

HEAVEN'S LADDER

Philippians 2:5-11

IN GENESIS 28:12, WHEN the old patriarch Jacob dreamed of a ladder that went from earth to heaven he saw the angels of GOD ascending and descending on it - as if carrying up the news of Jacob's needs, and coming down with supplies to meet them.

In John 1:51, our Lord uses the story of the ladder as a picture of Himself as He addresses Nathaniel. He said to him, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

Jesus Christ alone is man's link to heaven. In Him alone, man's greatest, deepest need is eternally met—the need of salvation. To accomplish man's salvation, it was necessary for our Lord to step down from the courts of heaven. He took 7 steps downward before He reached the lowest depth.

We begin at the top of ladder, where we see Him as: ***"Being in the form of God" (v6).***

Here, Paul takes us to eternity past. He tells us that Jesus Christ, as God, existed from all eternity. God in essence, is spirit, and invisible. He has no physical or visible form. His *"form"* is spiritual in nature. Jesus possessed, and possesses forever, the exact same spiritual nature that His Father possessed from eternity. He always has been God, and always will be God in nature.

John1:1, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (v14).*

THE WAY DOWN

Step One

"He thought it not robbery to be equal with God (v6b) or "Did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (NASB)."

Certainly as God, Jesus Christ did not need anything! He had all the glory and praise of Heaven. With the Father and the Spirit, He reigned over the universe. But the amazing fact here in v6 is that He did not consider his equality with God as *"something selfishly to be held on to."*

In other words, He did not consider the position of equality that He had with the Father something that He had to hold on to at all costs. He was willing to relinquish it. This meant relinquishing the comforts and joys of heaven. It was for us, that He

was willing to set aside His “*rights*” for a time, in order to come into this world to endure the opposition of sinners against Him. Never once did Christ use His divine power and authority for personal advantage.

Now let’s watch Him as He prepares to take His next step down.

Step Two

“He made Himself of no reputation;” literally—“He emptied himself” (v7a).

He divested Himself of His royal clothes, majesty and position. By doing so, He made Himself of no reputation and of no importance. He became undignified. He who was rich became poor for our sakes.

He divested Himself, not of His divine nature (that’s an impossibility), but of His heavenly glory. Jesus’ glory and divinity were still there, but were now veiled in humanity and mortality.

Isa. 53:2-3 tells us *Jesus had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.* The glory, the beauty and worth were beneath the flesh.

John Milton, the poet, beautifully described it this way:

"That glorious Form - that light insufferable
He laid aside: and here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us; a darksome house of mortal clay."

Step Three

We see him descend further down on the ladder. Here we watch Him forsake His Lordship. ***“He took upon him the form of a servant” (v7b) or “bond-servant.”***

At the moment in which He divested Himself of His glory, He put on the apron of the Servant. The towel, or apron, is the badge of service. It was used by slaves, and it was used by our blessed Lord Jesus. Because, He came, *“not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matt.20:28).

Everything He owned belonged to His Father, and Master. He owned no land, He owned no house, He owned no gold, He owned no jewels, He owned no business, He owned no boat, and He owned no horse. Possessing nothing, He borrowed a donkey, He borrowed an upper room, and He borrowed a tomb.

As the supreme bond-servant Jesus carried the burden that no other person could carry—the SIN-BURDEN for all who believe.

Jesus takes another step down the ladder.

Step Four

"He was made in the likeness of men" (v7c). Taking not the form of angel , but came to earth, choosing to be lower than angels , choosing to live as a normal man - not pretending, not masquerading as a man, but really becoming one! A man of flesh, bones and blood.

He was truly Man and yet, He was truly GOD –what a mystery! It is a dual truth incomprehensible to our finite mind, but apprehensible to our grateful heart.

How thankful are we to GOD, for all the Bible evidences of the reality of His manhood – that He *"was hungry,"* Matthew 4:2. That He *"was tempted,"* Matthew 4:3; that He *"was tired,"* Mark 4:38 – *"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted"* (Hebrews 2:18).

The downward steps continue.

Step Five

"He humbled himself" (v8b). The highest place that Heaven affords, is His – His, by eternal *"right."* Yet, on earth, it was a humble position that He sought.

He was humble in that He was born in a smelly stable. He was humble in that He was born as a child instead of appearing as a man. He was humble in that He was born into poverty, to a lowly mother, among a despised people. He was humble into that he lived in an obscure, oppressed place— in an insignificant village, and in a humble house. He was humble in taking on a poor trade as a carpenter.

During His ministry, as recorded in the Bible, *"the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head."*

Let's look at a further stage of His descent.

Step Six

"He became obedient unto death" (v8c). What depth for Deity! The effectiveness of redemption lies in His dying. There is a precious declaration which we find in Hebrews 5:8-9, *"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."*

By His suffering of death, He showed obedience to the max! Listen to Romans 5:19, "*by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*"

There is one more rung to go.

Step Seven

In the final feature of His descent and degradation, Jesus submitted, "***Even the death of the cross***" (v8d).

Three crosses were there at the time - two of them for a couple of no-good criminals, and the middle cross, which had been booked for Barabbas, the leader of a rebellious group, but was now occupied by Christ, his Substitute and ours.

His journey from the skies brought Him - to that place, the lowest place, to death on a Cross. He could not have gone any lower. In Psalm 22:6 we have the fulfilled prophetic words of the Psalmist, telling us what Jesus felt like on that Cross. The verse says, "*I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*" GOD-man-worm.

Crucifixion was the most shameful form of execution. It might be compared to the torture methods such as the gallows, the electric chair, or the gas chamber—which are reserved for murderers.

On that brutal Cross, Christ was bearing the sins of the whole world. He was "*Left – alone*", to Himself and forsaken by God, that He might bear man's sins in their full and crushing weight. He bore the punishment in our place that we might be saved.

Someone has aptly said, "Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Christ descended into it and bore its horrors in our place."

Truly, He has touched bottom. He has reached the lowest hell. He can't go any lower. For no lower place exists. As one stands there, at the place where we ought to have been: "*Two wonders I confess; the wonder of His glorious love, and that of my own worthlessness.*"

*I will praise Him! I will praise Him!
Praise the Lamb for sinners slain;
Give Him glory, all ye people,
For His blood can wash away each stain.*

Ah, Let there be praise to God! For GOD did not leave Him there; and now, with inexplicable joy, we watch His journey upward, to the skies. He grasps once more the Ladder, and we watch Him come back up.

THE WAY UP

The Way Down was wonderful in grace. The Way Up is wonderful in glory.

Three great steps and He is back where He properly belongs.

Step One

"Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him" (v9a). Because Christ totally obeyed the Father's will, He was not left in the grave. Instead, He was raised to the heights of Heaven and not only restored to His former glory, but was given even greater glory. Glory which He never had before.

For Justice' sake and for man's assurance sake, it was essential that GOD should give some sign and indication that the one time Sacrifice of our Lord was "*a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.*"

Jesus' resurrection was proof and a sign, that His sacrifice was accepted. Romans 1:4 says, "*God raised Him.*" By that, He is not only "*declared to be the Son of God with power*", but also declared to be the Savior of men with authority.

*Up from the Tomb - in wondrous resurrection;
- Up to the Skies - in glorious ascension;
- Up to the Throne - in illustrious session.*

Christ had no foolish pride. Christ did not crown Himself, but the Father crowned Him. He did not elevate Himself to the throne of majesty. The Father lifted Him there and placed Him on the throne.

1 Peter 5:6, "*Those who humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, shall be lifted up by Him in due time.*"

Reflect on this, that while Jesus walked the earth, He was never "*exalted*" by man. Man ridiculed Him, mocked Him, and rejected Him. They tried to stone Him, and when that didn't work, they took hold of Him, scorned Him, struck Him, scourged Him, and nailed Him to a cross to die.

Man did not exalt Him. They dishonored Him. And in opposition to all this, God highly exalted Him and honored Him. The words "*highly-exalted*" can correctly be translated "*exceedingly—exalted.*"

We see Him take the second step up.

Step Two

"GOD has given Him a Name which is above every name" (v9b). Jesus had taken the path of self-renunciation. He had humbled Himself, seeking not a name for Himself. Therefore, God give Him a new Name.

There is a difference of opinion as to what that actual name is. Some say it is Jesus, some say it is Lord (which would mean the name JEHOVAH), and still others say it is a brand new Name.

Bishop Lightfoot, who was a top New Testament exegete, felt that an actual new Name is intended and he points out that, in verse 10, it is not "*the name JESUS*," as if it were the Name, but "*the name, of Jesus*," as if it were some other Name, bestowed upon JESUS. Awaiting Him at His return was an especially significant Name and Dignity not yet known to us.

John Newton, who was a drunken sailor and who, before his conversion, would use the Name of JESUS as a swear-word, would later say, "*How sweet the Name of JESUS sounds in a believer's ears.*"

His final step, up into Glory.

Step Three

"That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v11). A time is coming when everyone in heaven, and on earth, and in Hell, will bend their knees before the Lord Jesus in recognition of His Sovereignty and Lordship. Everyone will confess He is God; either with joyful faith, or with resentment and despair.

C. H. Spurgeon says, "Every tongue - the atheist's tongue, the pagan's tongue, the foreign tongue, that of the holy angels, of the fallen angels, of the holy saints, of lost sinners, of Satan himself, including your tongue and mine, shall confess His Lordship. No tongue shall be silent; no knee shall be unbent."

If as a sinner you have not yet bowed your knee before the Risen and Exalted One, and have not yet confessed the Name that is above all names, then be forewarned that, one day you will be compelled to. But it shall not be with those in Heaven, but with those in Hell, with those who never cared to receive Him as Lord and Savior.

May God, in His great mercy give you the grace to believe in His Son this very moment. And enable you to turn from your sins to Him, calling upon Him for your salvation.

With indebtedness to Guy King, James Smith and C. H. Spurgeon.