

Mindset of Christ

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[0:00] Good morning, everybody. If you have your Bible on you or your Bible app, you may wish to keep it open.

We're going to keep referring back to the passage throughout. And this morning I have been tasked with continuing our sermon series on being centered on Christ, focusing today on the mindset of Christ.

A big task when the Bible actually repeatedly tells us that no one can know the mind of God except the spirit of God himself.

God tells Jeremiah, feel that my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

And yet, by the grace of God, we can begin to know God. His mindset, his ways, through his word, through the person of Jesus, God incarnate, through the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us today.

[1:12] So much so that Paul, when he's writing to the Philippian church, says, If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort in his love, any common sharing in the spirit, any tenderness or compassion, make my joy complete by being like-minded.

Being of one spirit and mind. In other words, when we meet the Lord and we give our lives to him, it should make a difference to the way we live our lives.

We should give ourselves to the spirit's transformation process in us, living for him and like him. And so we need to ask ourselves, what does it mean to be like-minded with Christ?

What does it look like on a day-to-day basis? In the highs and the lows, the stress, the fun, in the resting and the working, the socialising and the retreating, the waking, the rising, the living, the breathing.

In all of that, what does it mean for us to have the mindset of Christ? As we read on in the passage in Philippians, we read in the next breath that Paul tells us, To do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

[2:40] Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, looking to others' interests rather than your own. I think this thing of humility is really key here.

It's an intrinsic part of who the incarnate Jesus, the Son of God, the fully human and fully divine Christ is. Humble.

But we so often conflate humility with self-deprecation. Putting ourselves down, ignoring our strengths and even our God-given gifts.

I once heard a really good explanation of humility. And I'm going to try and demonstrate it. Adam, would you be able to give me a hand on this? Sorry, I didn't warn you about this.

Can you hold the cup?

[3:43] Thanks. Okay, I've got some orange squash here, so hopefully everyone will be able to see it. But we've got this cup here, a glass.

And if the glass is less than full... Adam, do you remember what this is? If it's less than full, it's false humility?

Yeah, it is. It's false humility. It's being down on ourselves. It's batting away well-intended compliments. It's making ourselves small. And that's not what God intends for us.

But if I keep on filling it... If it overflows, it's pride.

It's puffing ourselves up. It's thinking of ourselves above others. It's pushing others down so that we can lift ourselves up. And that's not what God intends for us either.

[4:56] But when the cup is perfectly full, full to the top, not overflowing, not less than full, it's taking up the space it was made to own.

And that's true humility. It's knowing who we are and whose we are. It's appreciating the space that we were made to own and that others were made to own.

It's not puffing ourselves up. It's not putting others down. It's thinking of ourselves well and thinking of others well. Choosing to serve. Choosing to view others in equality and love.

And that's real humility. Adam, thank you. My glamorous assistant, everybody. So, Paul wrote this letter to the Philippian church in about AD 60, 30 years after Jesus had died.

And there was so much to praise the Philippian community for. Their generosity, their commitment to the gospel were two key things. But there was also an infectious lack of humility at work in the community.

[6:11] And Paul was trying to squash it out. I've just finished reading a book called Lydia in which theologian Paula Gooder creates a well-researched, creatively licensed story about Lydia, the purple cloth seller of Acts 16.

Really, really recommend it if you can get a chance to grab it. But it's a book about how those early church Christians found it, living the Jesus way, in a society that was still largely rejecting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as the saviour of the world.

And as I read the book, it became more and more clear to me that social life in those days was all about elevating the self. It's, you know how Jesus said, exalt yourself and God will humble you, but humble yourself and God will exalt you.

Well, in those days, they weren't quite so good at that. Lowering themselves, to lower oneself, was literally the most un-Roman thing that someone could do in this Roman society.

And amongst those both inside and outside of the church, culture was all about elevating the self, proving your worth, improving your status, flaunting everything that you had to elevate your reputation, even at the expense of other people.

[7:46] But Jesus says this isn't the way. And Paul knows it too. And he's reminding the Christians, and he's reminding us today, to live differently, to live like Christ, to be Christ-minded.

And how much do we need to hear that word today? In a world that is obsessed with self-image, climbing the ladder, being influential, having the right stories to tell our social groups, doing the right hobbies, having the right car, the phone, the clothes, the holiday, and goodness knows what else. I'm not sure we're entirely different almost 2,000 years later. And yet we're called to be different. We're called to be marked with Christ-likeness.

As Paul continues, we get this beautiful piece of poetry. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being the very nature God, did not consider equality with God to be something used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man.

[9:09] He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. In a society where lowering oneself was the most unnatural thing to do, Jesus humbled himself by becoming one of us.

And as he humbled himself to dying a criminal's death for us, he loved us. And I wonder if it's humility from which the mindset of Christ grows.

When we humble ourselves, we're able to better see other people around us, the situations that need our attention, the people who need a little bit of extra love.

And I think there's a pandemic going on where we have become so short-sighted, so focused on ourselves that we've lost the ability to see beyond ourselves.

We can watch the news and see acts of war, violence, sexual exploitation, and so many atrocities led not just by our global leaders, but individuals as young as school children and as prestigious as the royal family.

[10:24] And we think to ourselves, well, at least I don't live there or at least my life doesn't look like that. But there are so many other ways in which we are short-sighted. When we get consumed by our own lives and

our business, that we overlook the needs of our friends and our neighbours near and far.

when we take our bad day out on a cashier at the supermarket, when we walk past someone in the street who maybe just needed someone to smile at them today.

And if we look a bit bigger, we only need to look at the state of our earth. We should all know by now that those who are affected the least by the climate crisis, the climate chaos in our world, are those who contribute to it the least.

Every decision we make in this country are making other countries inhabitable. Our support of unethical branding, our lazy decisions around consumption are making communities on the front line of the climate crisis suffer more.

For example, our irresponsible use of AI and chat GPT is using more water than the bottled water companies, the bottled water industry as a whole.

[11:46] Our fast fashion habits and use of single-use plastics consumption is filling up landfills and washing up on shores across the world. Underwear from Marks and Spencers is washing up in beaches in Ghana en masse.

Plastic pasta packaging from Tesco is washing up in Turkey and Thailand. And it makes us uncomfortable to hear those things because probably a lot of us shop at M&S; or Tesco or other similar brands and it's unsettling to be challenged about things that we're so used to.

I've recently been having conversations with my mum about how as Christians should we be maybe just boycotting chat GPT altogether because of its overconsumption of the world's resources.

So we've been researching, we've been finding out if generating images through AI, drawing up risk assessments and using it to smarten up emails as a responsible use of the program and how that compares to flights to go on holiday or an hour-long video call or Google searching wedding resources.

Because we need to allow ourselves to be challenged. This AI stuff is just one example and maybe it's a bit extreme but we need to allow ourselves to be challenged.

[13:14] We need to not get stuck in our ways without questioning our methods, without thinking about the consequences beyond ourselves, beyond what we see in front of us.

Because when we're called to live like Jesus, to have the same mindset as Christ, I believe that we are being called to think beyond ourselves in the everyday way we live our lives.

And that's as much to do with the practical part of our lives as it is to do with the spiritual part of our lives because we can't separate the two when we're called to live like Jesus.

We see this point clearly in Luke 14 when Jesus goes to the home of a Pharisee for a Sabbath meal. These very high profile, very elitist social occasions were about showing off status and worth, clothing yourself in expensive cloth, presenting yourself as ceremonially and ritually pure and making everybody else around you know that you kept the law.

And so Jesus finds himself here, potentially in the host's courtyard where other less elite, less important, less holy people could listen in to the conversations.

[14:32] And Jesus sees a man with abnormal swelling in his body. And knowing that if you healed this man then the religious leaders would take offense, they'd jump down his throat, they would plot to kill him as they so often did.

Jesus asks them whether or not it's lawful to heal somebody on the Sabbath. And they stay silent. He reaches out, he touches the poorly man and he's healed.

And he turns to the others and says, well wouldn't you do the same thing if it was your child, if it was your ox who needed help? See in this very strange story, Jesus habitually, he shows us what he habitually does.

He puts his reputation at risk in order to tend to those who need his help, his care, his healing.

Jesus doesn't wait for people to approach him, he goes out of his way to approach them.

The Samaritan woman at the well, he didn't have to walk through Samaria. Every other Jewish person would walk around the country. But Jesus made a point of going through the town where most Jews would walk the long way around to meet her.

[15:52] All those lepers that Jesus healed, well, they were excommunicated. They had to live on the outskirts. They wouldn't just bump into Jesus on their wanderings.

Jesus went out of his way to meet them. The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, who touched out and reached Jesus' cloak and was instantly healed.

Jesus might have just brushed it off as a job done. But he stopped in order to look her in the eyes, to call her daughter, to name her healing and give her a sense of being seen, of belonging, something that she wouldn't have had for a really long time.

All of these things, being touched by ill people, talking to people who were living sinful lives, talking with women full stop, it all put Jesus at risk.

And yet Jesus, as Paul writes, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant.

[17:02] Being made in human likeness and being found in appearance a man, he humbled himself to death, even death on a cross. The message version puts it like this.

Think of yourselves the way Christ thought of himself. He had equal status with God, but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.

Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human. Having become human, he stayed human.

It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death.

And the worst kind of death at that, a crucifixion. In coming to earth, Jesus lowered himself, something so counter-cultural to the place he was born.

[18:10] He didn't live a holier-than-thou life, giving us an unattainable example. Yet, in his very true godness, he humbled himself to very true humanness.

He might not have come like everybody thought the Messiah was going to come, on a stallion wearing battle armor, deposing kings and governors who oppressed the Israelites.

Instead, he came to earth as a baby, born in an animal shelter, laid in a feeding trough. He grew up as a carpenter's son and when it was time to enter Jerusalem to die for us, he came humbly, riding on a donkey, not coming in on a red carpet, but coming in on a carpet of palm leaves.

And then, the sinless son of God, the perfect one, without flaw or blemish, looked beyond himself to the rest of humanity. He humbled himself as far as it is possible to humble oneself, becoming obedient to death, the worst kind of death, a criminal's execution.

He was killed under the charges of treason, rebellion against God and blasphemy, claiming to be God, thus encompassing all of our sin, all of our rebellion against God, all of our trying to be God in our own lives.

[19:35] In the greatest act of humility, Jesus died for us so that he could restore us to himself. He took our sin and our shame and our brokenness and therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, as it says in our reading.

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We don't have to make our own reputations. Jesus tells the Pharisee that those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

A good reputation comes not from a life lived for self-affirmation but for the glory of God. I've recently been struck by the story of Mother Teresa who was called to work with the poor, the vulnerable, the destitute, the drug-addicted people of Calcutta.

She laid down her life for the sake of God's calling on her life and when she was given a Nobel Prize for her work, she said anyone who thought her life was about social work or even compassion had it backwards.

[21:06] She simply lived her life in prayer and everything that happened then was an accidental response to her answered prayers. She prayed and

she was open to God using her as an answer to her own prayers.

And as she did, lives were changed. Never living for self-glorification, the irony is that Mother Teresa is a greatly renowned name today because instead of looking to her own need or even the approval of the people around her, she gave her life to God.

She acted out of response to her relationship with Him, having the mindset of Christ, not concerned with her reputation but humbling herself in obedience to Him when that led her to the slums of Calcutta where there was a great need for someone with the heart and mind of Christ.

Having the mindset of Christ is so countercultural. It's a pivot from a me-first society that we live in. But when we call ourselves the body of Christ, that's inseparable from the mindset of Christ.

If we're to be His followers, we need to be leaning into Him, to His word, to His heart so that we can adopt the mindset of Christ.

[22:35] Choosing love, choosing obedience, choosing humility. And so, as we come to the end, I wonder what it looks like for each of us.

What does it look like for us to have the mindset of Christ? how will we look beyond ourselves to the lives of our neighbours, both near and far?

How will we humble ourselves in obedience to the one who humbled Himself in obedience to death? Jesus promises us that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted.

He doesn't promise it will be an easy ride, but He does promise that when we live for Him, trusting and submitting to Him, choosing to adopt His mindset, He will do the work of raising us up at the right time, to the right place.

And isn't that such a beautiful promise? Amen. Amen. Thank you.