

A life Worthy of the Gospel Part 1

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[0 : 00] Now, I wonder what goes through your mind whenever you need to buy a gift for someone. There's lots of things to think about, isn't there? But aside for, let's say, let's put aside how much money you have to spend, or for some of you it might be the other way around, how little you think you can get away with spending.

Put aside what people like or what they need. Those are things that we need to think about. But I'm also sure that one of those things would be that you want to find the right gift for the right occasion. That is, you want the gift to properly reflect the significance of the occasion. So, for instance, I would suggest that a gift that you might buy for an office Kris Kringle is not quite appropriate for a wedding gift.

But you also may want to buy a gift that properly reflects your relationship with the recipient. So, for instance, a gift that a parent gives to her only son at his wedding should be worthy, not just of the occasion, but also of that relationship.

It would be a very different kind of gift than, let's say, a colleague might give to that person. Well, we spent the last two weeks looking at the importance of the Gospel. So, in week one, Paul explained how the Gospel defines us, our identity in Christ and our community in Christ.

[1 : 24] Then last week we saw how the Gospel determines our dedication in life. Paul gave his life wholly to the advance of the Gospel and he encouraged the Philippians and us to do the same.

Well, this week Paul turns his attention to how we are to live, how our lives should reflect the worth of the Gospel. Just like a gift reflects the worth of the relationship between the giver and the recipient, so our lives as Christians should reflect the worth of the Gospel.

So, you might notice in verse 27 that that's how Paul begins. He says, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. This is Paul's overriding principle in tonight's passage and indeed for the whole letter.

He's saying, whatever happens, whether there's good times or bad times, the Philippians are to live in a manner that reflects the true value of the Gospel, that makes the Gospel shine in all its glory. Now, last week Paul's focus was on his life as an individual, his personal dedication to the Gospel. But this week, the focus is on the Philippians as a body, as a church, and how they will live together and how they will relate to each other.

[2 : 43] So, notice the words conduct yourselves. That's in the plural. And the verb that Paul uses here is actually one which describes an individual's conduct as a citizen.

Nowadays, everyone's a citizen, right? Most people are citizens. But in those days, Roman citizenship was actually a privilege. Only some people got it. And with citizenship, there came not only privileges, but responsibilities as well.

There was a duty to carry oneself in a certain manner, worthy of the title of citizen. And so, Paul is using this metaphor of citizenship and applying it to the saints in God's kingdom.

He's urging them to conduct themselves in a way that befits their honor and their privilege as saints. They have been given life in God's kingdom.

Now, they need to live up to it. And not because by doing that, they can somehow justify their own salvation. No. But rather to show the true worth of what they've received.

[3 : 44] And one of the key ways they are to show it is in their life together. So, things like personal godliness and commitment, yeah, those are still important. But that's not Paul's focus here tonight. Rather, he's interested with how believers act together and how they relate to each other.

And so, Paul gives us two aspects or two pictures of what that looks like. And those are my two points in the sermon outline. Two things that help people to see the worth of the gospel. So, what are they?

Well, the first, from verse 28 to verse 2 of chapter 2, is that of being united or having unity against opposition. Of standing together even in the face of adversity.

The second, from verse 3 to 11, is that of humility or being humble towards each other. So, let's look at the first point, unity against opposition. And the phrases that Paul uses to describe this are found in verse 27.

So, he says, I want you to stand firm in one spirit to contend as one man or one in unity for the faith of the gospel. But then further in verse 2 of chapter 2, he uses phrases like being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

[5 : 01] Now, the backdrop for all these phrases, of course, is that there is opposition to the gospel. And this opposition comes from both people outside the church. Today, we might think of people like atheists.

But also, those inside. People who may consider themselves as Christians and yet are dividing the church in what they teach. Now, many people think mistakenly, I believe, that when the Bible calls for unity, that what it means is that we just need to stick together no matter what.

That the institutional church must be kept together at all costs. And so, if there's disagreements, well, you know, we just sweep them under the carpet because we need to be united.

So, we see that, for example, globally with the Anglican communion, where there is such a desire to keep all the churches around the world together, that it overrides the duty to hold each other accountable to the truth.

But just look at the words that Paul uses here. Stand firm, contending as one man. Verse 28, not being frightened by those who oppose you. So, you see, unity is not some fuzzy notion, is it?

[6 : 13] Some superficial kind of peace. Rather, what unites us is the gospel. It's the truth that is contained in the gospel. It is this truth that gives us unity of purpose and mind.

Paul says in verse 1 of chapter 2 that our unity is with Christ. First and foremost, it is with Christ, not with each other. And then when Paul, two phrases later, then talks about fellowship or common sharing in the spirit, that word there we looked at two weeks ago is koinonia.

That is the partnership that we have in the gospel of working together for a common goal. And so, we have to measure everything against the gospel.

If people are denouncing Christ or mocking our faith, then they are opposed to the gospel. But so too are those who call themselves Christians and yet somehow distort or change the gospel.

So, if someone doesn't believe that Jesus is God, or he doesn't believe that Jesus died and rose physically from the dead, or if they don't teach that salvation is by grace alone, or that all humans are sinful and under God's judgment, if there is no call for repentance in order to be saved, then these are all signs that they are distorting the gospel.

[7 : 33] Further, if anyone adds to the gospel by saying that, yep, I believe all that, but on top of that, in order for you to be saved, you need this extra something. Maybe it's a special blessing like, you know, the gift of tongues or something, or you need to practice some extra thing like fasting or whatever.

These then too are distortions of the gospel because what they're doing is they're saying that Jesus is not enough. His death is not sufficient. You need more than just Jesus to be saved.

And when somebody teaches that, that is no longer the gospel. Now, it's important for me to say here, however, that even when people distort the gospel, our first response is not to condemn them. Rather, contending as one means, firstly, that we gently try to correct them. We explain to them what the truth is and urge them to repent and change. It's only when they continue willfully to teach these things, things that are clear in the Bible, that we then separate ourselves from them because they are no longer of the same mind and purpose.

But even then, we are able to do it not in a combative or aggressive manner. Instead, Paul says that all we need to do, really, is to stand our ground.

[8 : 50] We're in the right place. When we've received the gospel, we've believed what is true. So he says, don't be so easily scared off by people saying this or that.

And so if you look in verse 28, that's the picture that Paul gives us. The word Paul uses for being frightened is actually a word that's used to describe a herd of horses that's startled by a loud gunshot, let's say.

And then, you know, when that happens, if you've seen some of these movies, they stampede in all directions. That's the word that Paul uses. Paul doesn't want the Philippians to be like that, but to

keep calm and defend the gospel.

So last night, most of you know about the keep calm posters. Well, last night, I actually created a keep calm poster for myself. It says, keep calm and defend the gospel. If you're interested and you want to put it on your t-shirt, you can come and talk to me afterwards.

I'll email it to you. Free of charge. But that's what Paul wants us to do, isn't it? Not be frightened, keep calm and defend the gospel. And when we do that, Paul then says that it's a sign, verse 28, first to those in opposition because they cannot change or defeat the gospel and so they will be destroyed.

[10:02] But secondly, it is also a sign of encouragement for us that those who stand firm will be saved and that from God.

So friends, let me encourage you not to be fearful. We are increasingly being attacked, aren't we, in Australia? People are calling us bigots for our beliefs, dinosaurs for not moving with the times.

We've read all that, we've heard all that. But the thing is that if something is the truth, by definition, it cannot change. Truth remains the truth. And so, if we believe the truth, then we need to stand firm and not change and not be moved.

Now, Paul gives us another reminder that, further encouragement really, that opposition actually isn't unique to us. Sometimes we're in it, we think that we're alone. But Paul says, no, Jesus experienced it and suffered for it.

And so, verse 29, we're called just, not just to believe in Jesus, but also to suffer for him. And then Paul says, well, what's happened to Jesus happened to me too and happened to the Philippians.

[11:15] For he says next, that, for you are going through the same struggles that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. And so, all through the history of church, Christians have been suffering for Jesus.

And that is a sign that we will be saved. So, let's keep calm, stay united, even in the face of opposition. Now, the second picture that Paul paints, and we're going to move on now, is that of humility.

And in fact, the first and the second picture are actually related, the first and second dot points. Because Paul says that in order for our unity to hold, what it takes is for us as individuals to be humble.

I've separated verses 1 to 4 into the two headings, but actually, in the text, it's the one sentence that Paul is speaking. And so, what he's saying is that humility actually follows on from unity.

Humility follows on from unity. Unity, as it were, is like the visible outcome, but humility is the glue that holds the unity together.

[12:26] It is what the individual believers need to have in order to live in unity. I don't know whether you've had this experience or looked around, but, you know, often in companies or, you know, maybe at uni with a sort of group assignments, projects and ventures fail, don't they?

And this, despite the fact that the group is united in its goals. Everyone's passionate about something, they all agree, and yet, you know, halfway through, you find that, oh, it's all disintegrated.

And often, you look at it and you ask why, and often it's because the members can't work together, can they? They either don't get along or, you know, they disagree about how to achieve those goals which they agree on.

And unfortunately, it happens to churches as well. And it happened in Philippi, actually. In a few weeks' time, we'll be looking at chapter 4, and Paul there was urging two women, Euodia and Syneche, to stop fighting.

But if you look there, Paul actually calls both of them contenders for the gospel with Paul. Both have their names in the book of life. So these are not people who are opposing the gospel. These are actually people who are united in the same goal of the gospel.

[13:38] And yet, they were fighting with each other. And that's the same with us, isn't it? We may all be dedicated to the gospel. We may all be united in this common purpose. But if there's ever selfish ambition or vain conceit, you know, when people are interested in taking credit for themselves or want to do things their way, regardless of what others think, then this pride actually will eat away at the unity.

Now, many people think that when I say humility, what they think about is that it's all about thinking less of yourself. And, you know, many of you would have heard me say this, that, you know, it's

about when we get praised for something, you have to go through this whole self-effacing sort of ritual about, ah, no, it's not me, I'm not good, you know, it's just whatever, just luck or whatever. Many people think that's what it means to be humble, to be self-effacing. And, in fact, if you read the verses, I think it's translated as rather in humility, ah, no, this is actually a good translation, actually. The NIV in 1984 actually had consider others better than yourself. But verse 3 actually doesn't say that, actually. The translation says, rather in humility, value others above yourself.

That is, consider them ahead of yourself or consider them of more importance than you. It's a subtle sort of change, but it's actually an important distinction because then it ties in with verse 4.

[15:10] If you do that, then you put others' interest ahead of your own, looking not to our own interests, but to the interests of others. And so, I've quoted this before, C.S. Lewis puts it like this, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

In other words, all our thinking time should be given to thinking about others and what's best for them and what they need. Our thinking time is not given to constantly talking ourselves down, saying, oh, we're not good, or comparing ourselves with others.

That's not what humility is. Thinking less of ourselves. Rather, it's thinking of ourselves less.

Because perversely, if we still do that, then that's still pride, isn't it?

Because when we're thinking less of ourselves, we're still focused on self, aren't we? We're still being selfish and self-centered. But when we focus on others, then we're putting their interests ahead of ours, and then we begin to serve them.

We begin to put them before ourselves. And if everyone does that, then can you see how unity is just a natural product of it?

[16:25] Because we're allowing others what's best for others to dictate our actions rather than what suits us. Now, I have to say that it's easy for me to say this, but I have to admit that it is one of the most challenging things for me in life, to be humble and not selfish.

Because, I mean, our very sinful nature sort of is self-centered. We want to promote ourselves. We want other people to notice us. We want to seek our own comfort and advantage.

That's just what sin does to us. Well, I'm glad to say that Paul actually helps us now because he understands our weakness. And he says, now, he goes on to verse 5, he says that the key to humility then is to have the correct mindset, to have the correct attitude.

So it all starts up here. It's not about doing or saying certain things externally. It needs to start from deep within us. That's where humility needs to develop in order for it to be true.

And the person he points to and the person he turns our attention to is that of Jesus. So come with me verse 6 to 8 because Paul gives us an insight into the mind of Christ.

[17:43] It's quite amazing as I just said that we get an insight into the mind of Christ. We actually get to think, we actually get to see what Jesus is thinking when he did what he did. So let's read it together.

It says, verse 6 or verse 5, let me start from there. In your relationships with Anna, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus who 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 the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And the key phrase I want to focus on tonight is this, in verse 6, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be taken advantage of.

Or in the NIV in 1984, something to be grasped. I have to admit, I spend most of this week sort of turning over that phrase again and again. And it just leaves me in awe and wonder of Jesus.

[18:51] Especially as I see around the world this present obsession with the whole notion of equality. You know, whether it's racial equality, gender equality, and so-called marriage equality, the world is loudly saying to us that equality is something to be taken advantage of.

If you're equal with someone, you need to take advantage of it. You need to assert your rights. It used to be that the fight for human rights was all about fighting for the rights of others.

But it's now shifted, hasn't it? Now people are told to rise up and fight for their own rights. To fight for what they're entitled to. But friends, look at Jesus.

Because even though he knew his divine identity, he didn't for one instant choose to assert his right as God. Instead, what we find in the next few phrases is Jesus plumbing the depth of humility,

going lower, lower, willingly descending into the status of a nobody.

So this was someone actually equal with God. That means superior to humans. And yet, he humbled himself to be someone even lower, as it were.

[20 : 06] than a human. Or rather, the lowest of humans. So he made himself nothing. He took the nature of a servant. He came in the form of human likeness. And then he humbled himself, not just to any death, but the most humiliating of deaths, death on a cross.

And do you know what? The salvation we enjoy today, the very life that we have in Christ, none of this would be possible without Jesus' humility.

Imagine if the Son had said to the Father in Heaven, Father, I am God. I don't deserve to empty myself of divine power. I created this world. Why should I have to enter it?

Why should I have to constrain myself and suffer and give myself to this humiliating death when I've not done anything wrong? And if you think about that, he's perfectly entitled to do that, isn't he?

Because he had no sin. But if the Son had taken hold of his equality with God, then all of us would be left in our sins. We would not have the hope and blessing that we now have in Christ.

[21 : 18] And so friends, when you reflect on this as a Christian, I mean, how can you not then follow in Jesus' footsteps and have the same attitude as him? Now for those of you here who are not yet a Christian, then I want to urge you tonight to actually reflect on this very fact because what I've just said is the very heart of the Gospel.

Christ Jesus humbled himself for us, died on the cross so that we could be saved, and he did it even though he is God. So please, turn to him in faith, seek him out and find out what great salvation you can find in him.

But for the rest of us, I want to say and encourage you to know that humility, even though it sounds so difficult, isn't humiliation.

That's a big difference. Now if there wasn't a God, then perhaps humility might be humiliation. But there is a God and so our self-sacrifice, just as Jesus, will not go unnoticed, will not go unrewarded. Because if you read verse 9 to 11, God did not leave his son unrewarded, did he, for his humility. Instead, God exalted his son from this humility and gave him the name that is above all names, that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[22 : 42] Now, we won't be glorified to the same extent, but whenever we feel that our humility is being taken advantage of, remember this, humble ourselves and God will exalt us in due time.

If not in this age, and probably not, then at the end of the age, in the age to come. But in the meantime, let's show the worth of the gospel by putting others ahead of ourselves.

So, for example, when we gather each week, let the first question we ask not be, oh, I wonder how I'm going to benefit from tonight's service. Or, what's in it for me? Rather, let's ask the moment we step through the doors, who can I serve today?

When we make choices as a church, let's do it so that we don't take our preferences into account, but consider how we would best serve others. So, perhaps in the merge between Word and Sex Pant, if we took that kind of attitude into the merge, then, you know what, whatever fears we may have about whether it will work or not, whether we will gel or not, they'll be unfounded because we'll be looking to the interests of others.

Now, here I want to just pause and say something specifically to leaders, including myself. I want to say that leadership has been given to us, just like Jesus, not for our own interests, but for those we lead.

[24 : 08] Jesus was a good example of it, and as we shall soon see, so was Moses. As leaders, we are called to put the interests of those we lead ahead of ours. Now, that doesn't mean that we just do everything they ask us to do, but it does mean that we carefully consider what is in their best interest, what would best help them to grow in their faith, what will allow them to serve and to use their gifts for God's glory.

And so, it does mean that we put aside our own preferences, how we like to do things and accommodate ourselves to them, to those that we lead. Do things in a way that best helps them. So, if you're a band leader, well, you should be seeking to bring out the best in your team, rather than showing off your artistic talents. Not that any one of you are doing that. If you're a Bible study leader, then you should aim to lead so that everyone can clearly understand the Bible, rather than just show off how much you know of your Bible knowledge.

It's just exactly as Moses did in our Old Testament reading. And we do that even when our efforts are not appreciated. If you read through the whole of Exodus and Numbers, you'd see that time and time again, the people grumbled against Moses.

They let him down again and again and again. And our reading today is just one of many examples. And yet, if you recall, what did Moses do? He actually prayed for them.

[25 : 33] He pleaded for God's mercy so that God would forgive their grumbling. And this was even when God said, no, I'll make you, Moses, into a great nation.

I'll give you a great name. He actually turned down that offer and sought the interests of the Israelites as well. Now, of course, if you're not a leader here, this is not a license for you to give your leaders hell, okay?

Don't be like the Israelites. You can show humility by submitting to your leaders because they're seeking your best welfare. God calls all of us to stand united in the gospel.

And when we do that, we show that what we believe is true. It's unchanging. But as we partner in the gospel, we also need to be humble, to think of others ahead of ourselves because that not only reflects the content of the gospel, but it reflects the quality as well.

At the end of the day, we don't just want people to know that the gospel is true, but we want people to know that the gospel is beautiful as well. And people will know that by how we treat one another, how we are humble and put others' interests ahead of us.

[26 : 49] So why don't we pray and ask God to help us do that. Father, we thank you for Jesus, and again and again we see his life and we are amazed and we praise him and we worship him because we're not for his example, his humble life, that of a servant king, we would not have salvation.

Thank you for giving us your son. Thank you for giving him as an example for us to follow, that we too can learn to be humble. By your spirit, help us to be humble.

And also by your spirit, help us to stand firm and not be easily frightened of when there is opposition to the truth of the gospel. Help us to know the truth clearly so that we can stand firm in it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.