***Great Bible Paradoxes***

I want to talk to us today about the topic **Great Bible Paradoxes**. You know, the Bible is a unique book - very different from any other book in existence. Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* The Bible contains 66 books in total (39 in the OT and 27 in the NT) which the Holy Spirit revealed to different men throughout history by a process known as inspiration. The Bible contains God’s mind according to 1 Corinthians 2:12 *“that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”* The Bible is filled with strange yet marvelous spiritual teachings and among them are paradoxes. But what is a paradox? Well, a paradox is defined as a seemingly self-contradictory statement but is in fact true. To some, such Biblical paradoxes may seem somewhat confusing yet such are the very words of God which were written for our admonition and learning. In today’s lesson I’d like to catalog for us several **Great Bible Paradoxes** which are truly amazing.

**(1) Exaltation Through Humility:** The first great Bible paradox has to do with humility. Would you like to know the secret to being exalted? Well, the Bible teaches (and this will be surprising to some of you) that true exaltation only comes through humility. I take you to the book of James 4:10 where James declared, **“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”** Think about that. In order to be exalted I must first be humbled! Perhaps the greatest example of that was Jesus Christ who came down from heaven, took the form of a servant, lived a humble life, and died on the cross. Philippians 2:8-11 says, **“8And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** To die on the cross like that was perhaps the most degrading form of punishment the world has ever seen. Even the Lord Himself despised it according to Hebrews 12:-1-2. But it was through that death that Jesus Christ found the highest form of exaltation. You know, God has never been pleased with those who are proud, boastful, and arrogant. We know that Lucifer in his quest to be exalted eventually became Satan. He wanted to be exalted like God but he fell. Isaiah records in Isaiah 2:12-15, **"12How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! 13For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. 15Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."** The Lord sees to it that all who will desire to be exalted out of His will and timing will ultimately fall. What a contrast Satan and his followers are from Christ who humbled himself but was exalted! Jesus used one incident in particular to teach us the value of humility. In Matthew chapter 20 the mother of James and John came to Jesus requesting that her sons be given positions of special authority in His administration. They wanted to be exalted among the many followers of Jesus. However, the truth path to exaltation in Christ’s kingdom lies not in exaltation but in humility. Notice how the Bible talks about that in Matthew 20 beginning in verse 20: **“20Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. 22But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. 23And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. 24And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.** (It says they were offended at their ambition and at their desire to be exalted above their own) **25But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:** (You know, such honors are customary among the worldly. The kings of this earth raise their favorites to posts of responsibility and power, they give authority to some over others; but Jesus said my kingdom is established in a different manner. All are to be on an equal level – the rich, the poor, the learned, the unlearned, the bond, the free, are all equal. And those who will be the most distinguished will be those who show the most humility!) **28Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”** (Matt. 20:20-28) In order to help them learn this lesson Jesus points them to His own example. He was in the form of God in heaven but He came to the people in the form of a servant. He came not with pomp and glory but as the lowly son of a carpenter. Furthermore, He came to minister rather than being ministered unto being the perfect example of exaltation through humility. On another occasion the disciples came to Him and asked, **“1Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matt. 18:1-4) By the way, when you got dressed for church today did you remember to put on your coat of humility? Peter said in 1 Peter 5:5, **“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”** But there’s another Bible paradox I’d like to share with you…

**(2) Strength Through Weakness:**  The second great Bible paradox is strength through weakness. By the way, do you know when we are at our strongest? Surprisingly it’s when we’re at our weakest! In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul said, **“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”** In this passage we see that, of all the apostles, Paul received an abundance of revelations (more so than any other apostle). Paul wrote 13 of the New Testament books (14 if you include the book of Hebrews). That adds up to about 1/3 of the entire New Testament! With all his God-given privileges and advantages there was always the possibility of becoming proud and over confident so God allowed a “thorn in his flesh” which kept him humble and ever dependent on God. Three times he prayed for the removal of this affliction but God said that His grace was sufficient. In this Paul rejoiced! Would you like the world to see the power of Christ rest in you? Then serve God faithfully in spite of sickness, trials, and troubles. Rejoice in God! We all have weaknesses which God can use to make us aware of our limitations and keep us humble and useful! But there’s another point I want to make that you might see the value of our study…

**(3) Receiving Through Giving:**  Point number three, the Bible also teaches receiving through giving. Paul in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders said, **“I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** (Acts 20:35) The ultimate test of our love for God and man is in giving something that we hold dear. However, giving is quite foolish to selfish people. The world’s philosophy is that it’s much better to work and work, save and save, earn all you can, get rich, and then keep it all for yourself! This is the philosophy which says "Get rich or die trying". However, did you know that some of the most miserable people on earth are those who take and take? On the other hand, some of the happiest people in the world are those who give back. God has always been pleased with those who have an unselfish attitude. God Himself is the greatest giver of all. The golden text of the Bible John 3:16 says, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”** You know, God has blessed us far beyond what any of us will ever need. In fact, one of the reasons we come together on the first day of the week is so that we can give of our means. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says, **“1Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 2Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”** By the way, there’s more that you can give than just money – each of us has time, talents, or certain abilities that we can use to further the happiness of others. Those who give will be blessed! The wise man said in Proverbs 11:25, **“The generous soul will be made rich and he who waters will also be watered himself.”** But let me show you another great Bible paradox…

**(4) Freedom Through Servitude:**  Another thing that the Bible teaches which seemingly defies logic is the concept of freedom through servitude. In Romans chapter 6 Paul said there are two masters a man might serve. Do you know who they are? He said we can either serve sin which leads to eternal death or obedience which leads to eternal life. We’re all servants of somebody – we’re either servants of God or Satan so it’s up to you (and it’s up to me) to decide who it is we’re going to serve. Romans 6:18 says, **“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”** Men think they’re free as long as they are outside of prison cell walls. However, the truth is that there’s another form of imprisonment which is far worse because of its very nature. Do you know what I’m talking about? Did you know that to live in sin is to live a life of bondage? In a heated exchange with the Jews Jesus said, **“31If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? 34Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. 35And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. 36If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”** (John 8:31-36) Many today are enslaved by fear, doubt, hatred, vice, and sin that only add to one’s hardships in life. If you are enslaved in sin the only way you can be set free is through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God! But again, **Great Bible Paradoxes**…

**(5) Gaining Through Losing:** Another great Bible paradox is gaining through losing. I take you this time to the book of Philippians. In Philippians 3:7-8 Paul said, **“7But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”** Materialism and love of money has always been one of the greatest hindrances for people striving to faithfully serve the Lord. People who are materialistic rarely have any thoughts of sacrificing or offering anything for Him who died for them and rose again. After obeying the gospel one must completely devote himself to living a faithful life. After we’re buried with Christ in baptism we’re raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Jesus said, **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”** (Matt. 16:24) Only then can a person be truly satisfied. He said in another place, **“36For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Mk. 8:36-37) You can gain the whole world but lose your own soul or like Paul you can instead lose earthly opportunities but gain Christ and lay up treasure in heaven! The choice is yours! But let me show you something else…

**(6) Living Through Dying:** Another example of a great Bible paradox is living through dying. Jesus said in John 12:24, **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”** Jesus was foretelling His death and uses an analogy of a seed. This is an agricultural and a spiritual principle. You see, the corn of wheat that falls to the ground must first die before it grows and becomes productive. And that’s the way it was with the Lord’s death. Also, as believers we’re dead to sin. Putting to death the old-man of sin is the first step to becoming a successful Christian and this principle is emphasized again and again throughout the New Testament. Romans 8:13 says, **“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”** Death to the sinful nature means to be willfully against the works of the flesh and the mentality, the philosophies, and the vain superstitions of the world. God says that the flesh must be crucified with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24). The more you die to SELF the more CHRIST will live in you! But there’s one more Bible paradox that I want to share with you then the sermon will be yours…

**(7) Finding Through Losing:**  The final great Bible paradox that I want to share with you comes from Matthew 10:39 which says this: **“He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”** People try to find the meaning of life in earthly pursuits, in trying to succeed and prosper, in trying to enjoy their material possessions – only to find out too late that nothing on earth really satisfies the soul. Sometimes we sing the song **Without Him**. Have you ever contemplated what life would be like without the Lord? When you open the Bible and study its pages it becomes evident very quickly that we would be in bad shape had it not been for Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”** If I were to ask you to write down on a sheet of paper the things you can do spiritually without Christ what would you write down? You’d probably turn in a blank sheet. There’s not a single thing you can do in this world from a spiritual standpoint without Jesus Christ! And that fact simply indicates to us that we’re all lost and stand in need of a Savior. Jesus Christ is our savior according to Acts 4:12 which says, **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”** Jesus said in John 15:5, **"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."** Without Jesus you I can do nothing! However, with His help the possibilities are limitless. Philippians 4:13 says, **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”** Without Jesus life would be meaningless and hopeless for *"in whom (that is in Christ) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* (Col. 2:3) To put a price tag on something so valuable is impossible. He is everything that your poor lost soul has ever longed for. Psalm 107:9 says, **“For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”** So how much do you long for the Lord? Are you looking for Him? Are you willing to give up everything in order to find Him? Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-8, **"7Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."** If you're here and you're not a Christian the Lord is inviting you to come to Him today. He extends the great invitation unto all: **"28Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."** (Matt. 11:28-29) The Lord is asking, the Lord is calling, the Lord is knocking. If we can assist you in coming to the Lord through repentance, confession, and baptism please let us know as together we stand and sing.