

The Humble King  
Philippians 2:5-11  
March 29, 2015 – Palm Sunday

We have sung the great Palm Sunday hymn, “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name, let angels prostrate fall, bring forth the royal diadem and crown him, Lord of all.” Upon hearing of the name of Jesus, all the angels in heaven fall facedown. The name of Jesus is above every name. Christ is King over the universe, and Palm Sunday celebrates his royalty.

On Palm Sunday, Philippians 2:5-11 is read in churches all over the world: *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This begs the question: Why did God exalt Jesus Christ to be king? Why is it that at the name of Jesus, all of creation falls on its knees? At the name of Jesus, we are to lift up our hands and shout, “Jesus Christ is king.” Why? What did Jesus do that was so important? What did Jesus do that raised him to a level higher than all the angels and all people?

Was it because of the quality of his miracles? Because he was the Houdini of the Holy Land? He walked on water. He turned the water into wine. He raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus was the best miracle worker who ever lived, is that why God has exalted Jesus and made his name greater than all other names? Or...

Is it because Jesus was raised from the dead? Never in the history of the world have we seen a person raised from the dead by the power of God. A person who came back from the dead. A person who came back to life in a resurrected form. Because God used his power and raised Jesus from the dead, is that why God has exalted him above all others? Or...

Is it because Jesus had some special connection? Maybe it was because he had some divine nepotism. After all, God is his father. Jesus is the divine kid. God had this special Son, being of the same nature and substance of the Father, therefore God exalted him above all others. Is that why God has so exalted Jesus?

Why did God exalt Jesus?

The Biblical passage for today is very clear. The Bible says of Jesus: “*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in*

*appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Not because Jesus was some miracle worker. Not because he was raised from the dead by the powers of God and appeared in a resurrection body. Not because of some divine connection that Jesus was the Son God.

Why was and is Jesus exalted above all people? Because Jesus was the most humble person who ever lived. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but he took the form of a servant, walking the path of humility and obedience. Therefore, God has exalted him above all names on earth.

Several times Jesus said, *“He who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* At least three times Scripture records Jesus saying: *“If anyone would be my disciple, let him pick up his cross and follow me”*

Another favorite teaching of Jesus is: *“The person who would be first will be last; and the last will be first.”* The person who is at the foot of the table will be moved up to the head of the table. He who humbles himself will be exalted; the person who exalts himself in this life will be humbled in the next. The New Testament is laced with Jesus teaching about humility.

On Maundy Thursday Jesus displayed his humble nature. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. As he washed their feet, Jesus said that the greatest person in the Kingdom of God is the most humble servant. That night, Jesus took the job of the lowest household servant.

So I ask you again: Why is Jesus exalted above all others so that at the mention of his name, every knee on earth and in heaven shall bow? Because of his miracles? Because he was the Son of God? Because of his divine connections? No. Because he humbled himself and walked a life of humility and obedience. God wants us to have that same quality. We are invited to possess this depth humility. Humility is a great virtue in the mind of God.

Today’s text from Philippians comes from a larger section of Scripture Listen to the two verses immediately prior to today’s reading: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others* (Php 2:3-4 NIV).

A virtue of humility pleases God immensely. According to God, a very important quality in Jesus was humility. According to Jesus, a very important virtue to be found in us is humility. Do nothing from conceit. Count others better than yourselves. Look not to your own self-fulfillment but the interest of others. Live a life of humility.

Sadly, humility doesn't have many buyers today. We live in a culture that says, "We're number one. I'm number one. We have the number one basketball team; the number one baseball team" Our American culture infests and infects our hearts and hearts, saying we have to be number one. The best at whatever we do. After all, who remembers the one who came in second?"

It's not only being American that puts on pressure to be number one. It's also part of our human nature. You and I struggle to elevate ourselves above the next person. We take our talents, our intelligence, and the other gifts that God has given to us and we often use these gifts to be better than other people around us. And so within our American culture and within our human disposition, humility does not have a lot of buyers today.

Think about the quality of humility. Think about what it takes to be humble. Think about what it looks like to be humble. Now, try to think of someone that fits what you think humility to be. Who is the person who comes to your mind? A person who doesn't elevate himself or herself above others?

Abraham Lincoln is often selected as the greatest giant of our presidential past. When people make a list of the greatest Americans who ever held the presidential office, Abraham Lincoln is often on the top of the list. Why is that? Because of his legislative accomplishments? Because he was assassinated? Because he was opposed to slavery? No. Americans are attracted to a special quality in Abraham Lincoln; there was an unusual quality of humility to him. Humble Abe. Modest Abe. Honest Abe.

One historian said about Lincoln: "He stood tall, but he didn't stand above other people." That's what we are called to do. Jesus once told his disciples: *You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mk 10:42-45 NIV).

The humility Jesus displayed on Palm Sunday is beyond human comprehension. The King of the Universe, the Creator of the Universe, the One who flung the stars into the sky, and gouged out the ocean depths, came riding into Jerusalem on a beast of burden. Kings, governors, generals would come riding impressive horses. Jesus rode a donkey.

When important people would come to Jerusalem, all the officials of government and the Temple would come out to greet them. Who came to welcome the King of kings? Matthew tells us: *A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road* (Mt 21:8 NIV). The Greek says Jesus was greeted by the oxlos – the rabble, the most common people. No officials either secular or religious came out to welcome the Lord of lords.

However, when you read all the accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry into the city, you never find a word of complaint. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humbled himself to accept

the praise of those who did come out to greet him. He didn't begrudge what we might see as a slight, because these were the lost he came to seek and to save.

Knowing full well what the coming week held in store for him, Jesus *made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!* (Php 2:7-8 NIV).