

In it Together: A Shared Humility

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] So the reading is Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 to 11 and that can be found on page 1180 in the Church Bibles.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[1 : 25] Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Vicki, thanks for reading. Morning, everyone. For those who don't know me, my name is Simon Dowdy, and I'm the lead pastor here, and we're delighted you're here at Grace Church this morning. Now, let me pray for us as we look at Philippians chapter 2, as we continue our series in this wonderful letter. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we pray as we hear your words this morning. Please, would you indeed revive our souls, make us who are naturally simple, wise. Please, would you rejoice our hearts and enlighten our eyes.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. A few years ago, the author David Yankovitch wrote an influential book called Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down.

[3 : 10] He describes how a previous generation, I guess those who lived through the Second World War, lived very much with an ethic of self-denial and the duty to serve others, and yet how in the last 30 years or so, that ethic has been completely replaced with an ethic which he calls duty to self.

In other words, you and I live in a culture where the priority is self-fulfillment, and rather than seeking to serve others, our instinct is instead to serve ourselves.

And it is that duty to self-ethic which he talks about, which makes the letter of the church in Philippi so very challenging for us. So far, we've seen that all those who belong to Jesus Christ are citizens of heaven.

We've seen that the mark of someone who is indeed a citizen of heaven is that we stand together and contend together for the public truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We saw that back in chapter 1, verse 27. Do open the Bible if you've closed it. Philippians chapter 1, verse 27. This, in a sense, is the kind of central appeal of the whole letter.

[4 : 27] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, sorry, chapter 1, verse 27, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And although the church in Philippi is going well, in many respects this is a letter and it's full of joy, there are two things which will stop the church in Philippi and by extension us doing that.

The first is opposition. We saw that last time in chapter 1, verse 28 to 30, at which point, I guess, when opposition comes our way for following Jesus, for seeking to make him known, the great temptation is to keep a low profile and to back off from contending for the message of Jesus.

Why? Well, because in a culture where everything is about the duty to serve self rather than the duty to serve others, then what matters most is protecting myself.

The other thing which will prevent us from doing that is self-interest. And we can see that in chapter 2, verses 1 to 4. Notice, will you, in verse 2, how Paul says very much the same thing, but three times.

[5 : 58] As he says, be of the same mind, have the same love, be of one mind. Just as he said in chapter 127, that he longed for them to be standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

It's all about having the same in-it-together mindset as a church, striving together to make Jesus known for the sake of the gospel.

It's what we've seen, isn't it, throughout this letter to the church in Philippi, working, in other words, for the salvation of others before anything else. What's the big enemy of that?

It is pure and simple self-interest. Verse 4. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Because, of course, in a culture which is all about serving myself, then self-interest is always going to trump serving others and serving others for their salvation.

[7 : 14] So then, opposition and self-interest. And if you belong to Jesus this morning, and if you're anything like me, then you know those are precisely the two things which stop you and therefore stop us as a church being more effective at chapter 1, verse 27, standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

I know in my heart that is the case. And I guess most of us, if we're spiritually attuned to ourselves, then we all know that is the same case for us as well.

Which begs the question then, how can we have this in-it-together mindset in the face of opposition and in the face of the temptation simply to live for ourselves?

Well, it is about, as the Apostle Paul says, having the mindset of Christ. Chapter 2, verse 5, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

And in the verses that follow, the Apostle Paul wants us to consider two great truths. Firstly, Jesus Christ, the selfless slave.

[8 : 39] Verse 6, Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Now, in a sense, you couldn't wish here for a clearer statement about who Jesus Christ is. He is in the form of God. The form of God here is the equivalent of what the Old Testament speaks of when it speaks about the glory of God.

It's the very essence of God. In other words, Jesus Christ, from eternity past to eternity future, he is clothed, if you like, in the garments of divine majesty and splendor.

If you think about the most resplendent sunset or the brightest star, all these things, they pale into shades of gray before the splendor of Jesus Christ, the divine Son, God in the flesh, the one who is the perfect revelation of God himself.

Paul then goes on, doesn't he, to speak about Jesus' equality with God, which, again, is just another way of saying that he is truly God. All the attributes of God live in him.

[9 : 55] He is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise, pure. And yet, astonishingly, verse 6, he did not count equality with God, as something to be grasped.

By which, Paul doesn't mean that Jesus isn't equal with God. Rather, that word grasp means he didn't use it for his own advantage, to serve himself.

So, yes, Jesus is fully God and he's all-powerful, but he doesn't use that power for his own gain, for his own reputation.

As Andy reminded us earlier, when the Lord Jesus came into our world, he didn't flaunt his power. He wasn't self-serving, so unlike the leaders that we are used to.

How unlike politicians, so often, who seem to use their power for their own advantage, or the business leaders who wield their authority for their own interests? You see, have a look at the verse again.

[11 : 07] This is the heart of the decision that Jesus Christ made when he came to earth, not to use his power and authority for his own advantage, but, verse 7, made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

It's not, of course, that he ceased to be God when he came to earth. No, rather, that he emptied himself as God into the form of a servant, literally a slave.

In the first century, a slave had no rank, no rights, no privilege, no status, no power, no significance. It is extraordinary, you see, it means that as we see God in Jesus Christ, we see that God is prepared to take everything that he possessed, every advantage, every privilege, every possession, and to give them up for the salvation of others.

Is that not astonishing? And he did so, verse 6, precisely noticed because this is his very nature. nature. It is at the heart of his very nature to do this.

You see, let me ask, what is your view of God this morning? Do you see him as perhaps a bully, a demanding taskmaster, someone who likes to throw his weight around, someone who is unreasonable in the demands that he makes?

[12:50] No, at heart, he is a servant. A slave. When we were on holiday a few years ago in a remote corner of Wales, we went to church on a Sunday.

We found ourselves sitting next to, not by, just the way it worked out, really, next to a senior Church of England bishop and his wife. They were also on holiday. He wasn't wearing a purple shirt, he wasn't wearing a mitre, he was just wearing his walking shoes and his waterproof jacket, essential in Wales.

Afterwards, coffee, a member of the congregation, they were celebrating their birthday and so she was handing out cake to various people on plates, to all of us in fact, on plates.

And at one point, a little boy, he must have been about five or six or so, having been given this cake, he then dropped it all over the floor, obviously terribly upset, and yet it was the bishop who was the first person on hands and knees picking up the crumbs of the cake and cleaning the floor, taking the form of a servant.

He was much quicker to do it than any of the rest of us. Well, there is the mindset of Christ. But notice it's not simply that Jesus came to serve, he did so, verse 8, for a purpose.

[14:15] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Now, it may well be that the Apostle Paul here is deliberately echoing Isaiah 53 in the Old Testament, where God speaks of his servants who will come and die for the sins of his people, the one who will bear the punishment that is rightly theirs.

so that it might be forgiven. The Lord Jesus died the most shameful death of all. In polite Roman society, the word cross would not be mentioned.

It was an obscenity. And yet, in the death of Jesus on a cross, God has indeed demonstrated his true nature, taking on the role of a slave, pouring himself out for others, to win the forgiveness of sins for their eternal benefits and salvation.

As such, therefore, Jesus shows us what it means to have a heavenly mindset. Verse 5, this is the mindset you and I are to have.

Yes, of course, we are to marvel, we are to wonder that this is at the very heart of God's character to take the form of a slave.

[15:51] But God doesn't want us just to stay there. He wants us to consider the implications for our own mindsets. As citizens of heaven, you and I are to take everything we have and everything we are, all the rights, privileges, all the status, the power, the position that we have, everything which we may think we've achieved in this life and use them in the sacrificial service of others for their eternal benefits and well-being.

Striving side to side with others for the sake of the gospel and making Jesus known. Spending our time, energy, reputation, money, resources for the eternal well-being of others, both those who aren't Christian as well as those who are.

Why should we do that? Why strive side by side as a local church seeking to make Jesus known, however costly that might be? Well, because Jesus Christ is the model heavenly citizen who serves others for their eternal benefit.

selfless slave. Secondly, Jesus Christ, the vindicated Lord. Now, did you notice when Vicki read this, the very surprising beginning of verse 9, therefore, God has highly exalted him.

Therefore. Meaning, precisely because he has humbled himself, God has now exalted Jesus and lifted him up to the highest possible place.

[17:44] You see, Paul wants us to look at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He wants us to look at his ascension to heaven and to see that here is the evidence of God's divine approval of his son, of Jesus' selfless suffering in the service of others.

I wonder if at home you have a sort of special showcase or a table or just a kind of corner where you put things on display because in a sense you want the whole world, or at least everyone who comes into your home, to see what's on display, to see how brilliant they are.

There might be a prized family photo, it might be a music award, it might be a sports trophy or graduation photo or something like that, or perhaps on your social media profile, you've done a similar kind of thing.

These are the things you want to display to the whole world because they are brilliant. Well, that is precisely what God has done for Jesus.

Highly exalted, put on display for all to see. By raising him from the dead, by through his ascension back to heaven, God has proclaimed to the whole universe that the life Jesus lived on earth as a selfless slave precisely illustrates the mindset and the life that delights him, that brings him pleasure.

[19:17] He wants to showcase it for everyone to see. you and I need to grasp that, don't we?

You see, if we are followers of the Lord Jesus, who will thank us for living a servant lifestyle for the sake of the eternal welfare of others? It can feel very lonely doing so.

It can be very costly doing so, especially when we live in a culture which speaks of not serving others but serving myself. Indeed, I have a duty to serve myself.

When self-advancement is the name of the game. Or, you know, perhaps when you, if you still get a weekend newspaper, but if you do, then, or if you look at a newspaper online, you think of all the different kind of weekend supplements you get in the weekend newspaper, and it's all about, isn't it, me, me, me, serving myself, the travel section, and suddenly you're kind of off thinking, oh, it would be great to go there and there and there, the property section, oh yes, we could do with upgrading, the lifestyle section, the money section, the sports section, it's me, me, me.

Now, living a life of sacrifice to the eternal welfare of others can seem very lonely in a culture where the duty to self ethic is the ethic that prevails. Yet, verse nine, this is the very attitude that God loves.

[20:47] It's the mindset to which he gives his wholehearted stamp of approval. It delights him to see his son having lived like that.

It delights it when his people live like that. But that is not the only encouragement of verses nine to eleven, because the apostle Paul also wants us to understand the significance of the position to which the Lord Jesus has now been raised.

have a look at verses nine to eleven again with me. Therefore, God has exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Father. Now, I think to see the full significance of this, we need to turn back to Isaiah chapter forty-five. So keep a finger in Philippians chapter two and turn back to Isaiah chapter forty-five. Isaiah is generally, it's in the middle of the Bible, so it's easy to find, and it's big, which makes it easier to find. It's on page seven hundred and thirty-four, if you've got the same version of the church Bible that I've got.

[22:08] Now, Isaiah forty-five is a glorious chapter in which God shows us what it means for him to be the Lord God who reigns over everything.

Isaiah forty-five verse twenty-two, as he says to the whole world, turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn from my mouth has gone out in righteousness, a word that shall not return. To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.

Only in the Lord it shall be said of me, our righteousness and strength. To him shall come and be ashamed, all who were incensed against him.

Now just notice what's going on here. Here is the one true living God. How does he describe himself? He is the one before whom every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that he is indeed the Lord God, the King of kings of this whole world.

[23:15] Even his enemies, verse twenty-four, who were incensed against him, will be put to shame as they are forced to acknowledge who he is. So turn back to Philippians 2, verses nine to eleven, and what do we see?

that Jesus Christ has now assumed this mantle. He has been given this name. He is the one to whom every knee will bow.

Is that not amazing? Every knee will bow before him in recognition that he is Lord. Having been raised from the dead and ascended to heaven, Jesus is declared to have the title which is above every other name in the universe.

A while back, there is a wonderful story in the media about a schoolboy called Reuben Hayden who was repeatedly bullied at school and he decided to go to the highest authority in the country. So the eleven-year-old stood on a train to London.

He made his way to Buckingham Palace hoping to see the Queen. Well, he was taken in by the palace staff. They cooked him some sausages and got some baked beans out of a tin.

[24 : 32] I was quite surprised actually that sausages and baked beans exist in the palace but apparently they do and they rang his mother. And he later explained, I wanted to see the Queen because she is the most powerful person in the country and I was hoping she would sort out the bullies.

It's a rather wonderful story. Well, Philippians chapter 2 shows us there's something even more powerful than the Queen or the King now. the Lord Jesus Christ, the one before whom every knee shall bow, who will sort out not only the bullies but everything else as well.

Can you see what Paul is saying to the Christians in Philippi where the culture shouts at them all the time that the Roman Emperor Caesar is Lord?

Lord? Can you see what Paul is saying to the church in Philippi where the root cause of the opposition they face, and we've seen this over the last three weeks or so, is the fact they won't bow to Caesar as Lord.

And yet even Caesar will have to recognize and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is a selfless slave, Jesus the vindicated Lord.

[25 : 52] thirdly, the big question. Because this is the big question I've been asking myself this week, I think it's probably the question we all need to ask.

Do we know God? It's such a simple question, isn't it? I guess you could ask the quails the same question in Sunday Club this morning.

Do you know God? Do you really know God? I guess it's a question most obviously to ask if we're looking on the Christian faith.

We're delighted you are here. But what is your view of God? A tyrant, a bully, a God who doesn't get his hands dirty, a God who throws his weight around? Think again.

In Jesus Christ, God has shown his true nature, taking the form of a slave, pouring himself out in the service of others. He uses his power not to serve himself, but to serve others.

[27 : 01] It's in the very nature of God to do this. Or perhaps you're reluctant to follow Jesus because you think he'd ruin your life. Or perhaps you're reluctant to follow Jesus because you find it difficult to trust people.

and you find it difficult to trust him. Or perhaps if the truth be told, you think you'd be better off serving yourself than serving him.

Think again. But it's also a question those of us who are followers of Jesus need to ask, do you know God? I mean, do you really know God?

I take it if we do, then we'll be willing to set aside self-interest for the salvation of others. Because we're absolutely convinced that that is precisely the mindset that God delights in.

it will mean we're willing to suffer opposition and persecution for the salvation of others because we know that Jesus is Lord. Because we know that one day even the most vigorous opponents of the gospel will have to acknowledge that he's Lord and bow the knee to him.

[28 : 23] So here's perhaps a follow-up question to ponder later on in the day. where do self-interest and the fear of opposition of what others think hit the road for you in terms of therefore being unwilling to stand side by side with others for the sake of the gospel?

In other words, at what point do you feel that striving side by side with others simply becomes unreasonable, if I can put it like that? Because you see, this is the mindset shift that's needed if verse 5, we are to have the mind of Christ.

What is it for you? I'd love us to spend some time later on in the day pondering that. Perhaps it's when your personal comfort is threatened. self-interest means that actually your priority in life is your career or fitness or perhaps just having an easy life.

Whatever it is, why not write them down and then having done so, read through prayerfully Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 8 again.

And pray that you'd have the mindset of the Lord Jesus, who made himself nothing, who took the form of a servant, a slave, and who humbled himself unto death.

[30 : 06] I take it if we really know what God is like, we'll be willing to suffer for the gospel. We'll be willing to put aside self-interest for the gospel.

Of course, it may well be that you're here this morning and actually what you need to take away from these verses is not so much the challenge, but the encouragement. You long to make Jesus known.

You do stand side by side with others to do that. At church, at work, at school, in your circle of friends. And it's costly. It's costly in terms of time, it's costly in terms of energy, it's costly in terms of resources.

As you pour yourself out to others serving the gospel, you don't have the free time which perhaps others have around you. And yet this pouring ourselves out for others is the very mindset that God loves.

It demonstrates the mindset of Christ himself. It's the very mindset that God has vindicated and which he delights in.

[31 : 18] Let's have a few moments of reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him. Heavenly Father, in the world we live in where we see the abuse of power everywhere and where we see the whole world simply serving their own interests, we marvel at the very heart of your character, the Lord Jesus humbling himself even to the point of death on a cross.

We praise you for the salvation that he has won for those who trust him. We praise you that he is now exalted to the very highest place. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that as individuals and as a church, we might indeed be those who share this same mindset of the Lord Jesus as we strive together side by side for the sake of the gospel in the face of opposition and against self-interest. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.