

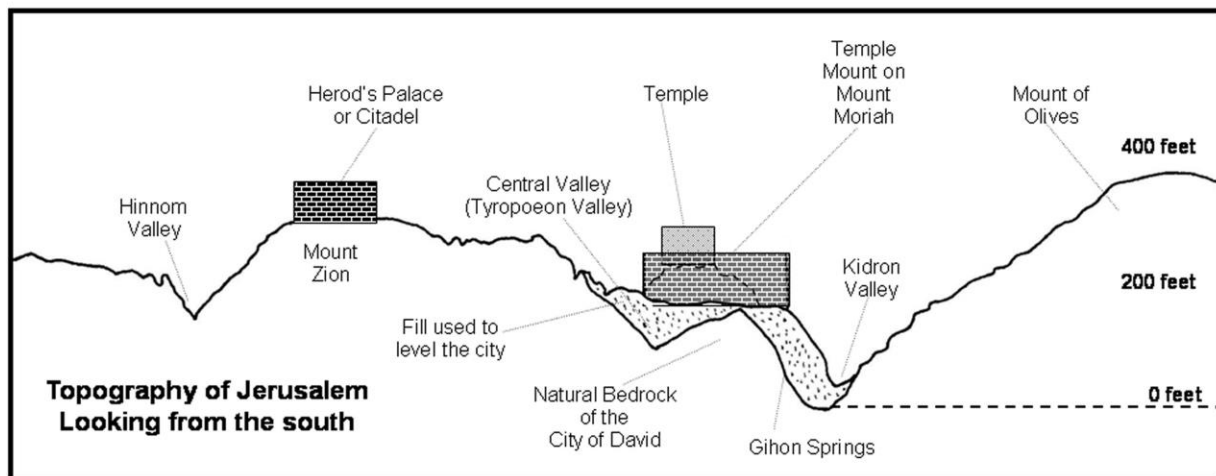
I. Intro.:

A. Elevator e.g. at Doubletree Hotel in Tulsa (WDC annual sessions, 2000 ... Had to go to basement 1st to get from main floor to 2nd floor) ... Ever had to go down 1st before you could go up?

B. Passages today show us Jesus doing precisely that

II. Jesus had to descend before ascending ... & in our Scriptures today he did this in 2 different ways/ dimensions

A. 1st, he did so in his physical journey – let's take a quick look at Jerusalem geography:



1. The temple was set on Mt. Moriah ... the Mt. Of Olives was just east of there w/ Bethany & Bethphage on the lower slopes ... Kidron Valley separating them

2. Jesus had to literally descend 1st to the valley before going up to the Temple ...

3. This journey also became a metaphor for Jesus' cosmic journey, as described by Paul in Philippians

B. Cosmic journey of Jesus had similar contours ... I thought that a visual representation might help us understand it

1. His journey didn't start in Bethlehem nor Galilee nor in Jerusalem ... a pilgrimage starting in the heavenly realms

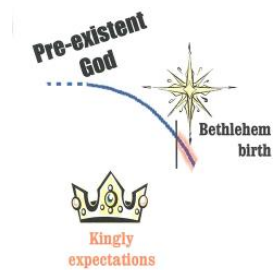
a) We see Jesus 1st as pre-existent God ... one w/ God ... in ultimate state of perfection, from before creation of the world

**Pre-existent
God**



b) Yet he “didn’t consider equality w/ God something to be grasped”

c) He left all that glory & security behind to become human on earth ...



... born in Bethlehem in humble stable, taking on our flesh & blood, emotions & frailty

2. But his descent went even further

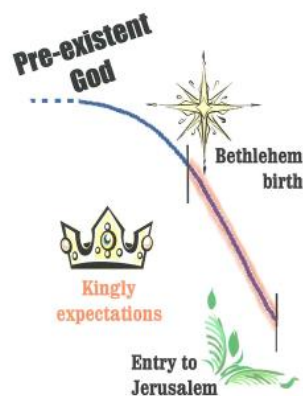
a) While his birth was heralded by lowly shepherds & respected wisemen as the coming of a new king, the way he lived out his life was in stark contrast to how kings usually lived

b) He taught humility, servanthood ... wasn’t just incarnated, he humbled himself, eventually washing dirty feet on that 1st Maundy Thursday, something only slaves would do

c) Yet from day of his birth people had grand kingly expectations of him

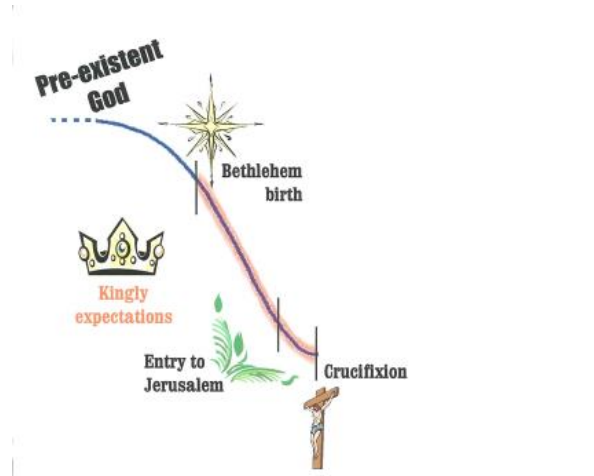
(1) expectations which only grew the more he traveled around teaching, preaching, healing & doing miracles ...

(2) expectations which reached a fever pitch as he descended into Jerusalem among a joyous crowd of fans



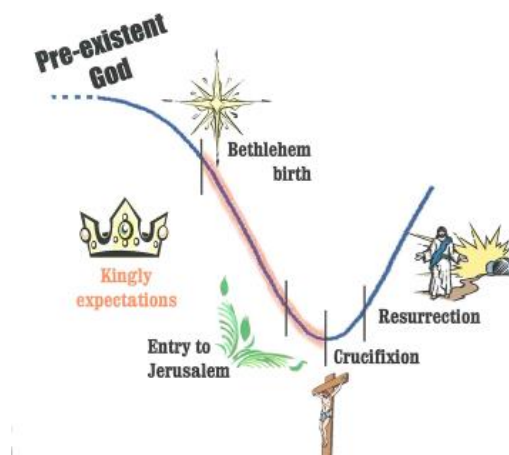
(3) So while their expectations kept rising that day, he kept going down, riding a common donkey instead of a glorious war horse

3. **But he didn't stop there ... he finally hit bottom**

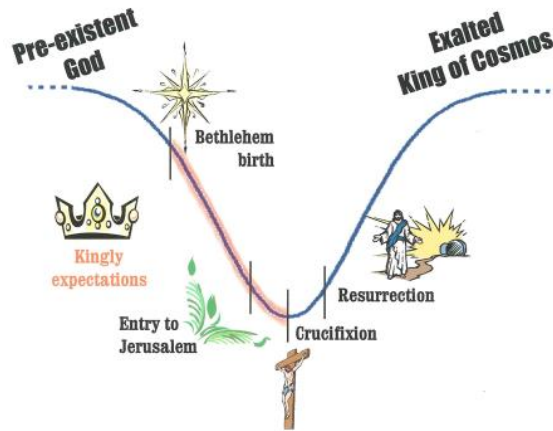


- That cheering crowd had no clue the depths of sorrow, pain & grief they would experience in less than a week
- God in human form allowed himself to be killed! ... to die a painful & humiliating criminal's death on a cross!
- Nobody's journey has ever gone lower than this ... (*pause*)

4. **Of course that's not the end of the journey ...**



- He came back up by God's power through being resurrected from the dead ... that's where we're headed & that's the whole core of our faith
- But even at the empty tomb, his elevator wasn't done going up ...



(1) he ended up back at the top ... Lord of the whole cosmos ...

(2) the most exalted one at whose name, Paul tells us, some day every knee will bow & every tongue confess!

5. Jesus went down before coming back up

III. So we too must descend before ascending

A. It may sound logical, even obvious, but everything within us resists that ... we don't want to do it

1. We want executive positions but we don't want to work our way up to get them ...

- a) We want joy but no sorrow in this life ...
- b) We say we want authority but we really desire power w/out being under anyone else's power

2. Yet the truth of Lent & Palm Sunday still hits us in the face (WE TOO MUST DESCEND BEFORE ASCENDING)

B. HOW are we to go down before coming up? What's in that basement stop before the elevator lifts us up to the top floor?

IV. I have 2 different kinds of answers, starting w/ the general & moving to the specific (not much I'm saying is new, but I hope that it helps you chart your own journey downward & then upward)

A. 1st, We descend in repentance before God raises us up

1. Note our confessing time in this series ... We've deliberately paused to name our sins before God, but repentance goes a step farther & includes willingness to make a turnaround

2. One of the things which repentance & belief leads to = baptism into J.C. & the church

- a) In the action of baptism itself we visibly see this movement of going down before coming up
- b) Paul gives us beautiful & clear language for this process of descending then rising w/ Christ in *Romans 6:3-5* ... (listen for images of dying then living ... of going down then up, as I read it)

3. By turning toward X in repentance, he raises us up w/ him!

B. Another general way we walk on this journey is not only when we 1st become Xians, but also as disciples by repeatedly & continuously emptying ourselves & letting go ...

1. What does this look like? Here we take our clues from what we heard in Phil. 2:

2. We let go of our selfishness (as it says in **vv.3-4**) ... **think of others' interests, & regard them as better than ourselves**

3. We let go of controlling, grasping behaviors (imitating Jesus in **v. 6**) ... **stop exploiting people & situations to our advantage ... let go of the need to control outcomes**

4. Similarly, we let go of striving to be top dog (to be #1) (note in Phil. 2:6 Jesus “didn’t insist on equality with God”) ... **we stop insisting on getting respect or preferential treatment**

a) A few years ago I came across a quote from a Christian author whose name I can’t track down now:

“If there is really to be room for [the Christ of Holy Week] in my heart, then there is much to be cast out ... it is very well to hail him with glad hosannas on Palm Sunday. He has come to reign – not on an earthly throne, but in your heart and mine. And before he can reign there, the present occupant of that throne, myself, must abdicate.”

(1) How often do we willingly give up power, privileges, or \$, with no thought of gaining something back? Almost never!

(2) This is incredibly countercultural! It’s hard enough in our personal lives, but it’s almost unheard of in the political world.

(a) As we have sat heartbroken the past 2 weeks learning of the horrifying murder of MJ Sharp and his fellow captives in the DRC, I am reminded that powerful people often hold onto their power at all costs.

(b) Some of the crimes that MJ’s United Nations team was sent to investigate involved massacres alleged against the government of the Congolese president ... This president has refused to step down from power even after his elected term expired.

(c) Not surprisingly, increased violence and instability are the results for the long-suffering Congolese people.

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/23/opinion/clinging-to-power-in-congo.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FKabila%2C%20Joseph&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=collection

(3) *And in Syria, it’s also unbearable to watch the horrifying results from a civil war and refugee crisis as that country’s president has stubbornly clung to power, even while being willing to massacre his own people.*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/world/middleeast/his-position-still-secure-bashar-al-assad-smiles-as-syria-burns.html? r=0>

b) What about you & me? Are we ready to abdicate the throne of our hearts so that Jesus can sit there?

c) (*Move to the banner*) All through this worship series, we’ve been

adding richer colors each week, symbolizing how God restores us

(1) But this week the picture I want to leave you with is not a rich multi-colored triumphant one ... that would correspond to the expected colors for welcoming an earthly king

(2) Let us not forget the actions of our Lord Jesus Christ in emptying himself ... *(climb step stool behind banner)* What direction did his journey take him? *(release colored banners, leaving only burlap)* DOWNWARD!

C. If God calls us to continually empty ourselves, what's our reason for repentance ... for this downward mobility?

1. Just this: Only by going down & emptying ourselves can we hope to be exalted
2. As in Rom. 6, *we must die w/ Christ to self before God can raise us up w/ Christ*
3. Repentance and continually emptying ourselves are admirable postures of the mind and heart, but they can seem a little vague

V. So let me suggest a few more practical ways you can go down before coming up this week

A. This is the biggest week of human history ... Make Holy Week special! Don't let it be "just another busy week" that looks like every other week of your life

1. Make time for our Maundy Wednesday service when you physically experience the descending when you wash the feet or hands of someone else
2. Attend the Community Good Friday service @ noon at College Mennonite Church
3. On Friday or Saturday, relive the Via Dolorosa with Jesus by walking the Stations of the Cross @ Pathways Retreat Center

B. Alter something about your personal routines at home to make this week special

1. Make time to read the Passion story in the last few chapters of one of the Gospels ... just let the power of it sit with you
2. If you haven't given up anything for Lent, try some fasting this week ...

- a) Try skipping 1 meal this week & instead spending 15 minutes in prayer or devotional readings
- b) If it's not food you fast from, maybe it's something electronic you do several times a day, like TV or social media. I challenge you to prove that your stomach (or your cell phone or tablet) is not your boss

VI. Conclusion

A. Scriptures today described 2 parallel journeys of Jesus on different levels

1. **On a physical level:** for Jesus to get from Mt. Of Olives to the Temple = literally going down first
2. **On a cosmic level:** we saw that God was not content to sit up there in heaven & watch us perish in our sins ... The Son of God came down to us in order to raise us up w/ him to the exalted right hand of God!

B. God calls us also on a parallel journey

1. 2 weeks ago, I told the Tony Campolo story of the birthday party he arranged for a prostitute.
 - a) Some of you may also have heard Tony Campolo preach his famous message, "*It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!*"
 - b) It is indeed Palm Sunday & some of us can't wait after 6 long weeks of Lent ... but I urge you to let Sunday follow in its own time, after Black Friday ...

2. **Those who get the highest on Sunday are those who have dared to go down low w/ Jesus on Friday & Saturday**

C. Are you ready to go down with Jesus this week?