

**Palm Sunday/Confirmation Day**  
**March 20, 2005**  
**Philippians 2:5-11**

*Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke*

**We Confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**

1. He humbled himself for us
2. He was exalted for us

***<sup>NIV</sup> Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

Fellow Subject of Christ, our King, and especially you Confirmands,

The most basic confession of Christians is the one St. Paul refers to here in Philippians 2: "Jesus Christ is Lord." This brief little confession is shorthand for a series of deep and important truths that lie at the heart of our faith, namely, that *the man, Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Christ, the Anointed One, fulfiller of the Old Testament promises, and is also our Lord, Jehovah, the true God.* All who make this confession from the heart have God's promise of eternal salvation. The same apostle Paul writes in Romans 10, "**If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**" (10:9)

This is clearly a confession that Jesus wants us to make. Do you remember when Jesus asked his disciples, "**Who do you say that I am?**" (Matt. 16:15) That's when Peter responded so beautifully with the confession that God the Father had revealed to him: "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" (16:16) As Paul tells us here, it brings glory to God the Father when we bow the knee at the name of Jesus and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And that's why you confirmands have come here today: to glorify God with the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. It's not as though you just came to this belief. By the mystery of the Holy Spirit's working, this has been your belief at

least since the day you were baptized. But your parents and your church, in obedience to Christ's command, have sought to help you grow up in the faith given you at baptism by teaching you what Jesus has commanded. Today is your opportunity to lift your voice in a public confession of what Jesus means to you.

These words from Philippians 2—the epistle lesson for Palm Sunday—are beautiful summary of what you learned in confirmation class. As we read these words today, they also underscore our reasons for confessing Jesus Christ as our Lord. Paul reminds us here (1) that Jesus humbled himself for us, and (2) that Jesus was exalted for us.

### **1. He humbled himself for us**

The apostle says here about Jesus, that *"being in very nature God, (he) did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness."* We studied this passage in one of the most important parts of your confirmation instruction. I'm sure you remember when we studied about the humiliation of our Lord Jesus, how he became a lowly servant for our sake. Though it's true that Jesus possessed all the glory of the divine majesty in his human nature, he voluntarily refrained from making full use of his divine majesty so that he could rescue us from our sins. We turned to the Apostles' Creed and saw there the specific references to the different aspects of Christ's humiliation: that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, that he was crucified, that he died and was buried.

Paul is here drawing our attention to the attitude of our Savior. Though he was true God from all eternity, equal to the Father and the Spirit in power and majesty, he *"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped."* Though Jesus remained true God throughout his state of humiliation, it certainly didn't look that way most of the time. It didn't look that way when Jesus was born in a stable and laid in manger. It didn't look that way as Jesus was absorbing a brutal beating from Pontius Pilate's soldiers. Today we remember that Jesus didn't reveal much of his majesty as God when he rode into Jerusalem in lowly fashion on a donkey—and certainly not as his hands and feet were spiked to the cross or as his lifeless body was laid to rest in a nearby tomb. But that was fine with Jesus. In love for us he willingly sought our best interests at great cost to himself. He undertook it willingly because he and his Father were in agreement that Jesus should ransom us from sin and death by offering his holy life for us. One of our Lenten hymns sums it up well: ***Lord Jesus, you are going forth For me your life to offer, For me, a sinner from my birth, Who caused all you must suffer.***

Do we understand what Jesus gave up for us? It may be especially challenging to appreciate this at your stage of life. To this point—would you agree?—for the most part, others have been doing for you. Your parents, especially, have been caring for you, providing the food, the clothing, the shelter you need—along with intangibles like love and discipline and guidance and encouragement. Can you think of something you've given up for others? Did you give up some of your free time to help with chores around the house? Did you give up the computer when someone else wanted to use it, or the TV remote when someone else wanted to watch? And when you did those things, did you always do them willingly? Or did you at times refuse to “lower yourself” like that. Now, by comparison, think of how Jesus lowered himself for you. The true God willingly became the servant of servants for you. He became obedient to death, even dying a slave's death on the cross to make you an heir of heaven. The Bible says, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** (2 Cor. 8:9)

It's important to see that what led to this beautiful explanation of Christ's humiliation was actually an encouragement to live a life of Christian humility. Paul had been encouraging the Philippians to **“do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility (to) consider others better than (themselves).** He said, **“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** And then he said, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”** That's why our goal in confirmation class has not only been to fill your minds with all sorts of Bible information. The goal has also been to use the power of the gospel to transform your minds, to help you grow in imitation of your Savior Jesus and adopt the servant attitude that he had. Finally, how do we as your pastors, or how do your parents, know that the instruction in the Word that you've received has found its mark? We can't look into your hearts. We can only go by what we see on the outside. As we see your attitude becoming more and more like Christ's, as we see you looking to the interests of others and sacrificing yourself in order to serve others, it will be a good indication that you are growing in your Christian faith and becoming more like your Savior.

In the first part of this section, Paul has shown us that Jesus Christ humbled himself for us. Now he goes on to tell us how Jesus was exalted for us. He says, *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place.”* There's a way of reading this section on the exaltation of Jesus as if the point is that by the job well done with his humiliation Jesus earned his exaltation. But, really, the purpose of Jesus' exaltation is for our benefit just as much as his humiliation was. Not only did Jesus humble himself for us, he was also exalted for us.

## **2. He was exalted for us**

*"Therefore God exalted (Jesus) to the highest place,"* Paul writes. Exalted, remember, means "lifted up." Here again we used the Apostles' Creed as our guide to the various elements of Christ's exaltation. Jesus, we confess, descended into hell, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead. That challenging clause about Jesus' descent to hell is classed as part of his exaltation rather than his humiliation because Jesus descended to hell not to undergo additional suffering there, but to show his victory over Satan. It assures us that the one who is the Victor over Satan is well able to deliver us from the temptations of the Evil One. Jesus' resurrection gives meaning to our lives, since it assures us that our sins have been forgiven and that God is going to raise our bodies from the dead. Jesus' ascension is proof positive that there is a home reserved for us in heaven and that even now Jesus is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. With Jesus serving as our mediator, we can be sure that we have been reconciled to God. Who better to speak to the Father in our defense than the one whose death has purified us from all sins? The knowledge that we are at peace with God through the work of Jesus—and the assurance that heaven is our home—prompt us to eagerly await the glorious return of our Savior. Like the humiliation of our Savior, his exaltation also overflows with comfort for us who believe in him. For all these reasons, the name of Jesus is the name above all names.

Now, at the end of this section, Paul tells us that these glorious truths about a Lord Jesus who humbled himself for us and who was exalted for us, lead to a response on the part of his creatures. *"...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."* The realization of all that Jesus has done for us should lead every creature to bow the knee before Jesus. Not every creature will do that now. The demons won't. Those who remain in unbelief won't. The day will come, of course, when they'll have no choice but to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord. But by God's grace you are willingly confessing him today. That's why you've come here today: to bow the knee before Jesus Christ and confess that he is your Lord. That's what makes this day a thrilling day for your family and friends and fellow Christians.

But I think we have to be careful not to over-emphasize this particular day and this ceremony that we're going to have today. The fact that you and your parents and your church are doing what Jesus told us to do when he said make disciples and teach them to obey everything he has commanded is certainly worth noting. And it's a good idea to have an occasion where you can lift your own voice to confess Jesus as your Lord. But the result that all those who love you are praying for is not just that you'll have successfully completed Friday's confirmation examination and today's rite of confirmation. What they're praying for is that you'll continue to make this confession of faith in Jesus as you go off

to high school and to college or to whatever other plans the Lord has for you in the years ahead. What's ultimately important is not that you're wearing a white robe here today, but that you're wearing a white robe and standing with that multitude that no one can count "before the throne and in front of the Lamb." That's where we take comfort in the Holy Spirit's work by which he keeps us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

So confess Jesus as Lord joyfully and boldly today. And by the grace of God go from confessing Jesus here today to a lifetime of confessing Jesus, both with lips that call him Lord and with a life that demonstrates a Christ-like attitude. Amen.