

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHAPTER SIX

RUNGS OF GLADNESS - *Philippians 2:5-11*

WHEN old Jacob saw his dream ladder, in Genesis 28:12, he found the angels of GOD ascending and descending on it - as if carrying up the news of his needs, and coming down with his supplies to meet them. Our Lord uses the story of the ladder as a picture of Himself, John 1:51 - through whom our requests mount up to GOD ("**in My Name**," John 15:16), and through whom His answers of supply reach us ("**by Christ Jesus**", Philippians 4:19).

Those were *Ladders of Communication* - whereon our great need and His great fulness meet. Now, in our present passage. we have, as it were. another ladder, *a Ladder of Consecration* - whereby man's greatest, deepest need is met eternally, because of the Princely mercy and Sovereign grace of GOD.

For all the simplicity of most of its words, it is, in very truth, one of the most profound passages in the whole of Holy Writ. Let us think it over under this simile of the Glory Ladder, whereon He trod for our redemption - rungs of gladness.

Indeed, for us; and for Him. "**Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of GOD**", Hebrews 12:2: back at the topmost rung again.

THE WAY DOWN

Six steps He took, until He reached the lowest depth. We begin at the top, where we see Him as

(1) "**Being in the form of God.**" His was the essential and eternal Being of Deity. He always had been, always would be, GOD: whatever were the conditions and circumstances of His Old Testament appearances (and they were many; generally under the guise of the Angel of the Lord), Deity always was His.

- He was the Angel at the Bush, in Exodus 3:2: hence the command to Moses to worship.

- He was the Soldier with the Sword, in Joshua 5:13: hence the instinctive action of Joshua to worship.

Angel-Soldier, what not - but always GOD. And when He came down in the New Testament to His incarnation it was the same, He brought His Deity with Him. He never Himself used the title, though He accepted it from others - He called Himself here Son of Man, not Son of GOD: but that essential Deity did not, could not, ever leave Him. It is of fundamental importance that we remember this.

Note that He "**thought it not robbery to be equal with God**" - He was not taking to Himself something that did not belong to Him when He lay claim to be thus "**equal**"; nor, as we shall see, did He think it to be something to be clung to, laid hold on, lest He lose it. No, it was of nature His by right. "**Making Himself equal with God**", John 5:18, was the Jews' disgusted accusation against Him.

So stands our Divine Lord at the top of the Ladder. Watch Him as He prepares to take His first step down - in itself a mighty descent.

(2) "**made Himself of no reputation**". Can you imagine a royal personage, wishing to travel incognito, divesting himself of all apparel and appearance that would give him away. He would still be a king, but he would have emptied himself of his royal habitament. Something thus happened here: He "**emptied Himself**". I am suggesting that He divested Himself, not of His Deity, but of His glory - stripping Himself of the insignia of His majesty. He never used that Deity for His own benefit, for He would live down here as truly Man - not pretending, nor masquerading, as man, but really so.

For all that, flashes of Deity did sometimes emanate from His sacred Person - for instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and when, at the arrest in the Garden, the soldiers fell to the ground at His use of the Divine Name, "**I am**", John 18:6.

Ah yes, He that thought it not robbery to be equal with GOD, thought it not forgery to use His signature. See Exodus 3:14. So His glory was laid aside, as Milton's magnificent lines describe it:

"That glorious Form, that light insufferable
He laid aside: and here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay."

It is often said that when He became Man, He subjected Himself to the human liability to error, as the rest of us. I am bound to say that I find it impossible to associate mistakes with Deity. Limitations; yes, voluntarily assumed; but not errors. I conceive it, therefore, to be the case that whatever He said was always true.

At the same time, we must, I think, hold that He suffered Himself to be limited. How else could there be any reality or normality, in His human childhood - what meaning could there be in the words of Luke 2:52, "**and Jesus increased in wisdom . . .**"? Yet, I suspect that, even at school,

He never actually made mistakes. Do you recall that description of the Child's session with the Temple doctors, "**All that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers**", Luke 2:47.

So He steps down

(3) He "**took upon Him the form of a servant**". A bond-slave! To whom? to GOD - "**Behold, My servant**", Isaiah 52:13; and, quoting from Psalm 40:7, "**Lo, I come... to do Thy will, O God**", Hebrews 10:7. At the moment when He divested Himself of the apparel of the Son, He donned the apron of the Servant - to GOD; and, as Plummer adds, "perhaps we may say to the whole race of mankind". Yet, it is interesting that, though we are "**the servants** [bond-slaves] **of Jesus Christ**" (as Romans 1:1, etc.), He is not said to be the bond-slave of us - in this latter relation, a less harsh, a kindlier Greek word is used. "**The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister**", Mark 10:45; "**I am among you as He that serveth**", Luke 22:27.

Still, in spite of this distinction of status, we do find Him, at least on one occasion, doing the duty of a bond-slave, when, in John 13:4, He "**took a towel**", to rinse His disciples' feet.

Coming in from the dust of the road, the guest at a meal would hold his feet over the earthenware basin, while a slave rinsed them from the water ewer. There was no such slave present, and the guests should, therefore, have done this service for one another; but as they refrained from this menial duty, our Lord Himself did it. And that at a moment when He was acutely aware of His high dignity, "**Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God**".

By the way; isn't this episode a striking illustration in miniature of the use of those first two rungs of the Ladder we are talking of -

- (a) "**He... laid aside His garments**", as of royal splendour;
- (b) "**He... took a towel, and girded Himself**," as with the garb of lowly service.

He goes down farther

(4) He "**was made in the likeness of men**." If I remember rightly, the Authorised Version never (except in our verse 8) speaks of our Lord as "a man", but always as "**Man**", and correctly so - as also the doctrinal truth, "and was made Man" - for He was not merely an individual, but the Representative of the Race, the whole of human-kind. He went to the Cross. not as a man merely, but as Man, as all men, "**He died for all**", II Corinthians 5:15 - So that all may, if they will, share in the redemptive benefit.

So here, not the likeness of a man, but "**of men**". Thus, as we said earlier, He was not here on earth playing at being a man, but was as truly Man as He was truly GOD - a dual truth incomprehensible to our finite mind, but apprehensible to our grateful heart.

How we thank GOD for all the Bible evidences of the reality of His manhood - that He was hungry, Matthew 4:2; that He was tempted, Matthew 4:3; that He was tired, Mark 4:38 - "**for in**

that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted", Hebrews 2:18; indeed, as the previous verse says, **"In all things it behoved Him to be like unto His brethren"**.

When the great railway engineer, George Stephenson, died, his long funeral procession contained a body of plain workmen, who bore a banner inscribed with the words, "He was one of us" for he had risen from their ranks. Truly, He is one of us - for He came down to join our rank.

What high level of humanity was it that this **"Prince of Glory"** came to occupy? Nay, no high level at all!

(5) **"He humbled Himself"**. Says our hymn,

"The highest place that Heaven affords, is His, is His, by right"

yet, on earth, it was a lowly station that He sought - an insignificant village, a humble cottage, a lowly mother, a poor trade. He was born to a borrowed cradle; He was laid in a borrowed tomb; and during His ministry **"the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."**

It would seem as if this choice of the humble were a principle of selection in all the service of GOD. Recall that passage in I Corinthians 1:26 ff. - **"Not many wise . . . not many mighty, not many noble, are called"**: He does not say "not any", but **"not many."**

Rather has He chosen, "the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, the nonentities, the 'are nots'." **"Chosen"**, mark you. It is not that He has to put up with these inconsiderables as the best He could get; but deliberately He so frequently prefers such, that people may be forced to recognise that the praise for the results must go, not to the human instruments, but to the hand that uses them.

After a battle of long ago, when a soldier had wrought great devastation with his sword, his king sent for the sword. Upon inspection, His Majesty returned it with the somewhat scornful remark, "But it is a very ordinary sword." To which the soldier ventured to reply, "His Majesty should have sent for the arm that wielded it."

Yes, that's it; or, to put it differently, **"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"**, II Corinthians 4:7.

But all this is to stray from our immediate subject - the wonderful spirit of humility that He displayed in His lowly station, in His humble service, and in His denial of self. At the end they said, **"He saved others; Himself He cannot save"**, Matthew 27:42 - how false that latter part, for, by exercise of His Deity, He could at any moment have come down from that Cross,

"Was it the nails, O Saviour, that bound Thee to the Tree?
Nay 'twas Thine everlasting love, Thy love for me, for me,"

How true that former part, **"others"**, always others, as He **"went about doing good"**, Acts 10:38, in the homes of sinners, and in the haunts of lepers.

How moving is this self-humbling of the Holy One and the Mighty.

Yet, mark another stage of His descent

(6) He "**became obedient unto death.**" What depth for Deity! Why could He not have been raptured to Heaven without dying, as Enoch was, and Elijah; and as living believers will be at His Parousia, I Thessalonians 4:17? The whole efficacy of redemption lies in His dying. That is a mysterious utterance which we find in Hebrews 5:8-9, "**Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.**"

Anyhow, we may say that part of the meaning is that, by His suffering of death, He showed obedience up to the hilt! We are back in the majestic argument of Romans 5:19, "**For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.**"

Stay a moment! Think you that He is now at the very bottom of the Ladder of our Salvation? No; there is a rung yet.

(7) "**Even the death of the Cross.**" See that cross, in its glittering gold, at the very apex of London's Paul's Cathedral, shining in religious splendour over the City's busy traffic: not such was it "on which the Prince of Glory died" - but one of roughhewn wood, a criminal's gibbet, stuck into a hole on Jerusalem's common crucifixion ground.

Three of them were there at the time - two of them for a couple of base malefactors, and the middle one intended for the leader of the nefarious gang, one, Barabbas; but now occupied by his Substitute and ours. To that place, to that death, to that depth, His journey from the skies has brought Him - "being nailed to a tree like vermin", as Plummer says.

One thinks of the Psalm that was in His mind as He hung there, and, in reverent reticence, one wonders if He dwelt upon the words, "**I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people**", Psalm 22:6. GOD-man-worm.

What a far distance down the scale of Being. Says American, Norman B. Harrison, "History has no parallel. How could He do it? Mute in contemplation, we can never cease to wonder." Truly, He has now touched bottom. As one stands there, at the place where one ought to be:

"Two wonders I confess,
The wonder of His glorious love,
And my own worthlessness."

Ah, but GOD did not leave Him there; and now, with uttermost joy, we watch His journey to the skies. He grasps once more the Ladder, and we mark:

THE WAY UP

Wonderful in glory, as the Way Down was wonderful in grace.

Three great steps, and He is back where He properly belongs.

(1) "**Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him**". We have seen that He humbled Himself, but He did not exalt Himself. By reason of His Deity, He could have done; but by reason of His Saviourhood, He did not do so. For Justice' sake, and, indeed, for man's assurance' sake, it was essential that GOD should give some sign and indication that the One Sacrifice of our Lord was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world", as our doctrinal statement has it.

The sign of the acceptance of the sacrifice was the resurrection, in which, in Paul's frequent phrase, "**God raised Him**". By that mighty token, He is not only "**declared to be the Son of God with power**", as Romans 1:4 says, but also declared to be the Saviour of men with authority.

- up from the Tomb - in wondrous resurrection;
- up to the Skies - in glorious ascension;
- up to the Throne - in illustrious session.

That is what GOD thinks of the finished work of His Son. That word "**highly**" is the English equivalent of a Greek preposition, "*huper*", with which the apostle has compounded the verb. Plummer points out that Paul has a great fondness for this use. So this is a hyper-exaltation - which, greatly daring, I have elsewhere ventured to render by the modern schoolboy slang, "Super"!

Another step up is that

(2) GOD hath "**given Him a Name which is above every name**". Here we touch upon a considerable difference of opinion, and I must leave my readers to make up their own minds, for there is little that is definite that I can place before them for their guidance.

(a) Professor Plummer, a great Biblical expositor, seems to think that it is not an actual Name that is referred to, but that it denotes the rank, or dignity, that has been given Him. "GOD gave Him the dignity that is above every dignity", as the professor put it. By the way, it is "**a Name**", as if that which was specially reserved for this, in recognition, and in honour, of the great task so successfully accomplished.

(b) Bishop Lightfoot, another supreme New Testament exegete, is of a different opinion. He feels sure that an actual Name is intended; and he points out that, in verse 10, it is not "the name JESUS", as if it were the Name, but "**the name of Jesus**", as if it were some other Name bestowed upon JESUS.

(c) The more commonly held view is, of course, that this Name "JESUS" was, like the Body that bore it, raised and exalted; and that, because of Him, it will be ever held in highest honour. This last will, in any event, always be the case; but perhaps there was awaiting Him on His return a specially significant Name and Dignity not yet known to us.

We do that sort of thing on our little sphere of earth - Sir Douglas Haig returns from a victorious campaign, and he is rewarded with a new Name and Dignity. He is to be Earl Haig. And Kitchener is to be Lord Kitchener; and Sir John French is to be Lord French. I don't know - but these little human instances may be pale and distant illustrations of what awaited our Victorious Lord when He re-entered in triumph the Gates of Glory. Yet, be this as it may, nothing can dim for us the wonder of the sacred Name, "JESUS": personally, I always feel that I must write it in capital letters.

"How sweet the Name of JESUS sounds
In a believer's ears."

So wrote a drunken sailor, John Newton, who, before his conversion, had used the Name as a swear-word.

What pages we could write on this theme; but it is time that we set out to follow in thought His final step up into Glory.

(3) **"Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord". "At the Name of Jesus"**, as if every mention of it must be accompanied by a bow of the head - threefold obeisance is due, Heaven and earth and under uniting to acclaim His sovereignty. Then every tongue - the atheist's tongue, the pagan's tongue, the foreign tongue, your tongue and mine - shall avow His Lordship, and our allegiance.

Universal acknowledgment hereafter: how good to practise by personal confession here one of the most thrilling moments in the Coronation Service of our Sovereigns is that of the People's Homage, when the massed representatives of the Realm join to acclaim, "GOD save the King! GOD save the King! GOD save the King!"

But a faint echo of the great heart-moving shout of **"every tongue"**.

So ends our exposition of this amazing passage - oh, that one could have done it better, more worthily. The reader may well be constrained to throw this poor Study on one side and to take the inspired record itself and, on his knees, pore over the sacred words themselves; and then, rising to his feet, join, with deepest adoration, in the Heavenly Tribute of Revelation, 5:12, **"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."**

Amen! - One brief prosaic word must be added, concerning

THE WAY FOR US

For that, after all, was how the passage began and why the passage was penned: **"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (5).**

The Selfless **"mind"** - which thinks nothing of itself, but only of others.

The Sacrificial "**mind**" which is prepared to go to utmost lengths for those others' welfare.

The Serving "**mind**" - which is happily content to render any service that will help.

The late Dr. G. H. Morrison records that he once received one of those typical postcards from Mr. W. E. Gladstone and that it was signed as from "Your obedient servant"! How that would have delighted Paul, if II Corinthians 4:5 is any criterion, "**We preach . . . Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servant for Jesus' sake**"

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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