

April 14, 2024

“Walking the Path” Philippians 2:5-11

FCF: Willing to believe. But now what?

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has opened the way for us to know him.
(magnet) And that means walking the path he walked.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

We are fast approaching graduation season. I’m thinking especially of high school, trade school, and college. It’s a great accomplishment just to have finished. You put in the hours, did the work, and are to receive your diploma. But a question yet looms before you, “Now what?”

I was reminded of that question as I’ve sat in our text for this morning. This is the last in this short post-Easter series as we have been pressing into the reality of the Resurrection and its implications. So let’s say you are convinced. You are willing to believe. But a question yet looms before you, “Now what?” What would following Jesus look like? That’s a good question.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Philippians 2:5-11](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

A story of a surprising discovery is interesting. There’s a long list of things that came to us by an indirect path - Teflon, Play-doh, pacemakers, penicillin. And Post-it notes ([READ](#)):

It was in 1968, while working for...3M, that chemist Spencer Silver received an assignment to invent a new adhesive that was stronger and more powerful than what was currently on the market. At the end of his research, (he) had achieved just the opposite: a mixture that adhered but was easily dislodged. At the time, Spencer believed he had failed. In fact, he’d just changed the history of the paper mill.

A surprising discovery. We have another here in Philippians 3. Paul is looking back over his story, describing a shift that had taken place, a radical new focus to his life ([READ Philippians 3:8-11](#)). That’s a surprising discovery for the reader. Think with me. This is the Apostle Paul. And he is saying that 30 years since his conversion experience, there is still yet more for him to know of Christ. But pushing beyond even that, he is implying that it is possible to know Christ.

If we were speaking of any other historical figure, we wouldn’t say that. Yet Paul says it is possible for us to know Christ. How? Go back to chapter 2. Yes, there he is addressing a specific concern. But Paul has in mind the pattern of the Christian life. That is, there is a call to an imitation of Christ. We are His followers. He is our example, our pattern. Let me put it this way. Jesus has opened the way for us to know him. And that means walking the path he walked.

And, as we look at this text, we see there are three essential parts to this walk, three phases we are to walk ourselves. First, incarnation. Second, crucifixion. And, third, exaltation.

I. INCARNATION

First, incarnation. This is what we celebrate at Christmas ([READ Philippians 2:5-7](#)).

A) *For Jesus*

This is what C. S. Lewis called “the grand miracle” - God becoming man.

1. “Not grasping”

Let's look at some phrasing. "Not grasping" - this refers to Jesus' pre-existence as the second person of the Trinity. Yet, unlike Adam, Jesus did not keep or grasp his status for his advantage.

2. "But emptying"

"But emptying" - he is still fully God but set aside his cosmic privileges and divine rights. He set them aside, laid them down, and became one of us. And in so doing, he took on weakness.

B) For Us

This pattern of incarnation, of a descent into weakness, is to be our own.

1. Recognizing our due

It begins, as it did for Jesus, in recognizing our due. True humility is never about thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. Knowing your worth - like Jesus did before washing feet.

2. Relinquishing our rights

Recognizing our due and then relinquishing our rights. Laying them down. Going yet lower. Seeing and prizing the needs of others. And then washing their feet ([READ Philippians 2:3-4](#)).

As followers of Jesus, we are called to walk the path of his incarnation.

Illustration:

Consider the church of the 3rd century and their response to the plague ([READ](#)):

Like many other places around the same time, Carthage was petrified of the plague. It wrought death and disaster when it struck and it was merciless in its sweep, claiming the lives of all who stood in its path. So, when an outbreak of the plague struck the city in AD 232, the local authorities acted swiftly and decisively. Dead bodies were disposed of and those who were suspected of having been contaminated were put outside the city walls. The impact was enormous suffering and death and disease on an epic scale. The Bishop of Carthage at the time, Cyprian, also acted swiftly. He called the church together and invited them to go and live among the sick and dying. He challenged them to give up the comfort and security of their own well-being and to step into the world of the rejected and the forgotten.

That was what it meant for the church in that context to follow Jesus, to do incarnation.

Application:

What practical effect might this have on us? This is the shape of love - recognizing and relinquishing our rights, laying them down. It's what parents know in caring for the sick child at 2:00 AM. It's the experience of living with a self-centered spouse. It's the enduring of a sibling who simply has to be the center of attention. It's being willing to be overlooked at school or work when someone else gets the credit for a job you did. It's choosing the path of going down.

Paul Miller, the author of *The J-Curve*, notes that this is also where we learn to pray. We have taken on weakness. We have entered into a life of dependence. And so we look to Jesus.

We are to walk the path of the incarnation. And that is how we come to know him.

II. CRUCIFIXION

Which brings us then to crucifixion. This is Good Friday ([READ Philippians 2:8](#)).

A) For Jesus

What did this mean for Jesus? Like we see in the Gospels, Paul's words are sparse.

1. Humbled himself

“He humbled himself” - God became man. He made himself a slave. He was obedient to his Father throughout his life. But never more so than then. “Not my will, but yours, be done.”

2. Death on a cross

“Even to death on a cross” - this is the deepest descent. The physical pain matched only by the degradation and humiliation. And outmatched only by the horrific separation from his Father.

B) For Us

All for us. And that is to be the pattern for us. We are to walk this very path ourselves.

1. Dying to ourselves

Dying to ourselves. This is part of what it is to share in his sufferings, to know the fellowship of his sufferings. Not simply reading or studying of this but dying. Going beyond the safe limits of our sentimentality. Going all the way down. As far as is needed. Just as Jesus did for us.

2. That others may live

That others may live. We die that others may live. This is not death for death’s sake. It is that others might be saved - not in the sense of their souls but to bring light and life into a situation.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to walk the path of his crucifixion.

Illustration:

The [Via Dolorosa](#) - it is said to mark the ancient route taken by Jesus through the city of Jerusalem on his way to be crucified. The path winds its way to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a journey of roughly 2,000 feet. The route consists of 14 stops, marking various stations along the way. Nine are on the way to the Church. Five are within the Church itself.

You don’t have to go to Jerusalem to walk the Via Dolorosa. It’s before us all the time.

Application:

What are the practical effects of this? Again, Paul Miller points out two helpful things. First, this locates our experience. The weakness, the powerlessness, the suffering that comes through the descent of love can be disorienting. “Where am I?” On the path. That’s reassuring.

So, first, it locates our experience. Second, it stabilizes our emotions. We are then freed to feel. Able to feel without giving into despair. Free to lament. Able to go to Gethsemane.

We are to walk the path of Jesus’ crucifixion. And that is how we come to know him.

III. EXALTATION

Which brings us to exaltation. This is what we celebrate at Easter. And more - both the resurrection and the ascension ([READ Philippians 2:9-11](#)). This is as vital as the first two steps.

A) For Jesus

What do we see here for Jesus? His exaltation brings a full restoration.

1. Divine recognition

A divine recognition - "Therefore." This comes not despite the great descent but because of it. This eternal cosmic reward is a consequence of everything that has come before. This is God's response to the Son. Christ's demonstration brings a full validation, a great two-phased rising.

2. Universal dominion

A divine recognition and universal dominion. He is given the name - clearly implied as the LORD, Yahweh as seen in the Old Testament. The name and rule over all the created sphere.

B) For Us

What then does that look like for us? Obviously, not the same. But there is still a rising.

1. Promise of restoration

It starts with a promise of restoration - partially now, fully in the new heavens and earth ([READ](#)):

Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.

2. Outlook of expectation

Coupled with that is an outlook of expectation. Which then frees us to be less demanding, able to be patient and to persevere. Able to see signs of the kingdom, the future invading the present.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to walk the path of his exaltation.

Illustration:

There's a scene in Tolkien's *The Return of the King* near the end that captures something of this. The Fellowship has completed their quest to destroy the One Ring. Aragorn has been crowned as the High King. In the midst of the coronation ceremony, he walks towards the four hobbits - Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. They bow before him. But, much to their surprise, the king and all the assembly kneels to them. For they were instrumental to the story's outcome. And then he says the line that grabs me every time ([READ](#)), "My friends, you bow to no one."

Application:

What might be some practical implications here? Let me give you two. First, patience. God alone does the resurrecting. That can mean a time of waiting in the tomb until the third day.

Second, hope. And a cure for cynicism. We have an outlook set towards what will come - one way or the other, in this life or the next - based on the Lord's sure solid promises to us.

We are to walk the path of Jesus' exaltation. And that is how we come to know him.

CONCLUSION:

This is the Christian life. Incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation is the constant ongoing experience. Why is this important to know? Why is this worth considering? We are talking about relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of all of life. The Lord is the headwaters of all flourishing ([READ Psalm 16:11; 36:9](#)). To be cut off from God is to be cut off from life. But to be connected to God, to be in relationship with Him, to know Him, is then to have life to the full.

Here I think of what is called the standard diving dress - the diving suit that was used for deep underwater work that required more than just holding your breath. The round helmet made of copper, brass, or bronze. The water-proofed canvas suit. The weights to counteract buoyancy. And then, of course, the long air hose attached to a manually operated pump. That was your life line. The idea here being that we are all swimming in the depths, needing air. Paul is speaking of the hose to the suit, relationship with God - what it looks like and how it plays out in our lives.

Jesus has opened the way for us to know him. That means walking the path he walked. That's worth knowing. It's worth living. And it means incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation.

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