

Every Tongue Confess



By Reverend Jonathan K. Twitchell

CHURCH OF  THE NAZARENE

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Philippians 2:1-11

Background – Confess

Sometimes called “the hymn of Christ,” Philippians 2:1-11 may have been an early hymn of the church, or even an early creedal confession. Paul repeatedly encourages the believers in Philippi to be united (1:27, 2:1-2, 2:14, 4:2), suggesting that the body of believers in Philippi were experiencing conflict or disagreement. In that context, this passage becomes an exhortation to agree in the essentials of the Christian faith, the core truths of the gospel.

Also called the *kenosis* (emptying) passage, these verses are about the self-emptying activity of Christ. Verses 6 through 8 tell us about the humility and submission of Christ, which is answered by the upward elevation of Christ in verses 9 through 11. In other words, the incarnation is fulfilled in the Ascension, and the Crucifixion is answered in the Resurrection. The passage concludes with the reminder that “every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” (Phil 2:10-11, ESV)

There are multiple ways to understand the word “confess” — we *confess* (admit) our sins, we *confess* (agree) that something is true, or we *confess* (vow) allegiance to something or someone. When we confess faith in Christ, we are essentially doing all of these things – not only confessing our sins, but acknowledging the lordship of Christ and declaring our allegiance to the kingdom of God above all other kingdoms.

Philippians 2:10-11 is likely an allusion to Isaiah 45:23, where we read of God saying: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.” (ESV) Assuming that Paul is drawing on the writings of Isaiah, it becomes clear that in this context “confessing” Christ means “swearing allegiance” to Christ. In the pagan culture in which the Philippian believers lived, this was a countercultural claim that stood in opposition to the claims of the Roman Empire. It was a reminder that Jesus was Lord, not Caesar. The verse was an affirmation that Christians are subjects in the kingdom of God, not primarily citizens in the Roman Empire.

As the Church of the Nazarene works together *to make Christlike disciples in the nations*, we not only look forward to the future day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess, but we desire to help people make that choice today. Even as we give toward the World Evangelism Fund and other ministries, we call our congregations to give entirely of themselves in submission to Christ the King. Confession is a call to whole life stewardship, where every dollar, every word, every deed, and every attitude is held captive to the mission and kingdom of God.

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Worship Service Suggestions

Suggested scriptures to be read during the service

Psalms 8

Psalms 46:1-3, 10-11

Psalms 86:8-13

Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah 45:22-24a

Daniel 7:13-14

Matthew 21:23-32

John 3:1-17

John 13:1-17

Romans 10:1-15

Romans 15:5-13

Revelation 5:1-14

Suggestions for congregational singing

Hymns:

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

"And Can It Be?"

"At the Name of Jesus"

"Blessed Be the Name"

"He Is Lord"

"How Majestic is Your Name"

"I Exalt Thee/We Exalt Thee"

"Jesus, Name Above All Names"

"May the Mind of Christ, My Savior"

"O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

"Our God Reigns"

"How Great is Our God"

by Christ Tomlin, Ed Cash, Jesse Reeves

"In Christ Alone"

by Keith Getty, Stuart Townend

"King of Kings"

by Naomi Batya, Sophie Conty

"Lord, I Lift Your Name on High"

by Rick Founds

"No Other Name"

by Robert Gay

"Open the Eyes of My Heart"

by Paul Joseph Baloche

"Overcome"

by Jon Egan

"Revelation Song"

by Jennie Lee Riddle

"Shine, Jesus Shine"

by Graham Kendrick

"Shout to the Lord"

by Darlene Zschech

"Song for the Nations"

by Chris Christensen

"The Name of the Lord"

By Clinton Utterbach

"We Fall Down"

by Chris Tomlin

"You Are Holy" (Prince of Peace)

by Michael W. Smith

"Your Name"

By Glenn Packiam, Paul Baloche

Popular Worship:

"Amazing Love" (You are my King)

by Billy James Foote

"Ancient of Days"

by Gary Sadler, Jamie Harvill

"Before the Throne of God Above"

by Charitie L. Bancroft, Vikki Cook

"Build Your Kingdom Here"

by Rend Collective

"Christ is Risen"

by Matt Maher

"Come, Now is the Time to Worship"

by Brian Doerksen

"Days of Elijah"

by Robin Mark

"Famous One"

by Jesse Reeves, Chris Tomlin

"He is Exalted"

by Twila Paris

"Here I Am to Worship"

by Tim Hughes

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Sample order of service

Prelude: "Days of Elijah"

Call to Worship: Daniel 7:13-14

Worship in Song:

- "Ancient of Days"
- "Revelation Song"
- "Christ is Risen"

Invocation

Scripture Passages:

- Isaiah 11:1-10
- John 3:1-17

Hymn: "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

Message: Philippians 2:1-11

Response/Prayer Chorus: "We Fall Down"

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn: "Song for the Nations"

Offering

Doxology: "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow"

Benediction: Romans 15:5-6

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Creative Option

At the beginning of the sermon, consider inserting this object lesson as an illustration of how unlikely it is that a large group would agree unanimously about anything. While you will want to avoid anything particularly controversial, you could have a little fun with this — inviting people to stand for their favorite sports team, food, or color (customize this according to demographics of your congregation).

After doing this with three or four different categories, conclude by suggesting that we might all agree that “Jesus Christ is Lord” or that “He is risen! He is risen, indeed!” The point of the exercise is to point out how difficult it is to get a large number of people to agree. As you conclude the creative option, you can segue to the sermon by looking at the context of the Scripture passage (a church with disagreements in Philippi), as well as the key verse — that one day “every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Suggested Mission Stories

The sermon leads toward a story about some missionaries who heard God’s call to build the kingdom of justice, joy, and hope in a land of despair and poverty. [Huacshapata: The Village of Good Soil \(bit.ly/E15HuacshapataEN\)](https://bit.ly/E15HuacshapataEN) tells about two short-term missionaries — Vanessa Ayersman and Wendy Véliz Lequernaque — who spent two years working with the children and youth of Huacshapata, a village outside the largest city in Peru. The story begins with the work of Rachel Kuhn, who caught a glimpse of God’s vision for this desert village.

Sometimes confessing allegiance to the kingdom of God causes us to cross economic, political, and social boundaries in order to glorify the Risen Lord. The call to stewardship is not simply a call to give money and resources, but a call to look at the world around us, envision how the brokenness could be replaced with God’s preferred future, and take steps to participate in that future.

You may wish to choose a different mission story to illustrate the sermon. Here are some other examples:

- [Genesis initiative in Mesoamerica takes church to the cities \(bit.ly/E15GenesisEn\)](https://bit.ly/E15GenesisEn)
- [Sheep without a shepherd \(bit.ly/E15ShepherdEN\)](https://bit.ly/E15ShepherdEN)
- [Missionary Profile: Brian and Julie Woolery \(bit.ly/E15WooleryEN\)](https://bit.ly/E15WooleryEN)
- [Missionary Profile: Scott and Jenni Rainey \(bit.ly/E15RaineyEN\)](https://bit.ly/E15RaineyEN)

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Sample Sermon Outline

Introduction

- Creative Option

Or

- Narrative: Getting people to agree

Scripture Background: Disagreements in the Philippian church

Read Philippians 2:1-11

Exposition

- A call to unity
- Creed, hymn, or affirmation of faith
- Word Study: Confess
 - Admit sins
 - Agree/Acknowledge
 - Vow allegiance
- Paul's appropriation of Isaiah 45:23 helps us understand "confess" to mean "vow allegiance"
- Allegiance to Christ is countercultural: living out our calling as subjects in God's kingdom

Example/Mission Story – [Huacshapata: The Village of Good Soil](#)

Conclusion

- Confession is about whole-life stewardship: money, time, talents, heart.
- Confession is about our words, but also about our actions.
- Confession means that we not only enthrone Christ as king in our hearts, but that we take steps to accomplish the mission of God in the world around us.
- Confession means that we glorify the Risen Christ, looking forward to the time when "every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess."

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Sample Sermon Manuscript

Introduction

Note: Consider using the creative option as a fun sermon opener or utilize this opening narrative, which segues directly from the hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." Charles Wesley uses this phrase to consider how limited we are in our abilities to praise God. Even if we had a thousand tongues, we could never exhaust the inexpressible attributes of God. Wesley's lyric draws upon the words of Peter Böhler, who said, "Had I a thousand tongues I would praise Him with them all."

But if we think of those words in a different way, we might pause to think about a large gathering of people, a thousand (or more), together singing the praises of God. We might imagine a conference, a General Assembly, a Christian concert, or an evangelistic crusade.

Recently, the Casa de Oración (House of Prayer) Church of the Nazarene in Cali, Colombia, hosted its yearly evangelistic event, welcoming 60,000 people to hear two well-known comedians and a gospel message. What a blessing to learn that about 4,800 people accepted Christ as their Savior through that event!

If you've ever been to a Christian conference or convention, you know what it's like to be in that thousand-voice choir – the power, the harmonies, the agreement in purpose and mission. It can be an exhilarating experience as we catch a glimpse of eternity.

And yet, in that massive crowd of people there are a multitude of opinions — types of food, political persuasions, and favorite sports teams. When the worship service concludes, we're probably grateful that they don't all go to the same place for dinner! Indeed, our differences are what make us unique and interesting.

Scripture Background

Have you ever noticed how difficult it can be to get a large group of people to agree on anything? The larger the group, the more complex the decision making process. Even an extended family gathering may require additional food options than a small family gathering. Getting one or two teenagers to agree on a fun youth group activity may be easy; getting a hundred teens to agree on something may be nearly impossible!

Disagreement and division is nothing new to the church, but has been around since the early church. The careful reader of Philippians will realize that Paul is probably writing to a group of people who are struggling with disagreement. Several times Paul exhorts them to be united: to have “one mind striving side by side” (Phil 1:27), to be “in full accord and of one mind” (Phil 2:2), or to “do all things without grumbling and disputing” (Phil 2:14).

And yet, in Paul's letter to the Philippians, he is clear to point out that the day will come when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Read Scripture passage – Philippians 2:1-11

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Exposition

This is such a wonderful passage of Scripture — a beautiful and poetic reminder of all that Christ did for us. You might sometimes hear this passage referred to as the *kenosis* passage, which is a reference to the Greek word for emptying. These verses are like a hymn or poem, reminding us of Christ's self-emptying movement, taking on the human condition in order to lead us through death into life everlasting.

If you look closely at the passage, you'll see that it starts with this downward movement. Verses 6 through 8 tell us about the humility and submission of Christ. He became nothing, He took on the nature of a servant, He was found in human likeness, He humbled himself, He was obedient, and He died on the cross to forgive us of our sins.

But the gospel message doesn't end there, for we know that Christ was victorious over death and the grave. Verses 9 through 11 tell us about the upward elevation of Christ as Lord. He is exalted to the highest place, and given the name that is above every name. In other words, the incarnation is fulfilled in the Ascension, and the Crucifixion is answered in the Resurrection. We know that Christ has died, but we also affirm that Christ is risen!

Paul concludes this hymn with the reminder that one day, at the name of Jesus, "every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Phil 2:10-11) Every knee! Every tongue! A great global agreement on what we already know is true: that Jesus Christ is Lord.

As the world population continues to grow at an amazing rate, it may be difficult to imagine Paul's vision of everyone agreeing that Jesus Christ is Lord. It took until 1804 for the global population to reach 1 billion people, but only 123 years to add the next billion. The 6 billion milestone was reached in 1999, and it only took an additional 12 years to cross the 7 billion mark.¹

Getting 7 billion people to agree on anything would seem to be an impossible feat. And yet, in 2007, it was estimated that 2 billion of those people agreed together as they prayed the Lord's Prayer on Easter Sunday morning.² Imagine that: 2 billion people (nearly a third of the world's population) praying for God's kingdom to come, for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This scripture passage has also been called "the hymn of Christ," and some scholars believe that it may be one of the earliest Christian creeds. If Paul was writing to a divided community, the inclusion of these verses may have been a call to unity, reminding them of the essential components of the Christian faith. Paul reminds them that their unity is found in the earliest Christian confession: Jesus Christ is Lord.

So what does it mean to confess something? The answer is a little complicated, because "confess" can have a variety of meanings. We *confess* (admit) our sins, we *confess* (agree) that something is true, or we *confess* (vow) allegiance to something or someone.

So which meaning does the Apostle Paul intend? Well, if you look at Isaiah 45, you find a verse that is nearly identical — in fact, it's so similar that it's likely Paul is alluding to this verse. In Isaiah 45:23, we

¹ worldometers.info/world-population/

² Kang, K. Connie. "Across the globe, Christians are united by Lord's Prayer." *Los Angeles Times*, in *Houston Chronicle*, p. A13, April 8, 2007

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read that God gave these words to the prophet: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.”

Paul is not just saying that everyone will someday confess their sins. Neither is he saying that we will all simply agree that something is true. If Paul is drawing on the writings of Isaiah, then it’s clear that in this context “confessing” Christ means “swearing allegiance” to Christ. That’s what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In the pagan culture of that day, this was a bold and counter-cultural claim. This confession — this declaration — stood in opposition to everything that the Roman Empire stood for. While those around the Philippian believers may have said “Caesar is lord,” the Christians were declaring their allegiance with a different confession: “Jesus is Lord!” This was an affirmation that Christians are primarily subjects in the kingdom of God, not primarily citizens in the Roman Empire.

Example/Mission Story

As subjects in the kingdom of God, our eyes must be open to what God wants us to do. We ought to align our lives with the priorities of that Kingdom, and conduct ourselves as ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20).

Sometimes we look around us and we see a different kingdom at work: the kingdom of despair, of poverty, of sin, or of oppression. It might be an urban neighborhood plagued by drugs and human trafficking or a rural village struggling with starvation and a lack of clean water. Subjects in the kingdom of God are acutely aware of the transformational power of God, and how God can bring about the kingdom of justice and joy, even in the midst of poverty and despair.

Rachel Kuhn was confronted with one of those villages when she visited Huacshapata, Peru.³ A recruiter with Extreme Nazarene Ministries, she was evaluating this small village nestled high in the Peruvian mountains. Arid and dusty, this village had significant challenges: no running water, no electricity, and no education.

While she was there, Rachel watched a 3 or 4 year-old girl take her small bowl to the pastor to receive bit of soup. The girl sat down in the church, ate half of the food in the bowl, and then said that she would take the rest of it home to share with her family.

In Rachel’s words:

“I got in the taxi to go back down [the mountain] and said, ‘It’s too much, God. There’s too many kids without parents; too much death and poverty; there’s no water; not enough housing; no education. I just don’t know how we are supposed to meet all of these needs. It’s overwhelming.’

“God very, very specifically said to me, ‘Rachel, this dry, dusty mountain desert dirt is good soil, and the seeds that are planted here are going to produce a crop that’s 100 times more than what’s been planted.’”

³ bit.ly/E15HuacshapataEN

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In partnership with the denomination's Global Mission Office and the South America Region 40/40 program, Extreme Nazarene Ministries paired Vanessa Ayersman (USA) with Wendy Véliz Lequernaque (Peru) as a volunteer church planting team. Together they spent two years creating evangelistic programs, small groups, and Vacation Bible Schools. They built a youth ministry, raised money for the teens to attend camp, and threw birthday parties that attracted over 100 people to the little, poorly constructed church building.

Why did they do this? Why would they give up two years of their lives? Because we are resurrection people. We are people of hope. We are people who believe that all things are possible because, as we sang this morning, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling over death by death."⁴ We are primarily subjects in the kingdom of God, not citizens of the kingdoms of this world.

Rachel Kuhn returned to evaluate their work in 2011, and this is what she discovered:

"During that time a school did develop so the children were able to attend school. Huacshapata got power and running water during that time. We got to visit the church and this community. They were doing a big event with teens that night and so we go in to this event and there are almost 100 children and teens ... they have packed out this church. It was absolutely amazing to watch how that promise God had made me in my heart — that this is good soil and I'm going to do amazing things here — was able to come to fruition, that God was doing [this] through His people."

As the Church of the Nazarene works together to make Christlike disciples in the nations, we not only look forward to the future day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess, but we desire to help people make that choice today, all around the world. Through partnerships with organizations like Extreme Nazarene Ministries and JESUS Film Harvest Partners, we work together with God to bring transformation to the kingdoms of this world. This transformation occurs as we live out the future reality where "every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Conclusion

Whether it's 4,800 people in Cali, Colombia, a small village in Huachshapata, Peru, or one next door neighbor, we celebrate the addition of every person into the kingdom of God. The resurrection of Christ reminds us that God is victorious over sin, death, and the grave. This is the certain hope that we have to offer the world around us, inviting others to join us in confessing Jesus Christ as Lord.

Confession is more than simply admitting our sins. It is more than simply affirming a set of doctrines or creeds. Confession is about declaring allegiance to Christ. It is about submitting ourselves first and foremost to the kingdom of God. Even as we give this morning, we hear the clear call: to give ourselves entirely in submission to Christ the King. Confession is a call to whole life stewardship, where every dollar, every word, every deed, every attitude is held captive to the mission and kingdom of God.

Confessing allegiance to Christ is about more than our words, it is also about our actions. It not only means that we enthrone Christ as King in our hearts, but that we are actively engaged in accomplishing the mission of God in the world around us. And as we partner in the mission and kingdom of God, we

⁴ Maher, Matt and Mia Fieldes. "Christ is Risen" from *Alive Again*. (Franklin, TN: Essential Records, 2011).

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glorify the Risen Christ, looking forward to the time when “every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”