

Let's keep our Bibles open right there at Philippians chapter 2. If you were here with us last week, we looked at this same passage but only verses 5-8. Let me read those verses one more time.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

These verses show us the stunning descent of Christ, from the glories of heaven to the deepest darkest place in human history, to death on a cross. And for just a moment, I want you to imagine if that's where Jesus's story ended. If that period at the end of verse 8 was the conclusion of Christ's life. He humbled himself. He died. Period. What if death was final for Jesus? What if it's final for us? What if death will ultimately have the last word?

Physicist Alan Lightman believes this is precisely what will happen. A few years ago, he wrote an article in *The Atlantic* titled, "Life is an Accident of Space and Time." He says, "At some point in the future, in perhaps a few hundred billion years, after all of the stars have burned out and all sources of energy have been exhausted, life in our universe will end—not just life similar to that on Earth, but life of all kinds. The 'era of life' will have passed." In other words, death will devour every living thing. Nothing will remain. But if that's true, if life of all kinds will burn out with the stars, and only a cold, dark, universe of unconscious matter will remain, then our lives are nothing more than an accident of space and time. And whatever meaning we attach to our lives is a delusion. One day no one will remember any of it, because there won't be anyone to remember anything.

The French novelist Albert Camus called this *the absurd*. It's absurd because we live with a sense that our lives do have meaning, but that sense is perpetually challenged by the shadow of death looming over us. And Camus argued that there are only two ways to deal with this absurdity: You can either give up on life, or you can fake it, acting like there's a reason to live even though you know there's not.

But the good news of Easter is that we don't need to take either of those options. Because death does not have the last word. Not for Jesus. And not for us. The period at the end of verse 8 is not the end of the story! Verses 9-11 come next, which say, *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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.*

Philippians 2:9-11

Friends, these verses contain the hope we need as we live under the shadow of death. They declare that Christ has risen, that Christ is reigning, and that Christ will return. Let's consider those statements one at a time and try to take in what they mean for us. First...

1. Christ Has Risen

Verse 9 begins with these words: *Therefore God has highly exalted him...*

Philippians 2:9

This verse made me think of bungee jumping, which I've never done myself. But the bungee jumper leaps from the bridge and plunges down only to suddenly spring back up again. And in verses 5-8 we watch Jesus leap from heaven and plunge down into death, but here in verse 9, he springs back up again! He humbled himself. Now, God exalts him. And that exaltation begins with vindication in his resurrection.

It's always important to remember that Jesus went to the cross willingly. In John 10:18 Jesus says, *"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."* And Philippians 2:5-8 remind us that Jesus humbled himself, willingly facing death, even death on a cross. No one forced him there. He went because he loved us, and he knew the cross was necessary to save us. He died in our place, taking the penalty we should have faced, so that we could be forgiven. But it is also true that Jesus was betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, beaten, mocked, and crucified by wicked men. So, what happened on the cross was the result of God's good purposes *and* human sinfulness. This is what Peter declares in Acts 2:23, when he tells the crowd gathered in Jerusalem,

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 2:23

Those lawless men thought that the death of Jesus was the end of Jesus. They thought they had silenced him. They thought they had defeated him. But on the third day, God vindicated him. Peter declares in Acts 2:32:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Acts 2:32

Think of the hope this brings as we live under the shadow of death! Death is not final. Jesus entered death. Then, he rose again! And he promises the same for all his people. In John 6:40, Jesus says, *This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

John 6:40

He has charted the course for us, through death, into resurrection life.

In high school I was on a backpacking trip in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. And one day our route included a 7-mile hike through dense forest, where there was no trail. Now, thankfully we had maps, compasses, and some orienteering ability. But if we didn't have those tools, there's no way we would have made it through. The forest was too dense. The terrain was too difficult. Without a way to orient ourselves we would have been totally lost. And without a way to orient ourselves as we make our way through this life, with death pressing in all around us, we will be totally lost. But Jesus, our risen Savior, says, "Look at me... believe in me... follow me... and

you will have eternal life. I will raise you up on the last day.” This is the good news of Easter! Christ has risen! And...

2. Christ Is Reigning

Look at verse 9 again: *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name*

Philippians 2:9

40 days after he rose from the grave, he ascended into heaven where he reigns with the name above all names. What is that name? Well, listen to what comes next.

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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.*

Philippians 2:10-11

Jesus Christ is Lord. That name—Lord—is loaded with meaning. Philippi was a Roman city, where everyone knew the common expression: Caesar is Lord. Throughout the Roman empire, Caesar claimed the highest authority. And when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, Caesar was a man named Nero. Nero was a violent and vengeful leader, responsible for some of the worst persecution of Christians that has ever taken place. And from a human perspective, it surely looked like Nero was the highest authority, far more powerful than Christians and the God they worshipped. But Paul is telling the Philippians, that’s not true! Nero might rage, but Christ reigns! Jesus is Lord, and time will prove his all-surpassing power and authority. Which is exactly what happened.

Here’s just one striking example: Nero wanted to put an end to the church, so he often dragged Christians into the Coliseum to face a brutal and public execution. But, if you visit Rome today the church is alive and well, but the Coliseum is nothing more than a ruin, a museum to an age long past, which Christians—who were once persecuted there—can pay 18 Euro to visit. The reign of Caesar is over. The reign of Christ continues, and his reign will never end. Let that comfort you when any dark power you see in this world threatens to overwhelm you.

- Caesar was not Lord, and neither is any other earthly ruler today.
- Cancer is not Lord, and neither is any other disease.
- War is not Lord, and neither is any other threat of violence.

Even death itself is not Lord. Jesus is Lord! And if we belong to him, we are safe.

But that’s not the only significance wrapped up in this name. Saying “Jesus is Lord,” is not only a declaration of his authority, it is a declaration of his divinity. Remember, Paul was an Israelite, steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures. He knew verses like Isaiah 42:8, where God says,

I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.

Isaiah 42:8

He knew Isaiah 45:23, where God says,

To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.

Isaiah 45:23

So, he knew what it means to say that every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord. It means that Jesus is not only worthy of our trust and allegiance, he is worthy of our worship, because he is our God. He is God the Son, equal in divine status with God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. And one day, everyone will realize this reality. Because Christ has risen, Christ is reigning, and...

3. Christ Will Return

Look at verses 9-11 one more time: *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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.*

Philippians 2:9-11

When God says, “every knee *should* bow...” he’s not making a suggestion. He is declaring his will. And what God wills, will come to pass. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Spiritual forces in the heavenly places, people throughout all the earth, and even all who have entered the grave. Everyone—living and dead—will one day bow before Jesus and confess his Lordship. Tragically, there will be those who bow before him in defeat. Because they rejected him in this life, they will receive no good in the life to come. They will face an eternity of his judgement, cast away from his blessing, forever under his curse.

As C.S. Lewis put it, hauntingly and powerfully, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’” Lewis is saying, if it is your will to live far from God, you will remain far from him forever. Friend, do not let that be your story. Bow before him, believe in him, and you will face a future of unparalleled hope! Because for his people, that day of reckoning will be a day of restoration! Christ will return and he will make all things right. He will fulfill the promise given in Isaiah 25:7-8, which says,

He will swallow up... the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces.

Isaiah 25:7-8

In this life, death covers everything with a veil, a dark shadow spread over all nations. It’s inescapable. A pastor named Matthew McCullough writes, “Death is not so much an event as a process with a final destination—a siphoning process that separates us from what we love so that, in the end, everyone loses everything.” In other words, in this life, we watch in agony as death slowly—and sometimes suddenly—swallows everything up. But do you hear the promise? One day, death itself will be swallowed up forever! As we heard at the beginning of our time, Alan Lightman predicts that “At some point in the future... life in our universe will end... The ‘era of life’ will have passed.”

But the exact opposite is true! At some point in the future Christ will return, and death will end! The era of death will have passed! And this is why we can have hope! Again, McCullough says,

“Death is... a siphoning process that separates us from what we love so that, in the end, everyone loses everything.” But then he speaks of how we can face that painful reality in Christ, through whom we enjoy the prospect of “a deathless world where what we love won’t ever pass away, a world promised to us by the one who is the Resurrection and the Life.” That’s Jesus, our risen, reigning, returning Lord. Our hope in life and in death.

Conclusion

Now, I’d like to end our time by speaking to anyone here today who does not yet believe this, and particularly to anyone who once believed, but has walked away. There’s a contemporary novelist who once wrote, “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.” I wonder, if you’re honest, if that’s how you feel. Because this world is full of amazing things, but it’s all passing away, it’s all being swallowed up by death. So, you miss the idea of resurrection life, and the God who promised it to you. Well, friend, the offer still stands. You don’t have to miss him any longer. Come to him in humble faith and he will welcome you with open, gracious, arms.

Remember, Jesus says, *This is the will of my Father, that **everyone** who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

John 6:40

Everyone who believes in him will have eternal life! Everyone! That includes you. Whether you’ve walked away from faith, or you’ve never walked with him before.

- Jesus has risen. Believe in him.
- Jesus is reigning. Depend on him.
- And Jesus will return. Hope in him.