

Philippians 2:1-4

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[0 : 00] Well, after an offertory like that, I hope my cadence could have that strength of rhythm throughout.

That kind of low, driving, I'm here and I'm going to stay here feel. I tell you what, we have a funky church and I believe we have the best music in the country.

So I'm just going to put it like that. Because you never know what you're going to get here. You're going to get a three-piece classical number one week.

You're going to have some Chicago Southside Blues the next. And we're going to keep bringing it that way. Thank God for Ben Leinard. Just get out, get around.

Go to a few churches and you'll come back and feel good about all that. I'm going to take for my text today the opening three words of verse 2.

[1 : 14] Complete my joy. This is one of the great pleasures of being in a book like Philippians. It allows you to settle in on just a few things.

It is not a 15 verse propelling Wesleyan hymn that's filled with massive foothills and peaks of doctrine.

It is a book more like a chorus. In its simplicity it continues to center on a few things. Like complete my joy.

Now I take this as my text today. Not out of some subjective reading of the Bible. As though all of the four verses in front of us fall before those three words in a way that made some impression upon me during the week.

No, it's not the subjective reasoning of the preacher that takes these words. Complete my joy for that which we're going to walk home with.

[2 : 34] But it's born out of the exegesis and the grammatical emphasis of the text. These words form the single command or imperative around these four verses.

It is the one thing that everything preceding it is moving toward. And it is the same thing that everything that follows it in 3 and 4 come forth from.

Complete my joy. That's the command. And the only one before us today. Complete my joy.

Complete my joy. So. It's interesting then to consider the apostle Paul with an incomplete joy.

The possibility of Paul having joy that is unfinished. Not filled up might be the most wooden way to put it. Indeed, you remember that he in verse 4 of chapter 1 had no problem praying with joy.

And when we saw his present circumstances, and those circumstances were not advantageous.

They were circumstances in which he found himself in jail. And if our supposition is correct, that this is a jail, not like any other jail, but a Roman jail, under Nero, perhaps at the very close of his life, then his circumstances are dire for more than one reason.

[4 : 04] Not only is he in the jail of all jails, but he's closing in on the end of his life. And so that the words that we're reading are words that were penned, knowing for himself that his death might be imminent.

He'd even been wandering between the two opinions of the later parts of chapter 1. And so he prayed with joy. It was no problem for him. And while his present circumstances, verses 12 through 18 of chapter 1, had him in prison, They close with these words, though Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

You could not rob Paul of joy by putting him in jail, by depriving him of all things, by cuffing him, or house arresting him, or restricting him, or disabling him to get his word out to do his thing.

After all, he did this thing, this preaching thing. He was commissioned by God to go all over the world. This was his unique calling. And now it's all been, in one sense, taken away.

And even in that, he had joy. Well, that was instructive for us a few weeks ago, wasn't it? But not only is he able to pray with joy, not only does his present circumstances of imprisonment do nothing to hinder his joy, We saw then, two weeks ago, at the very transition of verse 17 and 18, Yes, and I will rejoice, moving beyond his present circumstances to his consideration of an impending death.

[5 : 45] Death itself, and that by execution, would not rob Paul of joy. This is a man who was, well, if there ever was a joy-filled Christian man, this is him.

I pray with joy. My present circumstances, although they're worse than anyone listening to the preaching this morning, are beyond what they could ever imagine. Even in that, I have joy. And when I consider my death at the hands of an enemy combatant, I will rejoice. So it is a surprise, then, to come to our words, Complete my joy.

It's surprising to think that Paul could be incomplete in any type of joy. And what is it that would leave him unfulfilled in joy? What is it that would diminish his joy?

What is it that would rob him of joy? If not the things that we've considered in the opening chapter?

Yes, it would be the disunity of the assembly in Philippi.

[7 : 03] The apostles' joy was tethered to the local church's unity.

And if he were to hear or to return and to find that there was an isolated spirit among them, an individualism growing up within them, a factious element through them, it would rob him of joy.

This is the truth for the apostle. His joy can be mitigated by nothing other than the local congregation's inability to live in a single-hearted way.

That's why it says, Complete my joy by being of the same mind. And notice that word will return by the end of the verse.

Having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. The unity of the body of Christ in the local assembly at Philippi had the capacity to leave his joy unfulfilled.

[8 : 33] Well, I guess the congregation does have all the power. The same mind, one mind, and next week we're going to see the model having this mind among yourselves.

So let's settle in to Paul's imperative to complete my joy by remaining unified.

Being like-minded. Being on the same page. We all know how tedious it can become to hear the annual recitations of victorious athletes in team sports after the championship is won.

The commentator throws a microphone in front of a coach or a manager or a player and says every year, every sport, tell us how did this team end up to be the team?

And the comments are always the same. Well, you know, it began and they're spraying him with champagne and wiping himself down all the way back in spring training when some of the mature people on the team began to take a lesser role and we all came around one vision.

[10 : 06] You'll hear it every sport in every way. It's tiresome but always true. The victorious teams are the like-minded teams.

I've been an athlete, played through college. I've been on both sides of this ledger so when one wonders, you had so much potential as a team. We picked you higher in the standings before the season began.

What accounted for an 8-15 record rather than a 20-5 record? Well, there was not a good seed in the locker room.

We had a divisive locker room. We had guys that didn't want to be together, didn't want to sit together, certainly wouldn't live together. We had all of this in our team and this is indeed why we failed.

The unity and the disunity of a team are always the indicators of success or failure. They are the manifestations of whether one has the single mind or a divided mind.

[11 : 06] We find this in sports but we also find it in institutions whether it be in business. Some of you work in environments that are pleasing and pleasant and you can't wait to get there.

Well, maybe you can wait but at any rate you don't mind going to work. Others of you are saying, oh, Lord have mercy, may Monday morning never come.

And why is it? Why is it that the work context can be one of the greatest destabilizing influences on your joy? It's because of the disunity within the ranks, the biting, the politicking, the unjust oversight. Think of it in regard to a school, an institution, a university. Might look good on the outside but we've all been in places where we go, wow, world class in some sense but when you actually got in behind the corridors and looked behind the scenes, everyone hates each other.

Everyone would like to kill the other. Everyone wants to do their own thing. These are the defining characteristics of successful life or unsuccessful life. Think of it in regard to marriages.

[12 : 25] Think of it in regard to friendships. Think of it in regard to your condominium association. Disunity sucks joy from life.

And Paul is aware that the congregation at Philippi holds all the cards in the deck that are worth playing. I have joy when I pray for you. I have joy in my present circumstances although you can't even fathom how minimalistic they are.

I have joy when I consider death even at the hands of an enemy. But oh, whether I come to you or not, if I learn that you are not living as citizens of heaven in which we will be walking in fellowship with one another under the lordship of Christ.

If I hear that there is factious spirits within you, if there is a sense of individualism or leveraging relationships among you, oh, I will be diminished of joy.

will to him. And so he says to this congregation that has labored with him from the very beginning, from the first day until now.

[13 : 39] So he says to this congregation that he's not angry at in any way, as you can read through the internal evidence of the letter. Yes, there are signs perhaps that not everything is perfect, but this is a wonderful body, a church that's labored and yet must continue to labor.

There was a presidential candidate some years ago. I'm not going to name him because I don't want you to think I'm for him or against him. Neither. But he had a wonderful line and he said every good and perfect thing stands moment by moment on the razor's edge and must continually be fought for.

That's the church at Philippi. It was a good thing. It was a mature thing. It was a perfect thing in the sense of a full thing. Yet he knew that it stood moment by moment on a razor's edge and must be continually fought for.

And so he says to them, please, as I stand on the precipice of life or death, as I have called you to live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ, as I have called you to do the one thing, walk like a child of the light, know this, fill up my joy by being of one mind, one heart, one accord, one mind, unity.

This is Paul's great self-protective command that he places upon the church.

[15 : 17] when you look at what follows it, verses three and four, it comes with these strong parallel lines.

This negative statement and then a transitional word, but, and that seems to happen on two occasions.

actions. In other words, if you are of one mind, if you are fulfilling the imperative that Paul is putting before you, if the command is there, then here are the manifestations of it.

This is what it will look like. These are the attitudes you will see. These are the actions that will be taking place. So what is it then? if the imperative is to be of one mind, then what are the attitudes and actions that will reveal it?

Here it is. Here are the clauses. Do nothing, there's the negative, from selfish ambition or conceit, but, there's the transition, in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[16 : 28] That counting of others more significant than yourselves has attitudinal force. And then, lyrically, beautifully, in parallel way, he comes with verse four, let each of you look not, there's the negative, to your own interest, but, here it is, to the interest of others.

These are the actions that are manifestations of a congregation that is at one under the lordship of Christ. Paul is quite conscious of the fact that even though he is an apostle, he is not the head of the church, he is not the head of the church in Philippi, it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says to the congregation, may we all live under his lordship, that is my command to you, that whether I live or die, my joy would be complete.

And that which would make my joy complete is knowing that you're of one mind. And if you want to know the expressions and manifestations of that joy, well then, do nothing from selfishness or conceit.

It's an interesting word, selfish ambition, we've seen it earlier in chapter 1, verse 17 or so. There the former were proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition.

[17 : 48] It's a word that's used elsewhere with almost this kind of mercenary force. People were preaching Christ for what they would gain from it rather than the gospel going forth and what it

would give to others.

that they were doing a good thing for what they would get out of it. They felt that, oh, Paul is down, Paul is out, Paul is in prison, I'm going to start getting my pulpit a little larger because it's just going to drive him nuts.

And so they begin to preach out of a sense of wanting to gain something for themselves, to rise in stature, to get a leg up on Paul while he's out, or to leverage the disagreements that Paul knows he has with them while he cannot preach.

Selfish ambition. A congregation where individuals, says Paul, they would not be living in a way where they're leveraging their place in the community among others to gain something for themselves.

conceit, he says. This word has a sense of vainglory.

[19 : 15] It's not that I'm doing what I'm doing in the church to kind of stick it to those who know that they should be doing it and aren't. And therefore I'm getting something out of it.

No, this is a word that says, no, I do what I do so that the glories and the lights and the accolades might actually be coming back upon myself. When that happens, there is a spirit within, and we all know it because it's in us, that we would be motivated to do things because of what we can get from things, or we would be motivated to do things so what others will think of us while we're undertaking these things.

And Paul says that these things, this selfish ambition and this conceit, actually are moving away from one spirit, one mind. And when that begins to happen, well, Paul's joy is going to plummet. He says in verse three, count others as more significant than yourself. There was a legend has it, legend has it that there was an orchestra conductor who was asked a question, what's the most difficult instrument or place to be in the orchestra?

And the response came back, second chair violin. I don't know if it's true or not, that's why I opened this up with legend.

[21 : 00] It's an illustration. The difficulty of playing second chair violin is that you are always in the shadow of the one who first of all has greater capacity in the violin than you and gets all the parts from you and that your playing actually somehow supports the whole in a different way.

Paul says, do nothing where you'll be trying to leverage others for your own gain or do nothing that you might gain glory from what you're doing, but rather consider others as more important than yourself.

Have the attitude of the second violinist. this is true for church and ministry.

This is true for work and your employer and your employees. This is true for your dinner table. This is true for your marriage.

This is true for your friendships. This is true for all your relationships. To take on the attitude that others are more important than yourself.

[22 : 22] And believe me, we all know our own hearts. Someone said, I don't know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I do know what the heart of a good man is like, and it's terrible. Paul, having given his command, complete my joy by being of the same mind, begins now to show you the conduct that will manifest that in the attitude.

And then he goes on, verse 4, let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. It doesn't mean that you're not supposed to take care of yourself.

It says don't only look to your own interests. I know you have things to get done in life, says Paul. I know you've got to be about yourself, but not in the way that Delilah would put it at late night radio like I need a little me time.

No, don't just become self-absorbed in all of your actions. Get done what you need to do for yourself, but begin to look out for the interests of others. This is hard, especially for people who are so accustomed to running things.

By that I speak contextually of myself and others in the majority culture. Reminds me of our dilemma.

[24 : 03] Reminds me of a Methodist minister, Samuel Logan Brengel, who had been a pastor in a fine church and had real spiritual authority and had been used to kind of being in charge, and in 1878 felt the call to move to London and work for the Salvation Army, and he expected that when he would get to London, given his role in previous ministries, would have this great access to whatever Booth would need done.

In fact, it might actually be over time Booth and Brengel, you know. And he landed, and Booth picks up on the spirit of the man.

He could feel it. And Booth said to Brengel that he would accept his services, but it was reluctant and grudging.

He said this, you've been your own boss too long. And to instill humility into Brengel, he set him to work cleaning the boots of the other trainees.

Now, here's the man who led all the other people, now is the one on his knees doing the boots of the people who are yet the trainees who need to accomplish the work.

[25 : 29] That's where Booth put him. because he knew that he needed his spirit, not his ability.

He knew that this man who had long been used to running the show would need to learn under those whom he was serving.

Brengel says, have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic in order to black boots? And then he writes, as in a vision, he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough, unlettered fishermen.

This is the Lord. Jesus. The Son of God. The Incarnate One. The One filled with the Spirit. The One who created the heavens and the earth.

When he saw this vision of him over unlettered fishermen washing their feet, he said, Lord, he whispered it, Lord, you washed their feet, I can blacken these boots.

[26 : 40] And then Brengel, over time, becomes the first United States or American born commissioner of the Salvation Army.

But he doesn't get there except on his knees. The imperative, verse 2, complete my joy by being of the same mind.

The attitude and the actions that will be manifestations of it. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. And this imperative and this attitude and action is grounded in the appeal of verses 1 and 2.

Or, to put it differently, the command in 2 and the conduct that represents it, verse 3 and 4, arise from the fourfold consideration in verse 1.

[28 : 02] Because we all need to ask the question, how in the world am I to be able to do this? How can I be of one mind in the local assembly? I can't even be of one mind with myself.

I can't be of one mind with the people that I don't even have to interact with every day. I can't be of one mind with someone checking me out with groceries. I can't be of one mind with a gas station, nor the gas station pump.

I can't be of one mind at my dinner table. I can't be of one mind in my home. I can't be of one mind and a submissive spirit at work. I just can't do it. Well, here's the appeal.

lyrically put again, so, verse 1, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy.

This fourfold consideration is the air under which the imperative comes. This is the consideration of the Christian community.

[29 : 10] so if or since, I want you to be able to complete my joy by being of one mind and in order for you to do that, it's going to require this attitude and action, but I know that it needs to be grounded in something greater than just yourself or as we already heard this morning, your ability to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and go get it done and start serving and doing the duty thing all the way through.

No, says Paul, since there is some, in one sense, comfort, literally, consolation in Christ.

Consider that for a moment, says Paul, and you might get where you need to go. Think of Isaiah 40, comfort my people. Oh, comfort my people. I have repaid them double for their iniquities.

The comfort that comes to us from God is in a God that is willing to forgive our own sins. Consider if there's any comfort in Christ.

Consider, think for a moment on whether he has done anything to alleviate your place before God.

Consider for a moment what you were like before you entered into a relationship with Christ and you found yourself rebelling against God, continually living on your own accord and under his wrath.

[30 : 30] Consider whether there was some eternal punishment that was due you. Consider whether you were out of sorts with God and going your own way. Consider whether you have ever actually laid your life down before God and said, I give up, I'm ready to follow you.

Paul, writing to a people who have done these things, says, consider, since there is a comfort in Christ, since there is a forgiveness from your sins, since there is an implanting of the mercy of God in all that he has done for you, since there is blood that was shed on your behalf, even long before you thought about turning to him, since he did have you in mind before the foundation of the earth and the world, since he had you, built you, created you, wanted you, loved you, came for you, died for you, if there is any comfort in that, then let's be of one mind.

comfort in love, if there is any comfort in love, and I take this to be the love that comes to you from God, for God is love.

If there is any fellowship from the Spirit, again, all these considerations put your mind on God. If there is any participation, the koinonia, if you know that God is at work in your life, and you do, because you are actually finding yourself able to repent at times and begin to live rightly, then the Spirit is doing that in you, because believe me, you and I don't do that on our own.

I have recently heard of two wonderful stories that have again convinced me that Christianity is true. And both stories are rooted in the fact that I am seeing in the lives of others a participation of the Spirit.

[32 : 20] I have seen relationships. relationships in this week that have been decimated, embittered, rejected, isolated, no talking on either side.

I have seen, I have seen this week, whether you have or not, I have seen people who come to other people, look them in the eye and say, forgive me, I've got to move on with this. I need to be at one with you.

That's participation of the Spirit. Spirit. Because no one else is going to do that. Unless there's something to be gained or some angle to be had.

I even think that last phrase refers to God as the object of it, any affection and sympathy. I don't think it necessarily refers to the affection we might have for one another or the sympathy that we might have for one another.

but I think since the previous three all deal with God, if there's any comfort in Christ or any comfort from the love that comes from God or any participation in the Spirit, which is also of God, then it seems to me that although no object is attached to these words affection and sympathy, it's probably God.

[33 : 36] If you would consider for a moment the affection of God toward you, the sympathy of God toward you, these are the considerations that breathe air into a musty soul that continues to divide and allows one to fall under the gracious command to be of one mind and then to manifest it by laying your life down for the welfare of others.

well, I've gone on too long, but believe me, I could go on today for an hour more. I'm going to breathe.

Yeah, you say that and the rest of them are going, when do we get lunch? Boy, he's all wrapped up today. Here were the words of a song we heard and sang today.

Let lowliness begin to mark my heart within and sorrow for my sin abound. I love them both together.

This, okay, let lowliness begin to mark my heart within and sorrow for my sin, may it begin to abound. Paul wants this from the church at Philippi.

[35 : 11] For their worthy citizenship requires not only an external outward facing toward the world as we saw last week in military form, athletically engaged, without fear of the opponents.

To be a worthy citizen of Christ, says Paul, in chapter 2, verse 4, is going to require an internal dimension, an ecclesial dimension, a church dimension, a family dimension, a relational dimension. Well, we're of one mind. And Paul says, oh, if you do that, my joy will be full. I do not see any imprisonment on my horizon, nor do I, for any knowledge of my own, think that my death might be imminent.

but, in some small way, as a pastor of a local congregation, I do know, within the depths of my heart, that apostolic angst that thinks my joy is ultimately dependent on your unity.

Our Heavenly Father, help us then, therefore, to individually and corporately give ourselves again to the gospel and to the pleasure of living life in the presence of one another that Paul himself and all that apostolic band might have the joy even from a place like here in Christ's name.

[37 : 08] Amen.