

Biblical Themes - Lowly Being Exalted

Class Outline:

1. What do we mean by the words "lowly" and "exalted"?
2. The lowly being exalted in the Old Testament
3. The lowly being exalted in the New Testament
4. Jesus Christ - the perfect example of the lowly being exalted
5. What should we see in this biblical theme?

1. What do we mean by the words "lowly" and "exalted"?

Lowly = being of low honor, status, or rank. In the Bible, the idea of *knowing* one's lowliness is often included in this word, which would then also include ideas like humility, meekness, and contriteness of heart.

Exalted = To be lifted up, specifically in honor, status, or rank.

Examples: Mail room worker vs. CEO, Private vs. General, dishwasher vs. General Manager

2. The lowly being exalted in the Old Testament:

Adam

He is made from dirt, and is then announced by God as the pinnacle of creation.

Abraham

A nobody - a moon worshiper from a far off land, and it is through him that God chooses to reconcile the world to himself.

Isaac

Was going to be sacrificed by his father, but was instead rescued by God and was exalted by God to continue the lineage of promise.

Joseph

The 2nd youngest son of Jacob, envied and betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, becomes the 2nd in command over all of Egypt and rescues God's people from famine.

The Hebrew midwives

God names these women, but does not name the king of Egypt.

Moses

God chooses a murderer who is living in hiding, with a speech impediment, to declare God's message to Pharaoh and to deliver God's people from the most powerful nation in the world.

The nation of Israel

This smallest of nations was chosen by God for redemption and rescue.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Rahab

A prostitute in the town of Jericho becomes one of those mentioned in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, and praised in the book of James.

Army of Gideon

God reduces the number of soldiers from 32,000 down to 300 before giving them the victory over Midian.

David

- This smallest, youngest son of Jesse isn't even considered to be brought before Samuel.
- This young man who is too young and weak to be a part of the Israelite army, defeats the Philistine giant.
- This murderous, adulterous man is loved by God and chosen for great honor and legacy.

Daniel

An exiled slave becomes the 2nd in command in Babylon.

3. The lowly being exalted in the New Testament

Mary & Joseph

Two unknowns who are engaged to be married, and God intervened to make them prominent figures in His redemption narrative.

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49

Jesus' Disciples

- Simon Peter - fisherman
- Andrew - fisherman
- James (son of Zebedee) - fisherman
- John (son of Zebedee) - fisherman
- Philip - we don't know much
- Bartholomew - we don't know much
- Thomas - known for his doubt of the resurrection
- Matthew - a tax collector
- James (son of Alphaeus)- we don't know much
- Thaddaeus - also known as Judas the son of James
- Simon - the Zealot
- Judas Iscariot - known for his betrayal of Jesus
- Matthias - known for replacing Judas Iscariot

Saul / Paul

Murderous persecutor of Christ's followers, becomes one of the primary authors of the New Testament.

4. Jesus Christ - the perfect example of the lowly being exalted

- Born in a stable, laid in a manger
- His birth is announced to lowly shepherds
- He grows up in Nazareth, a nowhere town
 - The gospel writers had to tell us where Nazareth was.
- He is homeless

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Luke 9:58
- He dies a death meant for slaves, political agitators, criminals
- The scriptures often speak explicitly of his lowliness:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

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. 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 2:5-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" Matthew 21:1-5

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:3-5

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 1 Corinthians 8:9

- Even upon his return, Jesus will remove the strong and exalt the lowly.
 - The strong beast is thrown down and destroyed
 - The lowly sheep will enter the kingdom

5. What should we see in this biblical theme?

First, we should see that we typically don't see the world through a biblical lens.

- We like this idea of the lowly being exalted, but only in our stories (movies, shows, books, sports). Everyone naturally roots for the underdog.
- In real life, however, we tend to think that those who are exalted should be those who have earned it.

1. God's desire and plan is to use the weak things of the world to shame the strong and to accomplish great things.

- This upside-downness of the kingdom is shown clearly in the Sermon on the Mount
 - Poor in spirit shall have the kingdom of God
 - Meek shall inherit the earth
 - The persecuted will be rewarded

So the last will be first, and the first last. Matthew 20:16

The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:11-12

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:27-31

2. Therefore we should embrace lowliness

But what does that mean, to embrace lowliness?

- Remember that by our definition, lowly is someone who has little honor, little status, and little rank. In the kingdom, that's exactly what sinful humans are! We are inherently lowly.
- As we struggle with our sinful nature, we must understand that any improvement of our rank, our importance, or our status, is because of God.
- Only in Christ are any of these things improved. If we are exalted, it will be God's doing, not ours.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Embracing our lowliness should result in:

1) Contentment

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:11-13

2) Humility

Humility is coming to terms with the reality that you are not God. It is God alone that is worthy to be exalted, and understanding and believing this is what produces true humility in the heart of a man, and true contentment with his lowliness.

The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day." Isaiah 2:11

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 2 Corinthians 4:7

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. Zephaniah 2:3

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, Colossians 3:12

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. James 4:10

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:4

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:12

It is only God who will exalt the lowly, and he does so by giving a new heart, and a new identity. Those who receive this gift of faith in Jesus Christ are exalted to the status of adopted son or daughter into the family of God, sharing in all the entitlements of Christ.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9