

Jesus' Present Ministry
The Name above Every Name
Philippians 2:9-11

I'd like to begin with a parable written by Soren Kierkegaard:

"Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden.

How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his very kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist – no one dared resist him. But would she love him?

She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind. Would she be happy at his side? How could he know?

If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover. . . He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross over the gulf between them.

The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to *descend*. He clothed himself as a beggar and approached her cottage incognito, with a worn cloak fluttering loosely about him. It was no mere disguise, but a new identity he took on. He renounced the throne to win her hand.

(cited by Philip Yancey in *Disappointment with God*, pp. 103-104)

That's a parable about Jesus' earthly life. When He became a man, His power and glory were veiled because He didn't want people following Him for the wrong reasons. Jesus came in humility and obscurity because He came looking for a bride. Those who believe in Him are collectively called "the bride of Christ." We read about Jesus' humility while on earth in Philippians 2 (our passage for today).

***Jesus emptied Himself and humbled Himself.* (Philippians 2:5-8)**

Paul described Jesus' earthly life in Philippians 2. After urging the believers in Philippi to be humble toward each other, Paul wrote this:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus emptied Himself by becoming one of us. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. That was the focus of our time on Good Friday. But today is Easter! So let's spend the rest of our time considering God's response to Jesus' crucifixion:

God exalted Jesus and gave Him the name which is above every name!

(*Philippians 2:9-11*) After describing what **Jesus** did, Paul tells us what **God** did in response.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

Because Jesus humbled Himself as fully as possible, God exalted Him as fully as possible. God "highly exalted Him." Many Scriptures speak of two stages of exaltation: first, Jesus was raised from the dead, and second, Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. As Murray Harris put it, the resurrection says, "Jesus is alive. . . and He lives forever," and the exaltation says, "Jesus is enthroned. . . and He reigns forever." Here Paul included both Jesus' resurrection and exaltation when he writes that "God highly exalted Him." This is what we've been discussing the past couple of months - Jesus present ministry at the right hand of God.

And God "bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. . ." Whatever this "name" is, it is something given to Him after He was raised from the dead. A couple of other Scriptures (Hebrews 1:4, Revelation 3:12) also speak of Jesus being given a new name after His resurrection. For example, in Revelation 3:12 Jesus says of those who overcome/persevere:

12 . . . I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Jesus says He will write His "new name" on those who persevere and keep their faith. People debate just what "name" Jesus was given. It's important to remember that in the Bible a name isn't merely a label that is slapped on a person; a name is associated with a person's character or reputation. For example, in Exodus 33 the Lord promised Moses, "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you" (33:19). We find the fulfillment in Exodus 34; there we read that "the Lord passed by in front of [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth. . .'" (34:6). When the Lord proclaimed His **name**, He gave an explanation of His **character**, something that is true of Him.

In Philippians 2:9 when Paul says that God "bestowed on [Jesus] a name that is above every name," he is saying that when God highly exalted Jesus He declared something that is true about Jesus, something that was proven through His life, death and resurrection: ***He is greater/higher than every other being in the universe.*** If you

have a name that is above every other name, you are supreme/superior to everyone else.

This wasn't obvious during his time on earth; people could ignore Him, ridicule Him, spit on Him, beat Him, and crucify Him. But God's response was to raise Jesus from the dead and exalted Him above everyone else. This is confirmed in verses 10 and 11.

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When Paul mentions "those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth," he is saying that **every created rational being in every realm** will one day submit to Jesus.

When Paul speaks about "every knee bowing" and "every tongue confessing," he is making a reference to Isaiah 45. Isaiah 45 is a fascinating chapter. That's the chapter in which the God of Israel explains how He is going to use Cyrus, a pagan king, to bring His people back from exile. He even calls Cyrus a "messiah" (45:1) because He "anointed" him for that specific purpose. Why could the God of Israel summons a pagan king to deliver the Jewish nation from exile? Because He, YHWH, as the Creator of heaven and earth (i.e., everything), has authority over everything and everyone. The God of Israel wasn't merely a tribal deity whose power and authority stopped at the borders of geographical Israel. Rather, God is sovereign over all the nations. He deserves and wants the worship of the nations. Therefore, we find this invitation in Isaiah 45:22.

22 "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;
For I am God, and there is no other.

This was a standing offer throughout the Old Testament. Anyone from any nation could turn to the God of Israel and be saved. [In saying "I am God, and there is no other," YHWH isn't saying that no other gods exist; He is saying that none compare to Him (see 47:8 for another example of how this expression is used in Isaiah).]The next verse in Isaiah 45 is the verse Paul referenced in Philippians 2. Remember that this statement coming from the mouth of YHWH, the God of Israel:

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, every tongue will swear allegiance.

Here in Isaiah 45 YHWH says that one day "**to Me** every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance." YHWH made the irrevocable declaration that one day His sovereignty will be acknowledged by His friends and by His enemies alike (in the next verse (45:24), those who have "ragged against" Him will come to Him and will be put to shame). Back to Philippians 2:10-11. . .

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In an astounding statement, Paul employs this very Scripture and claims that “at the name of **Jesus** every knee will bow . . . and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” “Behavior that the Lord says would be directed to Him, Paul says is directed to Jesus” (Orr, p. 15). Confessing that “Jesus is Lord” is equivalent to declaring that Jesus is YHWH. Jesus the Son was distinct from God the Father; but they are one in essence. Jesus was YHWH in human form. Jesus had told His disciples that “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” It’s a false stereotype when people say that the God of the Old Testament is full of wrath and judgment whereas Jesus is full of compassion and love. If you have seen Jesus you’ve seen the Father.

Consider a fascinating account in Acts 9. There we read that Saul (Paul’s Hebrew name) was on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus there. On the way “a light from heaven” blinded him.

4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. . .”

Saul clearly understand that this voice was God’s. Apparently he was confused that God would ask him, “Why are you persecuting Me?” He knew he was persecuting Christians, but he thought he was serving God. The idea that he had unknowingly been persecuting God threw him into confusion; perhaps he didn’t even know who God was. And so Saul asks, “Who are You, Lord?” The answer from the Lord is, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” The God Paul thought he was serving was actually Jesus.

[This wasn’t a Christian innovation; the idea of a “Godhead” (one God who existed in distinct persons) was implicit in the Old Testament. Old Testament scholars have long recognized that the Old Testament itself spoke of “two YHWH’s” - one in heaven and one on earth. There was a figure called “the angel of the Lord” who appeared to various people in the form of a man. Typically those people initially thought that they were simply talking to a man. But eventually they came to realize through His words and actions that they were talking to YHWH who appeared in bodily form. The angel of the Lord was distinct from YHWH but was nevertheless YHWH also.]

Because of this identification of Jesus as Lord/YHWH, Paul wrote that one day every knee would bow to Him (in every realm) and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. This will either be joyful, glad worship or forced submission; but every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible makes these statements? Why are we told that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess? We are given glimpses into the future so that we can live our lives **today** in anticipation of **that day**. In Philipians 2

Paul is making the not-so-subtle point that we shouldn't wait until that day to bow the knee and confess that Jesus is Lord. And we should keep in mind that:

The One given the name above all names is still the One who emptied and humbled Himself. When Jesus was given the name above all names, He didn't cease being humble. He is still the King who humbled Himself to win a bride. He remains the One who said this (Matthew 11):

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The Jewish people listening to Jesus would have expected Him to say, "Go to **God/YHWH** and learn from **Him** and **He** will give you rest." But Jesus said, "Come to **Me** and learn from **Me** and **I** will give you rest." Jesus often said things about Himself that were said about God in the Old Testament. He could do that because He was YHWH in the flesh. Notice that Jesus said we can become His disciple and learn from Him, "for I am gentle and humble in heart."

I don't know what your concept of Jesus. But He isn't harsh or mean or arrogant; He is gentle and humble in heart. He is like His Father who is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). Jesus is humble.

At the same time, as we've seen in Philippians 2, He has been given the name above all names. This means that He has the power and authority of God. He uses that power and authority for His glory in our lives and in our circumstances as we walk with Him. There is beauty and power in living your life in relationship with the One who is both exalted and humble. As the child's mealtime prayer says, "God is great, God is good." He is both great and good.

Rosalind Picard is a professor at MIT. She told her story in the latest issue of Christianity Today magazine. She grew up as a straight-A student. She didn't see any need for God; she actually labeled herself an atheist and thought that "religious people were ignoramuses." In high school she babysat for a couple she thought was really "sharp." One night after paying her for babysitting, they invited her to church; she was stunned that "people this smart actually went to church."

When Sunday morning came around, I told them I had a stomachache. They invited me again the following week, but once more I came down with another phantom stomachache. The more they persisted, the more I struggled to invent convincing excuses. (You try faking an illness to a doctor.)

Eventually they tried a different tack: "Going to church isn't what matters most. What matters is what you believe. Have you read the Bible?" Since she wanted to be an educated person she agreed to read the best-selling book of all time. Following the

doctor's suggestion, she started in the book of Proverbs. She read a chapter a day and found it fascinating; she had to pause while reading and *think!*

Rosalind bought a modern translation of the Bible and began reading through the entire Bible. As she read she had the "strange sense of being spoken to" - which was "disturbing yet oddly attractive." She began wondering whether there might really be a God. Her second time through the Bible again she read more carefully, trying to refute what she found there, hoping to be able to put this "religion phase" behind her. While part of her was "increasingly eager to spend time with the God of the Bible," another part of her wanted to "move on."

In college a friend invited her to church. There the pastor talked about "the difference between believing that there is a God and following God." He also asked the simple question, "Who is Lord of your life?" He talked about the things that can go wrong when "you, a human being, put yourself on that throne." [That's another way of asking whether you believe **your** name is the highest or that there is **Another** (Jesus) who has a name above all names.] Rosalind was intrigued at the possibility that Jesus was willing to be Lord of her life. She decided to take the risk of asking Jesus Christ to be Lord of her life.

After praying, "Jesus Christ, I ask you to be Lord of my life," my world changed dramatically, as if a flat, black-and-white existence suddenly turned full-color and three-dimensional. But I lost nothing of my urge to seek new knowledge. In fact, I felt emboldened to ask even tougher questions about how the world works. I felt joy and freedom—but also a heightened sense of responsibility and challenge.

Many people here today have experienced life and freedom and joy by bowing the knee to Jesus and confessing that He is Lord. The offer that we saw Isaiah 45 still stands: anyone can turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Peter made this statement to the crowds in Jerusalem (Acts 4:12): "there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." If you have never bowed your knee to Jesus and believed on His name, you can do so here this morning.