirms simply that Christ left his position, rank, and privilege. They were “of no effect.”¹⁵²

Two ideas modify the verb “made himself nothing.” They are: taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. These statements explain both how this took place

and what it means. Paradoxically, being “made nothing” means adding humanity to deity rather than subtracting deity from his person. The language has a vagueness to it; that vagueness allows for theology which cannot be expressed easily, a theology of the relationships between the divine and human in Christ.

The relationship between these ideas reveals further the movement to death. Some interpreters take the two ideas to be simultaneous, so that being a servant and becoming human explain each other and refer to the same action. Others see a progression: first servanthood, then humanity. Certainly the first, the “very nature of a servant,” speaks to an attitude which produced the action of assuming humanity. It logically precedes.

Because of the close relationship between these modifying ideas, their content should be seen in parallel, rather than with fine distinctions of meaning. The “very nature of a servant” means that Jesus’ outer actions (appearances) conformed to the inner reality. Jesus’ servanthood issued in humanity and, later, obedience to death. Some assume that his servanthood was his humanity. That brings questions of how humanity is servant and to what is its slavery. These questions, however, go beyond the text, and they cannot be answered from the passage. This text says simply that he was genuinely a servant. It does not explain what that means, other than the giving of his life in death.¹⁵⁴

The description “human likeness” really stresses Jesus’ humanity. While on the surface it may seem to say that Jesus was not really man, that conclusion finds almost no support. In fact, likeness “does not suggest any degree of unreality in Christ’s humanity; the word is almost a synonym for ‘form’ (*morphē*) and ‘image’ (*eikōn*); but it leaves room for the thought that the human likeness is not the whole story.” It must be seen in light of the next statement, that he was found “in appearance as a man” (v. 8). The change from the plural (“human likeness”) to the singular (“appearance as a man”) may reinforce that conclusion. Finally, the verb “being made” (v. 7) contrasts with “being” (2:6). He existed originally in the form of God; but at a specific point, he became human.

With these words, the text praises the attitude of Jesus. The hymn was to be used in worship, and as such, it was doxological. The total impact was to move the church to appreciate and imitate Jesus’ actions. Each word contributes to the meaning. Certainly interpreters need not read more into the text than was intended, but overtones of Christology exist which cannot be dismissed. First, it affirms Jesus’ preexistence. Before he came to earth, he existed fully as God, in essence and appearance. Second, he became human. Like the movement from riches to poverty in 2 Cor 8:9, this text follows the movement from the exercise of lordship to the obedience of the servant. The hymn teaches that Jesus added servanthood to lordship as he added humanity to deity. In so doing, he elevated humanity beyond what it had known before, as Heb 2:6–8 affirms (quoting a fulfillment of Ps 8:5–6, LXX). Paul easily affirmed both the deity and humanity of Jesus by using (and not correcting) this hymn. The words convey significant theological meaning that adds reality to the impact of the worship experience. Recalling this servanthood also exhorted the believers to unity.

Grasp Philippians 2:8-9

2:8 Having entered the world of humanity, Jesus “humbled himself” (2:8). This describes a second stage in Jesus’ humility. Like the first statement, two ideas modify this one, explaining the extent of Jesus’ actions. First, when he was found in fashion like a man, he chose humility. This statement reinforces the previous section of the hymn, but it also introduces a new phase of

Jesus' action. At this point, people can identify with him. Second, he became obedient to death. The text does not suggest to whom Jesus was obedient, though most obviously God willed such an action. As a true servant, Jesus chose to obey even when it cost his life, and that further in a most ignoble way. The impact of crucifixion on the Philippians would be great. No Roman could be subjected to such a death, and the Jews took it as a sign that the victim was cursed (Gal 3:13). Perhaps it made a point to Paul's opponents as well, whom he described as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil 3:18). The cross, so dear to Paul and other devout Christians, was an embarrassment to many. That, in itself, demonstrates the extent to which Jesus went.

2:9 Again the passage changes both tone and structure. The hymnic character continues, but God becomes the subject, rather than Christ, and the purpose of God's actions becomes evident. God exalted Jesus. Two statements reveal the nature of God's actions. First, he "exalted him to the highest place"; second, he "gave him the name that is above every name." The two relate to each other so that together they express God's action.

Jesus' exaltation is stated graphically. The word translated "exalted to the highest place" actually means *superexalted*. Some scholars have taken the word in a comparative sense, that God exalted him more than before. Thus they seek a new position for Jesus after the ascension.¹⁵⁸ Others, however, point out that this is a superlative degree. He was exalted "to the highest," a contrast which compares the lowliness of the "death of the cross" (v. 8) with the exaltation of restored glory. Finally, many interpret this in the context of the human Jesus. The hymn describes the exaltation of humanity in Christ.

In determining a solution, several matters must be kept in mind. First, the action of "superexaltation" occurred as a consequence of Jesus' voluntary humility. It clearly came because of his servantlike attitude and actions. Second, these actions began in eternity past. The sequence of thought is that his attitude was such that he was able to add humanity. A position that rewards Jesus as man, therefore, seems to enter the drama in the second act. Surely God's blessings took into account the attitude which prevailed in Jesus' preexistent state. That is the primary point of the passage. Third, "superexaltation" should be taken seriously. It was not something that happened to the earthly Jesus only; it began in eternity past. Fourth, it has overtones of a change of position, even though exaltation lies at the heart of its usage.¹⁶² Fifth, the exaltation involved granting to Jesus the title "Lord" (v. 11). This places the focus on function as well as being. The "superexaltation," therefore, is as much a functional matter as an ontological one. These scholars argue for an interpretation that elevates Jesus *in position* more than before, while recognizing that he could be no more than God before or after.

The second portion of the exaltation is that God "gave him the name that is above every name." Though the introduction to this portion of the hymn suggests that God's blessings were the outcome of Jesus' humility, this verb implies a gratuitous giving of honor. Jesus was not "paid" for his servanthood; nevertheless, as a consequence, God chose freely to grant him a high name. Most agree the "name that is above every name" is the title "Lord." Further, most agree that the title refers to Jesus' character, as well as to his function. This corresponds to Peter's preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:36) and to the view of the early church generally. The new factor is that, by virtue of Jesus' humility, he became the object of adoration in the Godhead, as well as the administrator of God's affairs. The worship accorded him in 2:10–11 supports this fact. Other passages speak to his function of Lord as well (1 Cor 15:24–28; Eph 1:20–23). Now, since the ascension, all that God is comes to us through Jesus, and all who come to God do so through Jesus.

Glory Philippians 2:10-11

2:10–11 The hymn explains the goal or purpose of God’s exalting Jesus. Quoting the LXX of Isa 45:23, with its own additions, two parallel ideas express Jesus as the object of worship. They are: every knee should bow and every tongue should confess. Employing typical imagery of the part for the whole, the knee and the tongue stand for worship and confession that Jesus is Lord.

Ultimately, every creature in the universe will acknowledge who Jesus is. Two concerns must be discussed: the meaning of “at the name of Jesus” and the description of which persons acknowledge him. The phrase “at the name of Jesus” may mean that he is the object of worship, that he is the medium of worship,¹⁶⁵ or that he provides the occasion and focus of worship. The context clearly reveals that Jesus is to be the object of worship, as the name “Lord” and his exalted position indicate. That rules out Jesus as a medium of worship, but more may be required by this expression. In fact, more is intended. Wherever Jesus’ name (and character) has authority, he will be worshiped. Since he is authoritative everywhere, as the next phrase indicates, he will be worshiped everywhere. The emphasis of this text, however, is not directly on the worship of Jesus. The language is that of triumph. The bending of the knee was a posture of submission, as was confessing “Jesus Christ is Lord.” The hymn, therefore, speaks to Jesus as the conqueror of all and should be seen as parallel to such texts as 1 Cor 15:24–28. Thus the hymn points out that everyone will acknowledge the position of Jesus in the universe.

The second concern of this first purpose clause is the persons who submit to Jesus’ lordship. The text states, “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” The meaning of the text is that it is *the knees* of beings located in these places. Paul could and did use personification to speak of the relation of inanimate objects to Christ (Rom 8:19–22), but this context is confined to persons. Jesus’ lordship encompasses spiritual beings (those of “heaven”—good or evil),¹⁶⁹ living human beings (those of “earth”), and dead persons as well (“under the earth”). Thus the hymn includes every conceivable habitation of personal beings.

The second purpose statement is that “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” In a parallelism typical of poetry, both the universal nature of Jesus’ lordship and the acknowledgment of it are reemphasized. “Every tongue” includes the same beings as “every knee” which bows. The confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” encapsulates this aspect of the Christian faith and may well have been the earliest Christian confession.

Honoring Jesus in this way fulfills God’s plan. He elevated Jesus to the position of lordship (v. 9), and the confession is “to the glory of God the Father.” There is perfect unity in the Godhead. The actions of Jesus in his exaltation bring glory to the Father. Thus the Father honors the Son, and the Son honors the Father. In this dynamic, both display selflessness, and both receive honor.

This is an eschatological picture. The hymn brings the future into view by describing the culmination of history, when all persons will acknowledge Jesus’ lordship. No evidence states that such acknowledgment will bring salvation, however. That must be cared for in the present, before Jesus conquers his enemies. The church bears witness to Jesus’ lordship by confessing to the world “Jesus Christ is Lord” and offering salvation to those who accept that confession and make it the central part of their lives (Rom 10:9–10). Paul recognized, therefore, that some people will voluntarily accept the reality that Jesus is Lord and participate in his reign of glory. Others will deny that lordship and, in the end, be conquered by the Lord himself. For them, it will be too late to participate in the glory, and they will be destined to the punishment appropriate for those who resist the Lord.

In using this hymn, Paul reminded the Philippians of the greatest example of servanthood. The first section, on selflessness, applied directly to them. They were to be like Christ, the chief servant. Christ's attitude was to become theirs. They were to focus on giving rather than receiving. If God chose to exalt them, they would be truly exalted, but there were no guarantees of what that meant. True servanthood can never be perceived as simply an alternate route to the top, to exaltation.

Christ acted selflessly to accomplish the will of God. He even died to provide salvation as a part of the divine plan. God chose to honor him, determining that Christ would be the focus of the Godhead in its interactions with creation. Because of Jesus' actions, the way to honor God is to honor Christ. Even so, the glory Christ receives is a glory given to the Father. Again, a shared servant-hood works to the mutual benefit of all involved. The church had to learn this lesson. It would learn this lesson by focusing on Christ himself. Appropriately Paul employed a hymn to teach the lesson. Hymns were used in worship, and it was through worship that these attitudes would make their way from the mind to the heart and from attitudes to appropriate actions.⁶

⁶ Melick, R. R. (1991). *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 32, pp. 100–109). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.