

Highly Exalted: The Path of Humility

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References: **Philippians 2**, Philippians 2:9-11; Psalm 97:9; Philippians 2:5-8; Matthew 26:53-54; Hebrews 5:5; Psalm 2:7; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6

The Tragedy at Surrey Gardens Music Hall

Well, tonight we're going to be looking at a passage of a story from a real-life individual by the name of Charles Spurgeon. And Charles Spurgeon was a Baptist preacher in London. And this story takes place in the year 1856.

And it was a very important evening for Charles Spurgeon because it was that evening where he was starting a new outreach. It was going to be at a place called the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. And it was a newly constructed venue. How many people could it seat? 10,000 to 12,000. How many people were there to listen to him that night? 10,000 to 12,000. It was sold out. And guess what? There was another 10,000 people outside waiting to get in.

Now, this was a really potentially stressful time for Spurgeon because he was a very young man. He was only 24 years old when he had this opportunity to preach the gospel. And so he was a little bit nervous going in.

And so the proceedings went as usual. There was some singing; there was a hymn that was read. And when it was time for Spurgeon to speak, just as he was saying his opening words of his message, someone somewhere started yelling "Fire!" repeatedly—"Fire! Fire! Fire!" And a big commotion broke out. And you can imagine, in a 10,000-seated arena, hard to tell where things are happening.

Eventually it was determined that there was no fire, and then the audience started yelling at Spurgeon, "Preach! Preach! Preach!" And so he was really thrown off his guard. And so he asked for a song to be sung, and then when that song was ended, he went up to preach. And then there was another commotion from the crowd that came out, and it was at that point where Spurgeon said, "I can't preach here." And so he just left those 10,000 people; he went away.

Now, he didn't know this at the time, but a tragedy actually had occurred. It's true there wasn't a fire, but whoever yelled "Fire!" caused a panic. And would you believe it, seven

people died in that panic that ensued, and 28 people were injured. When Spurgeon found out about this, he got into a deep depression. He got a little bit despondent. He felt really distressed. And at the time, his wife had just given birth to twins. And so she was in no position to console him. And so a friend of his recommended he stay with him for a little while. And so Spurgeon spent his days in a garden in London at his friend's home.

Now, this was in October, middle of October. And you can imagine what that garden must have looked like. It was not full of flowers and bees and blossoms. It was actually a dead garden. It was a dying garden.

Highly Exalted

But there was something that happened to Spurgeon that warmed his heart. A Bible verse came to him. Now, I don't know exactly how it came to him, whether he was reading the Bible and it came to him, or whether it was given to him by the Holy Spirit, but it came from Philippians. And it's Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 to 11. Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 to 11. And in Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 to 11, Paul writes:

[Philippians 2:9-11 NKJV]

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now it's interesting, there's one word here that really resonated with Charles Spurgeon, and it's in verse 9. It's the word exalted. And it's very interesting that this word should have really taken Spurgeon, made him interested, because in the New Testament, it's the only time this word exalted appears. The Greek is hyperhypsos. I apologize, Phoebe. But it simply means super-exalted or exalted above and beyond. And I think what Paul is trying to do is he's trying to explain a kind of exaltation that is not of this world, that is divine. And that's why it's hyper—it's above, it's above and beyond. It's the only time that it's mentioned in the New Testament.

But what about the Bible? Actually, it appears one other time in the Bible. And I'll read it. It's from Psalm 97, verse 9, and it says:

[Psalm 97:9 NKJV]

For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods.

And so it's fitting that in the Old Testament, it's speaking of God the Father, and in the New Testament, Paul's writing about His only begotten Son. It's quite an interesting parallel there.

And so this word exalted sparked three questions in Spurgeon:

1. Why does it matter for us as Christians that Jesus was exalted?
2. And then another question was, well, how was Jesus exalted?
3. And then, who exalted Him?

He was kind of wrestling with those questions. And so we're going to be looking at each of those: Why does it matter? How was Jesus exalted? And who exalted Him?

The Mindset of Christ: Humility

So we'll start with the: why does it matter that Jesus was exalted for us? In Philippians chapter 2, in verses 5 to 8—and I'll read them here in just a moment. Okay. Verses 5 to 8, he says:

[Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV]

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

And so if Jesus had come down and He had lorded it over us, if He had really used His divinity to His advantage—own advantage—it wouldn't be nice, but at least we could understand it, because that's kind of how the world views or many use power in this world. But Jesus actually did the opposite. He humbled Himself to a degree that I think is so unexpected even today.

When we think of the Gospel writers, we think of Matthew, John, Luke, and Mark. Each one of them presents Jesus in a slightly different lens, we'll say. And let's say Matthew describes

Jesus mostly as, let's say, the King or the Messiah, and Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man, and John presents Jesus as the Son of God. But who does Mark present Jesus as? It's as the suffering servant.

And when you think about the advantages that Jesus had being divine, He could have used it to His advantage. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He says something here in Matthew—if I can just find it here, just a moment. Okay. He says:

[Matthew 26:53-54 NKJV]

⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

Now, I don't know—I think one legion is equivalent of 6,000 men. So if you do the math, 6,000 times 12, I think is 72,000. So Jesus had the ability to call an incredible force. I think one angel would have been enough. Amen. But He could have called a force that would have been unparalleled to earth, and He chose not to. Why? Because that wasn't His Father's plan. And so He had to humble Himself, you know, be humble, obedience to His Father, to not do what it was in His own will, but what His Father's will was.

And the interesting thing about that is when we think about the road to heaven, we often think of it as an ascension, and in many ways it is. But what Jesus shows us is that the road to heaven can also be downhill, right, through humility.

Who Exalts?

And the question becomes, who exalted Him? Well, the one thing that's interesting about exaltation in the world is it's really fickle. Meaning when the world exalts you, it's a wonderful moment one minute, and in the next it could be disaster. We think of Barnabas and Paul in the city of Lystra. There's a man who has his feet paralyzed from birth, and Paul walks up to this man and he says, "Stand up." And the man doesn't stand up; he jumps!

—Yes.

And he runs around, and he causes a big commotion. And the locals in Lystra are confused, and they confuse Paul with Hermes, the Greek god, because Hermes was a messenger and I guess Paul was talking a lot. And then they thought that Barnabas was Zeus. And so they confused these two as gods. And Paul and Barnabas, their response was actually accurate. It

was a good response. They tore their clothes, meaning they were like completely in despair. And they said, "No, we're just men. And we're here to tell you the gospel of Jesus." That's what they were there for. They did not want the exaltation of man. And they were right, because what happened soon after? The crowd turned on them. They went from being gods to nearly stoned to death. That's what happens when you rely on the exaltation of man.

And then the question is: who exalted Jesus? Was it man? Certainly not in His earthly ministry; that wasn't the case. What about Jesus? Did Jesus exalt Himself? Well, in Hebrews chapter 5, verse 5, the writer gives us the answer. Hebrews chapter 5, verse 5, the writer says:

[Hebrews 5:5 NKJV]

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him:

"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You."

And the author here is referencing a passage in Psalm 2, verse 7, where he says:

[Psalm 2:7 NKJV]

"I will declare the decree:

The LORD has said to Me,
"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You."

So Jesus did not exalt Himself, but God the Father did. And it's the same Father that doesn't change. And that's the encouraging part about it. As fickle as the world is with its exaltation, as fickle as we can even be ourselves, God does not change. His character is unchanging. And so when God exalts someone, that's something that's going to be an eternal exaltation. It's not going to be a fickle one.

Present and Future Exaltation

And here's the good news: the same God that exalted Jesus, I think it also is an exaltation that we have in our own walks as well. We can think of a present exaltation that we can take

part in, and that's found in James 4:10. James 4:10. And you'll notice in both of the verses that I'm going to be citing, humility plays a part. So James 4:10, James writes in verse 10:

[James 4:10 NKJV]

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

And notice how that's a present tense. That means in times of trial and suffering and difficulties, God will exalt you. He will lift you up. He will put a sure footing underneath your feet. He'll give you stable ground in which to stand.

But that's not just a present promise; it's also a future promise as well. 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 6. Again, humility is referenced. 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 6. In chapter 5, verse 6, Peter writes:

[1 Peter 5:6 NKJV]

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

And that's an exaltation to come. That's a future exaltation. And so we have this lifting up in the present and also in the future sense as well.

Lessons from Spurgeon's Return

So going back to Spurgeon, after that tragic event, he had three options. At least I think he had three options. He actually might have had more, but I'm thinking he had three options:

1. The first option, option number one, was to quit the ministry entirely. That means to never preach again. He could have just left it. And even though I think many people would think it would be unfortunate, you can kind of understand because he felt responsible for the deaths of seven people. He went there to win souls; seven people died and 28 were injured. And so if he were to leave the ministry, it would be a loss, but I think people could understand. So option one was leave the ministry. That was one option he had.
2. Option two was keep teaching, but never set foot back into that music hall again, just to kind of keep a wide path away from it. That's option two. Option one was quit entirely; option two was to continue, but don't step foot into that music hall.
3. And option three was to go back there and preach again.

What do you think the option he chose? He chose the third option. He chose what I think was the hardest option to choose. And you think he had to humble himself a little bit? He went in there initially with 20,000 people—10,000 inside, 10,000 outside waiting—and he left out the back door; he was snuck out. That's how he left the last time. And so to go back in again, I think it required a certain amount of humility on his part.

So he went back in there and he spent three years there teaching and winning many souls. Now, I said he spent three years there; I think he probably would have continued even longer than that, but there was a problem with the owners of the music hall. See, Spurgeon was teaching on a Sunday, and the owners were losing money, Spurgeon felt, because he felt that the people, that the community viewed that place as a church now. And so they weren't going there the other six days to party and to do all sorts of crazy things. They were avoiding it. And so the owners of the music hall were actually losing money.

And so they approached Spurgeon on many occasions and they said, "We want to program entertainment on a Sunday night." And Spurgeon would always refuse. He'd say no. And then one day they made a final offer. They called his bluff. And he just said, "I'm not going to be preaching here anymore because this is the Lord's day." He felt that strongly about it. He didn't want to compromise.

So it's interesting how he came back fearless to that music hall, but when he left, he didn't leave in fear. He left out of principle. I think that's an important distinction to remember.

So what happened to that music hall? There's a story about what happened to this music hall because something interesting happened. When it was made at the time, it was a marvel of architecture. It was exalted in many respects. It was beautiful to look at. Well, in 1861, about two years after Spurgeon left, someone called out, "Fire! Fire! Fire!" And this time, the fire was real. And that beautiful, exalted building ended up being turned into rubble.

That's the truth of this world. But God's Word and Spurgeon's ministry still continued, and it continues to this day.

So that's the message I have this evening. Phoebe, I tried. I really tried to speak slowly. I got a thumbs up from Phoebe! So I hope my message was being able to be translated to you all. And I just want to end with a quick word of prayer.

Yes, Heavenly Father, thank You again for this opportunity to share Your Word and for this wonderful reminder of humility, Lord. And it's important that when You came down, You easily could have glorified Yourself, and many people wouldn't even have thought the worst for You. But You chose not to do that, Lord. You chose to be a suffering servant so that we may freely be given the gift of salvation. And so we're grateful for this truth.

Will You please make sure that everyone, Lord, gets home safely this evening. We're grateful for this time together, and we look forward to gathering in Your name soon. In the name of Jesus, amen. Amen.