

Philippians 2:1-11

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[0:00] And I read this with fear and trembling.! It is a beautiful passage. The apostle says, So if there is any encouragement in Christ, 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.

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.

Let's pray. Our great King, Lord, that is a weighty thing to read.

[2:02] Lord, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. When pastors begin to preach certain books of the Bible, particular sections loom large on the horizon.

When a preacher opens up the book of Hebrews, they tremble at the thought of getting to chapter six. In the book of Matthew, which we preached through a few years ago now, I told you that chapter 24 was terrifying me for like six months ahead of time.

Romans chapter seven and chapter nine, right, require something very special from the preacher. And today, we come to Philippians chapter two.

It is a spectacular passage filled with incredible truths. And two very famous heresies love to cite this passage.

[3:22] One of them, canoticism, if you're interested, is named after verse seven. Right? So I will try very hard to preach this as it deserves, gloriously, and to avoid falling into a pit as well.

So pray for me. Thank you. Let us recall that Paul is writing to the Christians in Philippi. He's under house arrest in Rome, awaiting an audience before Caesar.

Nero, that Nero, yes. He's writing to a church that he helped plant about 10 years prior. It's now AD 60 to 62. That's when we think he was in prison in Rome.

And so this church is a little older than Shoreline. And in chapter one, he has been reassuring them. Right? He's in prison. He's under house arrest. And he's saying to them, don't worry about me.

Even though I'm in prison, the Lord is continuing my ministry, even without me. And even though I might face death, because Nero, you know, not a great rep, for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[4:39] So don't worry. Like, I can't lose. And in chapter two, he turns his attention away from himself and away from his situation to shaping the Christians in Philippi.

And by extension, the Christians in this room today. And Paul begins with a big if in verse one. Actually, he begins with four ifs.

In verse one, he says, so if there is any encouragement in Christ, and in the Greek text, they're actually, he uses the word if four different times here.

Some English translations actually keep all the ifs there. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from love, if any participation in the Spirit, if any affection and sympathy. And those are really big ifs. Let's not take them for granted.

[5:43] What I mean by that is, are these things in verse one true of us? Or is it simply an ideal?

Or is it not even an ideal and just not even on our radar? When you look to Christ, are you encouraged? Does his love comfort you?

Do you know, is it your experience that you participate in the one Spirit who raised him from the grave and indwells his church?

or is this a theory to you? Practically speaking, is it just a theory? Do you receive from him from the pardon he's offered, from the adoption he's granted?

Do you receive affection and sympathy from the throne of grace? Do you? Right, this is an if-then statement. if-verse one, then, verses two and following.

[6:59] So the question is, is that really our experience? Is that what you have received from Christ truly in your soul?

or is it all theoretical? Is there any of that encouragement in Christ for you?

Let me ask, friends, first of all, if you don't know Christ, if you've not repented and believed and come to belong to him, friends, all of these things are available to you in Christ because he gives himself to his people and in him is every blessing.

And for those of us who might have walked in here feeling totally dry, like the scriptures weren't alive to us, like God wasn't present to us, let me encourage you, all these things are true.

And so, if this is not your experience, we might walk in them. And remember, they all come from Christ to his people by his love and you have been loved to the uttermost, as we're about to see.

[8:33] I hope verse 1 is not hypothetical to you. I hope it is actualized in your life and in your experience, truly.

But if it isn't, let's walk into this passage together and see something extraordinary.

I said it's an if-then, but as we consider the then part, I think the very things that he asks us to do help us to experience all of the blessings of verse 1.

So let's look at what he's asking us to do. He says, complete my joy. Isn't that wonderful? Complete my joy. That he would be rejoicing that this happens.

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.

[9:49] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. You can see a relationship there between verses 2 and 3 and 4, right?

Verse 2, let us be unified as a church body. Let us love one another as a church. Let's be of full accord and mind together.

Beautiful. And here's the means for that. It looks like humility, right? Verses 3 and 4, the way, the thing that stands against good fellowship is our selfishness, is my selfishness, right?

That's the thing. And so if we want to look like a church that looks like verse 3, humility is the thing. And we can connect it further back to verse 1 where his logic works like this. verse 1, since there are so many blessings in Christ, verses 2 and following, live in love towards others, in loving humility.

[11:05] If we have all of verse 1, encouragement and love and fellowship in the spirit and affection and sympathy and we have it all in Christ, that is we have him, so we have all these things from him, then we have all we need.

We don't have to live selfishly. towards others. We don't have to use other people because I have all in Christ already. And so the church can then be that true community marked by selflessness and humility and integrity and care for others.

Now, not looking out for number one sounds risky. It sounds a little dangerous.

It might not sound like, hmm, I'll let others lead in that. I'll let somebody else start that game. It might not sound great to us at first, but what would it be like to live in a community where that's how you were treated?

it. Where everyone else was looking at you, not looking out for their own interests, but for the interests of others, you.

[12:34] How wonderful would that be? I think in large part that describes this congregation. I love you guys. You're awesome. and it could be more.

And it will be fully when we join our Savior in his presence. And it requires of us, like we said, that relationship between the community that's described in verse 2 and the way to get it in 3 and 4 is humility.

how do we get that? How do we become that so that this body of believers might magnify Christ by loving each other that way, by being a very strange community to the world around us that is inviting and beautiful.

this goes against our selfish natures. How do we get there? Paul continues verse 5. 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.

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

[14:15] Paul uses a lot of cognition language in this passage, how we think. Complete my joy by being of the same mind.

Being in full accord and of one mind. In humility, count, consider, count others more significant than yourselves. Look, that is, direct your attention, not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And here, verse 5, have this mind among yourselves. Humility begins, well, first in the heart, but it is exercised in the mind.

And so, Paul desires that our thinking change. That's the application. Like, I'm not going to give you lots of homework assignments to do today.

The application of this is, we need our minds to be renewed by Christ and by his word. It can't come from without.

[15:30] You can think of like monks are in a very humble kind of situation, but humility cannot come from outside. Right? You can be a very prideful monk.

The monastery doesn't make you humble. That has to come from within. And so, that is where Paul is directing his attention, at our hearts and our minds. So, how do we get there?

How do we get this one mind? How do we get this attention that looks for others' interests? How do we count, consider others more significant than ourselves?

Because it's not natural to us, is it? Is it? One of my spiritual heroes of the 20th century was John Stott, a British minister.

A few years ago, I think the Spiveys led a number of cadets through one of his books called Basic Christianity. We give that book away to guests. It's a wonderful little book.

[16:29] If you want to dive real deep, John Stott wrote a book called The Cross of Christ. It is a masterpiece. And is it well worth the couple hundred pages that it is.

It's a spectacular book. When he, John Stott, preached this passage, he cited one of his spiritual heroes on developing humility.

And I'd like to quote him too. It's very thoughtful. It's sort of counterintuitive things, things that I wouldn't have expected. He said, thank God often and always.

Thank God carefully and wonderingly for your continuing privileges and for every experience of his goodness. He said, thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.

He said, next, take care about confession of your sins. God's forgiveness renews your freedom to be humble.

[17:39] He said, do not worry about status. There is only one status that our Lord bids us be concerned with. And that is the status of proximity, nearness to himself.

Jesus said, if a man serve me, let him follow me. And where I am, there also my servant shall be.

The nearness to him. That's the status. This, he says, is our status, to be near to our Lord wherever he may ask us to go with him.

And something that I thought was quite interesting as a point of application. He said, use your sense of humor. Laugh about things. Laugh at the absurdities of life.

Laugh about yourself and about your own absurdity. We are all of us, infinitesimally small and ludicrous creatures within God's universe. You have to be serious, but never be solemn.

Because if you are solemn about anything, there is a risk of becoming solemn about yourself. Those are good and helpful practices to cultivate humility.

[18:49] But I think this passage gives us more, a lot more. And to do that, we need to understand a few key things in it.

This is the section in which the heresies reside. We won't go too deep into the weeds in that. But, what is this form of God business? When we see Paul say that Jesus was in the form of God, what does that mean exactly?

Does that mean that he truly was and is God? Or was he like God, like a model of the real thing? And that matters.

Cataclysmically, there is not a more important question that you can answer than who is Jesus Christ. This is the very heart of Christianity.

Who is it that died for you on the cross? The one true God or a servant, a highly exalted one, but a servant of that God? Who is worthy of your worship?

[19:59] Is Christ God most high? God does not. God most high deserves your worship and Christ does not. We must get this right.

Luckily, Paul does not leave us guessing because he uses the exact same word, form, in the next verse. And we can know for sure what that one means.

And so, we can understand how he's using this term in this passage. In verse seven, he says, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And so, he's gone from the form of God to the form of a servant. And so, then the same question applies. Was he God or was he like God? Then, was he a servant or was he like a servant?

How do we answer? Was Jesus like a servant? Did he simply look like a servant? Or was he a servant?

[21:04] What is his testimony about this? What did he say of himself? Of course, he said, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

And what did he do? Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

He laid aside his outer garments and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet.

So you tell me, did Jesus look like a servant? Or was he a servant? Did he merely look like someone who served?

Or did he serve? God. And if that is what Paul means when he says the form of a servant, that Jesus was a servant, and truly he served us, which we'll get to that, that means when the form of God means true God of true God, that Jesus was and is God.

[22:45] that is who went to the cross for you and for me and for all who will call out for mercy.

Hallelujah. The second difficulty in this passage, also in verse 7, this language that he emptied himself.

Right? I was careful to say was and is God, because that's another mistake we can make reading verse 7. When Paul says that he emptied himself, we might think that he somehow set aside his divinity entirely and became not God for a moment, temporarily was not God or something of that sort.

That would be a mistake. That would be a mistake in reading and understanding of this text. Not just philosophically, how could that happen ontologically and logically? Not just theologically, how does that square with the rest of scripture that says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever?

So not just philosophically or theologically, but also exegetically. Exegesis just means what does this text mean? If you look carefully at this text, what does he emptied himself mean?

[24:14] Words only have meanings in a context. Empty means different things when you're talking about an empty bucket and an empty promise,

right? So the way Paul uses the word is how we understand what it means that Christ emptied himself.

So when Christ emptied himself on our behalf, did he somehow part with his deity? Did he lose something? What does the text say?

It says something that is completely the opposite of what I would expect and perhaps you. How did he empty himself?

He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

He humbled himself not by putting something off, not by subtraction, but by adding something.

[25:24] himself. He took to himself a human nature, and because that is lower than him, that is how he humbled himself.

He did not subtract any godness from himself, but he added something humble to himself. Meditate on that.

Your god is so glorious that to humble himself, he added. And it makes sense when you think about it.

The infinite, voluntarily constrained by the finite, immortality, enfleshed in mortality, humility, the one whose essence defines glory, put to utter shame.

The fountain of life subjected to death, bound to the grave. Doesn't that push our hearts where Paul wants them to go, towards humility?

[26:43] Because when we look with eyes of awe, at this great God, we've stopped thinking about ourselves, and we have certainly thought lesser of ourselves.

And so this passage, remember we were talking about how humility, it's a cognition thing. He's trying to change our mindset. And doesn't this look glorious to you and change your mind?

Do you find welling up in yourself, Jesus did this for me? It's spectacular. Doesn't it make you want to be like him?

Isn't there something aspirational about this? Oh my goodness, he is so good. Let me be in his presence and let me be like him. Verses 6 and 7 show us this incredible contrast, the biggest contrast ever made, so highly exalted, brought down so low for our sakes.

Never has something so high stooped so low, and certainly not voluntarily. We try to make analogies for it, right?

[28:13] We liken it to something, you know, what's the best analogy you can come up with for this? Right? The president of a university mopping the grounds crew's locker room, or CEO of a Fortune 500 company refilling the printer toner in the mail room, or the president of the United States, the commander in chief doing scullery duty on Eagle.

it's like that, except it's nothing like that, nothing at all like that, because verse six, who he is, true God of true God, is so much higher than CEOs and presidents and the kings of this world.

And verse eight, going to the cross, is so much lower. Verse six is much higher, right?

He's not like a CEO. What did we sing today? He wraps himself in light. He's not like the president of a university.

Darkness, tries to hide. He's not like a president or a king or any ruler in this world.

[29:50] Time is in his hands. It's nothing like that. So highly exalted is our God, and so much lower did he stoop.

Because those things that I just mentioned, those are all honorable jobs. Working in a mailroom is a good thing. Being the grounds crew, that's a good thing.

Scullery duty, aboard Eagle, a pretty good thing, I guess. Right? They're all respectable, they're all honorable. But to what was our Lord subjected?

This Lord who's so much greater. To what was he subjected? Because he's just walking a stairway down. It starts higher than we've ever even contemplated.

And it ends as low as low can go. Isaiah says that Jesus was brought so low that the shame of it was unbearable to other people.

[31:11] Not just it was bad for him, it was bad for the onlookers. In Isaiah 53, he was as one from whom men hide their faces.

His shame was so absolute on the cross. There is no deeper and lower shame than the cross of Christ where he was stripped of his clothes and beaten nearly to death, completely powerless

before the Roman army, they believed, mocked with a crown of thorns, nailed to a wooden cross, lifted high at an intersection for all to see and tortured to death.

That's what even death on a cross means. not to mention that the curse of God was upon him for our sakes. And that's it, friends.

He did this all for you in your place. Doesn't that foster awe in your soul?

doesn't that shift your mindset? Doesn't he look glorious?

[32:46] And do you find yourself thinking just a little bit less selfishly? Not only is it a tremendous example of blessing over us.

But it also, what did it purchase you? We've kind of mentioned this already. He did this to give you something.

He did this to give you his name. He did this to give you heaven as your home. He did this to offer you adoption into his very family.

And with himself give you all things. So you don't need to grasp for yourself. You are already the heir of the universe.

selfish. If you seek to use other people for your own advantage, if you are selfish among the believers, you already have everything in Christ, everything in him.

[34:16] You don't need anything else. And last, actually, first, if you back up to verse 5, he says something really interesting.

He says, you have this mindset in Christ. That's Paul's language for being joined to Christ in salvation.

it means that he is near you. Do you sense that?

He is making you like himself. Do you sense that? He is near to his people by his spirit. And when Christ draws near, glory draws near.

even now, this moment, where you set. When Christ draws near, glory draws near, look at verse 9.

[35:28] This passage does not end in shame. It ends in glory. 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.

Our inheritance isn't just a future thing. This great glorious God draws near to us. Paul said verse 5. We have him. We're in Christ already.

He is near and present to his people. But there's something more. Paul doesn't say it here, but this is part of a theme that runs through the scriptures, especially in the new covenant, that says that this pattern of humiliation and glorification isn't just something that Jesus did on his own.

It is also the pattern that he has established for us, which means that our story ends in glory too.

And of course, we don't suffer in precisely the same way.

We can't make atonement for anyone's sin, let alone sins of the world. And of course, we won't be glorified to the heights of Christ. We do not have ourselves the name that is above every name.

[37:06] But in for us. That's why the apostle says here in verse 5, have that same mindset because this is true of you as well.

That's why the apostle James says, God opposes the proud, he humiliates, but gives grace to the humble. That's why the apostle Peter says, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

Did you hear that exalt part? Glory is part of the pattern that he is working in your life.

Do you remember chapter one verse six in our first entry into the book of Philippians. Paul said, I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

That good work that Jesus began in you has a lot of components to it, a lot of pieces there, and one of them is that exalt bit.

[38:38] Just as Christ is exalted, so too will he exalt those who have joined him in his suffering. Here's how Paul puts it in Romans chapter eight. The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs.

Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

If you are in Christ you have Christ and with him everything. There is nothing to grasp after don't use others for your advantage.

There's no more advantage to gain you have been given all in Christ. Only act like Christ towards others then.

And as we do as a community of Christ as we act like Christ towards one another because we already have everything his character will be by his people made manifest in our midst which is glory and we can taste it even now.

[40:14] So let me return to where we began in verse one and ask you about those ifs. Does participation in his spirit bring you God's affection and sympathy?

Do you sense it and know it? Is it real in your life? Is there comfort from his love? Is there encouragement in Christ?

I hope that we can look again today and every day and see what he has done and know it to be true. Let's pray.

But what is there to say? You are good beyond anything we can contemplate.

You are glorious beyond anything we can understand and you've given yourself for us. We will praise your name forever and we will rejoice to do it.

[41:40] We pray that in the name of Jesus who did all this for us. Amen.

Amen.