

Philemon

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 2, it's on page 980.! Being at the top. Getting to the top.

! In some sense we all want to be there, don't we? We all have some longing for significance, some desire to stand out, to be up there.

So in all of us, isn't it, if we have the means, getting to the top. But at Christmas time we see that the way up is down.

The way to the top is at the bottom. Christmas means upside down thinking. We see Jesus going up by going down.

Three things this morning. First of all, Jesus goes down. Jesus goes down. We've all seen it.

[1 : 08] The fall from grace. People at the top of their game losing their position. Losing their respect. Their status.

A name can topple from glory to ruin in a moment, can't it? Does the name Sam Allardyce mean anything to you? If it doesn't, well, you're not into football, I guess.

He's got the record for the shortest ever stint as England football manager. Just two months. But that does make him the only manager with a 100% record of success.

Because he only had one game. Which he won against Slovakia. But in September he stepped down in disgrace. He took the walk of shame.

It was humiliation. And that name now, Sam Allardyce, is an embarrassment. It's a joke. Paul speaks of a name that has taken an even greater fall.

[2 : 15] This name has been shamed. This name has been smeared. And loathed the world over. The name, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has walked down the steps of shame. He has stepped down from his high position. From glory to disgrace.

His name was an embarrassment. And Paul wants us to see how far he fell. He goes from glory, the glory of godness.

In the form of God. Verse 7. To humanness. He is emptied, he says. In the likeness of men.

In the paleness of humanity. He goes from humanness, do you see then? To take the form of a servant. Or a slave. To slavishness.

[3 : 19] And in slavishness, he passes away. To death. Not just any death, Paul says. But death on a cross.

A crucifixion death. To die on a cross. The ultimate symbol of shame. The Jewish law says. Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.

The Romans wouldn't crucify anybody unless they were the most hated of society. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Was humiliated.

A name. Can disgrace anyone who's associated with it, can't it? There are other names that we hear a lot in the news. That will be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

Things have been done in the past. And they've now been exposed. Names that we'd rather not mention in polite conversation.

[4 : 18] The whole abuse scandal is awful, isn't it? It continues. And a name can bring a ruin to a whole family, can't it? The family of one such name, who will remain unmentioned.

With the strength of public opinion, the family had to rip up his grave and throw it in the skip. His name inscribed on it.

His name was written on road signs which have been removed. A plaque on the family home had his name inscribed on it, graffitied over. Mere association with the name is shameful.

And it was the same with Jesus Christ. So much so that Paul has to tell his early Christians, doesn't he, to not be ashamed of the name.

So, it's the joyful season, isn't it? And this is a family service. But I want us to feel the humiliation this morning.

[5 : 24] I want us to feel the shame of Christmas. And then of Easter. Of Jesus going down his incarnation and his crucifixion.

It is glorious for us, but it was humiliating for him. Isaiah, the prophet, speaks 700 or so years before Jesus' birth.

And he tells of Jesus' death. He says with Paul, just listen how far he fell, how low he went. Isaiah chapter 53.

His appearance was marred. Beyond human semblance. He had no form or majesty that we should desire him. No beauty that we should look on him.

He was despised and rejected by men. And they made his grave with the wicked. Some say Isaiah expresses there just the physical disfigurement of Jesus in his punishment before his death.

[6 : 30] So badly beaten and lacerated was he that he was unrecognisable even as a human being if you'd have looked at him. So when he came to earth, he became a little baby in the dirt and the grit and the feces of a farmyard stable.

And he died a shameful death. He fell as far as anyone could. He went to the deepest depths of shame. He fell so far.

He went so low. To the very dregs of disgrace. And just by association to the name Jesus Christ could bring shame on anyone, couldn't it?

Could even get you killed. G.K. Chesterton once said, Jesus promised his people three things. To be absurdly happy, ferociously fearless and always in trouble.

So disgraceful is that name to many. The world over today. But the strange message of Christmas was that the way down for Jesus was actually the way up.

[7 : 42] And the way to the top for Jesus was at the bottom. The way down for Jesus. His name was disgraced. But secondly, Jesus on the way up.

Jesus on the way up. His name is exalted. Getting to the top. We all want it, don't we, I suppose. And we have done.

Ever since Adam and Eve, our first parents, were in the Garden of Eden. They were given a choice, weren't they? And the temptation that Satan laid before them to eat the fruit that God has told them not to eat.

And he said, didn't he, look, you won't die if you eat this fruit. The reason why God has told you not to eat it is that he knows when you eat it, you will become like him.

You will know good and evil. Given half a chance, we all want to listen to that lie, don't we? To sit on God's throne, to make our own decisions, to say what is wrong and what is right.

[8 : 45] To become like God. George Bernard Shaw confessed, I'm a self-made man who worships his own creator.

So true, isn't it, of all of us. We're self-made people who love to worship ourselves, our own creator. That is what we all want. To worship ourselves, to be gods.

The temptation for Adam was to get to the top by grabbing something that did not belong to him. Something that was forbidden. Equality with God.

To be a god. And getting to the top that way was a big, big mistake. And in the sense they got what the devil promised, didn't they? They knew evil and they knew good.

They knew the difference. But not in the way that God does. They learnt what evil was personally and internally. They learnt about evil by participating in it.

[9 : 52] By knowing it from the inside, as it were. Adam took and he ate and he chewed and swallowed and he willed down the fruit inside of himself.

And so through the disobedience of Adam and of humanity, they grasped things that they were not entitled to.

Trying to get to the top. But they fell to the bottom. They fell to death. There is a massive difference there, isn't there, between Jesus' humiliation and the shameful things that we do.

And we see other people do. Because where we have tried to grab a status that does not belong to us, which is not ours to keep. Jesus has surrendered his status for which he had every right.

His humiliation is voluntary, isn't it? So that's what Paul says in verse 6. He was in the form of God. It just means he was equal with God. He was God.

[11:01] But he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He did not hold on to what belonged to him.

He surrendered his status. It's not that he lost his divinity. It's not that he stopped being God. But he chose not to take advantage of that.

He chose not to exploit that. To take the form of a man and of a slave. And in his death he denies himself the privileges that his royalty allows him.

Do you remember those iconic pictures of Princess Diana? She was always pictured, wasn't she, wearing royal finery. The best gowns and jewellery.

But there were some pictures that are etched in some of our minds. Aren't they? Of when she took a visit to Angola. On a humanitarian mission. She walked through a minefield.

[12:07] And some of the hints of her royalty were still there. A pair of simple earrings. And a wrist watch. But the odd juxtaposition of it.

Of the royalty and humility of it. Was she wore a flak jacket. With a face visor. And as she walks next to the minefield.

She relinquishes her royalty. She surrenders her rights. She refuses the helicopter. To take a bird's eye view. She refuses the armoured car.

She declines the privileges that her royalty allows. That her royalty demands. To help her people. So do you see the difference?

The difference between you and me. And Jesus Christ. Is just that. Our temptation is to grab something. That does not belong to us. But the temptation for Jesus.

[13:07] Was to keep something that did. To call upon his royal rights. And to avoid stepping down in disgrace. Jesus surrenders his immortality.

He becomes killable. And so the message of Christmas is. It's not what I can get. It's what I can give.

Isaiah explains why he did it. In that same chapter we read from earlier ago. Surely he has borne our griefs. He's carried our sorrows.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed. For our iniquities. We go down.

Don't we into death. Because of our disobedience. That is what Adam deserved. But Jesus' death. Was his obedience.

[14:16] He laid aside his rights. For us. It is glorious. Isn't it? Unimaginable. Unimaginable. Kindness. Unimaginable. Humility.

And self-ebasement. And so that is why. Paul uses this great word. In verse 9. Just look. Therefore. Therefore.

It's not a great word. Because it's long. It's only a three letter word. In the original language. But he's saying. Isn't he. Because of all of that. Because of his great. Step down into disgrace.

Because of all of disobedience. God has. Highly exalted him. A guitar was sold. Last week.

I don't know if you heard about this in the news. It was bought for \$25. A few years ago. But just last week. It was sold. For £200,000.

[15:12] Why? Because it had a name. Written on it. Jimmy Hendrix. It should have gone for more actually. They were saying.

£200,000. A name. A good name. Makes all the difference. Doesn't it? A good name. A great name. Adds value. And this disgraced name.

Has now become that name. A name that is highly praised. In fact. Paul says. Jesus name is now higher than any other name.

It is the name that adds more value to anything than any other. It is the name that is worthy of universal praise. Not just from music fans.

But from everybody. Every knee. He says. Every tongue in heaven and on earth. Everywhere. Should worship him. There is no one who is more exalted than him.

[16:12] Charles Lamb was an accomplished writer in the 18th century. He was friends with Coleridge and William Wordsworth. And he was an expert and lover in the works of William Shakespeare.

Now that is a great name isn't it? William Shakespeare. What a great name. And he said of Shakespeare. Charles Lamb. If Shakespeare were to enter this room right now.

We would rise. In respect for the name. But he went on to say. If Jesus Christ entered though. We would all kneel.

We would kneel. That is the appropriate response. To Jesus. To the name. Because God has exalted him to the highest status.

God looks at Jesus' incarnation. To his stepping down in voluntary disgrace. To his life and his shameful death.

[17:11] And his burial. And he says. Yes. The way up is the way down. And I love him. This behaviour is what I find beautiful. This humility is what I am about.

The man Jesus is the true Adam. And so he is exalted. And he is given the place that was designed for Adam. He is made Lord of the world.

And given the most valuable name there is. Now we have jumped back to Isaiah a little bit. I want to just quickly go back to Isaiah chapter 45.

If you want to turn there that is fine. But it is fine if you don't. I think the book of Isaiah was maybe in Paul's mind quite a lot. As he wrote this chapter.

Isaiah 45. There is a refrain. God speaks through Isaiah of his uniqueness. That he is the only God to be worshipped.

[18:12] There is a refrain. Verse 5. I am the Lord. There is no other. Beside me there is no God. Verse 6. There is none beside me. I am the Lord. There is no other. Verse 18.

I am the Lord. There is no other. We get the picture don't we? Verse 22. I am God. There is no other. And then I think the verse that Paul is particularly thinking of.

Verse 23. By myself I have sworn from my mouth. Has gone out in righteousness. A word that shall not return. To me every knee shall bow.

And every tongue shall swear allegiance. I am the Lord. There is no other. And he does not share his glory with anyone. To me.

The Lord says. Every knee will bow. And every tongue confess. But as you turn back to Philippians. Something odd is going on here. Isn't it?

[19:09] Because the exclusive description of the Lord in Isaiah 45. Is now given to the name Jesus Christ. Paul says. Verse 10.

So at the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow. In heaven and on earth and under the earth. God is saying. He is Lord. And you should worship him as Lord.

Kneel to him as Lord. You've got to ask. What on earth is going on here? God does not share his glory with anyone. His name is sacrosanct. Isn't it?

He will not share. The glory of his name with anyone. What is going on here? Is it that somehow. Jesus has now appeared. And he's done this great thing.

And there are now two gods. The Lord of Isaiah 45. And now the Lord of the New Testament. Jesus. Both deserving this worship. That only God deserves.

[20:07] Or is it that somehow. Jesus has done this act of obedience. And now he's being kind of merged in. And sucked into God. And God is saying. No Jesus Christ.

He now deserves a bit of the glory. That I said I deserved. I don't think it's either of those. The only remaining option is. That Jesus Christ.

Is now receiving here. Something that actually. Has always been his. By right. His exaltation. Is something that was his.

From all eternity. He is the God. Of Isaiah 45. As the one. Who is the Lord God. This is the eternal. Son of God. Who has always been. The Lord. With the Father. And the Holy Spirit. One God. In three persons. And so what we see.

[21:03] In Jesus' humiliation. Is not a new view. Of Jesus. It is a new. And great view. Of God. This is the Lord. In action.

This is the one God. Taking the walk. Of shame. Saying to us. That the way to the top. Is at the bottom. And it is not what I can.

Get. But what I can give. And so now. Jesus Christ. Receives all that belongs to him. By rights. But he chose not to grasp himself.

The way to the top. Is at the bottom. The way. To up. Is down. For God. So where does this. Leave us this morning.

These great truths. What do we do with this. Jesus on the way down. Jesus the way up. Thirdly. And lastly. Jesus our way. Jesus is our way.

[22:01] His name. In some sense. Is our name. Isn't it? Verse 5. Have this among you. This mind among you.

Which is yours. In Christ Jesus. That name. Belongs to you. God has autographed you. With his name. You are valuable.

To him. And yet. This comes with great challenge. For us. Doesn't it? And I think this is the great point. Of the passage. These are glorious truths. For us at Christmas time.

Jesus comes to serve us. And to save us. At Christmas. But our salvation. Is a call. To change. Jesus has. Not come to save us.

For sin. But from sin. To get us to change. By his spirit. And so our theology. Of the incarnation. Should drive.

[22 : 58] Our behaviour. Shouldn't it? We've already seen. Actually. Already. That the theology. Of the incarnation. Drives what we do. With our money. 2 Corinthians 8.

He was rich. He became poor. Now what are you going to do. About it? The incarnation. Drives our lives. Doesn't it? And so it's interesting. The words that Paul uses.

As he commands the Philippians. To act upon this. He addresses. Difficulties in the church. This is a church.

That has got his fair share of problems. If you read the letter. You can see that. There have been fallings out. Among people. In the church. There have been grudges.

There is resentment. Between people. But verse 4. He says. Let each of you look. Not only to his own interests. But also to the interests of others.

[23 : 58] I think that the word. Look there. Look to the interests of others. It's slightly. Weak. With the way we think of look. It sort of feels a bit. Distant. Doesn't it?

It's more like. Take heed. Take heed. Pay attention to. You. He's saying here. Pay attention to the needs of others.

He's not saying. Don't pay attention to your own needs. Is he. But also. To the needs of others. And it's really strong language actually. He is talking here about strategy.

Strategising. And planning. In the same way that we plan. Our own lives. And we strategise. For our own lives. We spend so much time doing it. Don't we? We obsess.

About the things in our own lives. About our. Our bills. And our free time. And our holidays. And our work. And our money. We plan. And we strategise.

[24 : 53] To do life as well as we can. And there's nothing wrong with that. But Paul is saying. When we plan. And we strategise. We also should do that for others. That we aren't just to think of our own needs.

And this is church life. He is saying. That is driven by this up down journey. Of the Lord Jesus. In his incarnation. As we are involved in each other's lives.

Strikes me that one of the big problems. Of many churches. Is that we've just not learnt this. We've not learnt that the way up. Is down. And the way to the top. Is at the bottom.

In our relationships. We come to church. With a sense of entitlement. Don't we? We come as consumers. To grasp hold of what we think belongs to us.

And it's not what I can give. It's what I can get. In all of our relationships. That can be our motives. Can't it? For being in church. With our stuff.

[26 : 00] With our possessions. But with Jesus. It is about surrendering rights. It is about apologising.

Isn't it? Even when we think we're in the right. It is about surrendering that. It is not always grasping the things that belong to us.

It is considering other people worthy. Of my attention and help. That is what he tells us here. Isn't it? Count others more significant than yourselves.

It is to consider other people as worthy of your attention. It is not a kind of false. You know. They're better than me thing.

It is not that. It is to consider others worthy. As Christ considered us worthy. Of his attention. And his planning. And his strategy. As he stepped down.

[27 : 00] Jesus is our way. Paul says to Romans. In chapter 8 of Romans. We are fellow heirs with Christ.

Jesus is our way. Provided we suffer with him. In order that we will be glorified with him. That is our journey.

As well as it is for Jesus. Getting to the top. But God says to us at Christmas. Watch him fall. See him in disgrace. For you. And see him now. Raised with the name. He is Lord.

And join him. This Christmas. At the bottom. Because the way up. Is the way down.
[27 : 57] And the way to the top. Is at the bottom. Let's pray.