The Church and the Cross

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2013

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] We are in week two of a series called The Church That Jesus Builds. Last week we asked the question, where does the church fit into God's great plan, God's redemptive story?

Is it just, for example, is it just a resource to help us with our personal relationship with God? No, we decided. Is it just sort of a temporary thing, just to kind of, you know, I don't know, keep us on track, give us something to do, keep us off the streets, I don't know.
Is it just this kind of temporary thing? No. Where does the church fit into God's big story? Right smack in the middle. And that's because God's plan has always been about a people.
God has always been about gathering a people that he can, you know, how do I say it, like do life with. So, as extraordinary as it sounds, the ordinary local church, whether it's a biggish sort of church like us or some random, small, rural church in the middle of nowhere, the ordinary local church is the most significant thing happening in the world today.
Because it's there that we see the beginning of God remaking a broken world. So the church, it's a pretty big deal around here.
[1:25] From Matthew 16, which we preached on last week, we heard that the head of the church is Jesus. That the guardian, the defender of the church is Jesus. That the foundation of the church is Jesus.

And the builder of the church is Jesus. Jesus. So today we're looking at how Jesus builds his church. And it's through the cross. Our passage is Philippians 2, 1 to 11.
Paul is writing to a church in Philippi. And it's a church, because I'll give you a bit of background because we're kind of jumping into the middle of it. So it's a good church.
He really likes this church. It's suffering from some external, sorry, yeah, external sort of persecution, a bit of that, a bit of that action going on, a bit of internal drama, a bit of conflict there. And immediately before our passage, Paul is saying, team, we've got to be unified here. We've got to be unified contending for the gospel together. And the verses we're looking at today explain how we become a unified people.
[2:28] Now, because these 11 verses are fairly dense, I'm going to completely show my hand and give you a summary of the sermon, which is, if you know, rhetorically, it's a terrible idea.

But it might be helpful to you. All right. So here is a summary of chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. And it's good because it rhymes. I worked hard on this, plagiarizing this.
So here we go. Unity thrives where self-interest dies and self-interest dies at the cross.
Unity thrives where self-interest dies and self-interest dies at the cross. Okay, that's it. That's the whole sermon. Would you do me a favor? When I get to these points, would you try and look surprised? And, you know, kind of mumble, oh, he makes a good point.
Something like that. That would be helpful. All right. Let's get right into it. Chapter 1. Sorry. Chapter 2, verse 1. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection, any sympathy.
[3:40] It sounds a little bit strange, right? Because it sounds like he's being a little bit rude. It sounds like he's being a bit snarky. It sounds like he's saying this stuff's not going on. It sounds like he's saying, look, if there's any encouragement, I don't think there is.

But if there is, you know, he's not. It's just, it's an unusual way of saying, I'm assuming these things are happening. I'm working on the principle that they are happening.
Therefore. You could replace so if with the word since. And so it would read something like this. Since you're being encouraged by Christ and you know the love of the Father and you know what it means to have the Holy Spirit in your life, therefore be unified.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-06-08 11:16:19

Have the same mind, it says. One mind. One accord. The same love. And I really, it's great how he says, you know, complete my joy. Do this and complete my joy. He's not saying I'm going to all get a great laugh out of you guys, you know, pulling it together here.
He's saying that I'd be over the moon if the church was unified because in a unified church the gospel moves forward. Now I want you to notice something about verse 2 here.
[4:49] How he describes being unified. Same mind. Same love. Full accord. One mind. Clearly, the kind of unity Paul is talking about is not a superficial unity.

It's a unity that goes a long way down. It's a deep unity. A good question to ask at this point would be, Aaron, what are you talking about when you say unity?
Are you saying we should be doctrinally on the same page? We should agree on sort of doctrine. That would be nice. I think that's a good thing. But that's not what Paul is talking about.
I mean, I think that would be easy compared to what Paul is asking us. You know, getting a group of people to agree on a set of propositions, that's pretty durable. Getting a group of people to set aside egos in a large body and move forward in one direction, that's tough.
That's really hard. That's what verse 3 is about. Let me read it to you. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves.
[6:03] So what's he saying here? He's saying that the enemy of unity is self-interest. And what's fertile ground for unity? It's humility.

Have a closer look there. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. So I think we learn here that the real obstacle to unity in the church is not the presence of legitimate differences of opinion.
The real obstacle is self-interest. The real obstacle is self-centeredness. Now when you hear that word self-centeredness, you know it's bad, right?
I think we are repulsed by overt greed. I'm sure you are. I remember a number of years ago, there was like an NFL, some famous NFL player was renegotiating his contract.
He was getting like 15 million a year. He wanted 20 million. I can't remember the exact figures for his contract. And he got turned down, so he only got 15. And so his wife, they managed to track down his wife and interview his wife, you know, and she's holding all her kids and stuff.
[7:09] And she's just bawling her eyes out into the camera. And she says, and the journalist must have been thinking, this is awesome. She's bawling her eyes out going, how am I going to feed my children? You go, what is she feeding her children?

Like albino tiger steaks or something, you know? So the video went viral because it was just such an overt display of greed.
It was awful. So I think you'd agree, that's terrible. But a scaled down version of that? Goodness, that can easily slip past our radar, I think.
The subtle tug of the heart that says, I need to be thought of as important. I need to be recognized. I need to be honored.
I need to be exalted even. That can find a place in our hearts. It can find a place in the church. It can be a motivation for serving.
[8:11] And that kind of motivation, when that's your interest, self, that puts cracks in church unity. As a priest, I get to go on things every year.

Priest club. Synod. Or general assembly. Or clergy retreat. A few things like that. So we gather as clergy. It's great, you know? But I'll make a confession now.
Sometimes I go to these things, and I will see somebody emceeing the event, or leading a Bible study, or doing a talk, and I will think, I can do that better.
I could totally do that better. Yeah. And that's actually not even the terrible thing. Because, you know, it's often, it's sometimes right. You know, I could do that better. The terrible thing, though, I'm going to get to that, because that's actually not a, that's not completely awful.
It's not great, but it's not terribly awful. But what's really terrible is where my heart goes after that. Do you know you have these kind of fantasies of grandeur sometimes? And I can get these fantasies of grandeur.
[9:20] I can sort of think, wow, if they'd just ask me to do that, because I deserve to be asked, you know, if they'd ask me to do that, and I'd put on a really good thing, and, wow, everyone would want to be my friend, and I'd be really well respected, and the bishops would look at me and go, oh, here we go, the church is in safe hands, there's the great hope of the Anglican church.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-06-08 11:16:19

You know, like, just, like, honestly, like, ridiculous thoughts like that spring up in my heart. And I'm going to assume that similar things spring up in your heart.
But shifting the attention of our hearts away from ourselves, from our gain, gee, that's a big challenge. But this is what Paul asks us to do, in verse 3.
He says, humility means counting others more significant than you, thinking about them more than you. And I'm so glad the Bible defines unity here, I mean, sorry, humility here, because I think we can think, we can have a wrong idea of humility.
We can think humility is pretending that we're not good at anything. For example, we would agree that Jesus was humble.
[10:42] Last week in Matthew 16, Peter said to Jesus, you are the Christ. When Jesus put out the question, who do you say I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ. Now, Jesus didn't go, oh, don't say that.

That makes me so embarrassed. There are plenty of other guys out there doing really great work. You know, I'm just one of the guys. No, that's ridiculous, obviously.
That is, humility is not pretending, you're not good at stuff. That's pretense. That's fakery. True humility, the Bible says, is this. It's counting others as more significant than you.
Now, that is not saying that we should think that everyone is better than us at stuff. That's fakery as well. It means prioritizing the needs and interests of others.
In an achievement culture like we have in Vancouver, we can look at a person and in our hearts, we can ask, how can they add value to my life?
[11:49] In a grace culture, in the culture of the church, we say, how can I serve this person? How can I enrich their lives? C.S. Lewis has this wonderful quote on humility which I think summarizes this really, really well.

Let me read it to you. To even get near humility, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert. Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call humble nowadays.
He will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably, all you'll think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him.
If you dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility. He will not be thinking about himself at all.
Isn't that great? Obvious question. How do we get this? How do we do this? How does that happen in our hearts? Well, the answer is by coming to the cross.
[12:57] And that's what verses sort of 5 to 8 are about. So let's have a look. Have this mind amongst yourselves, Paul says, 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 the cross.

Gee, that's just amazing stuff, isn't it? And it's a very unique articulation of the gospel, actually, because it's less about the saving significance in the gospel and more about the cross as a demonstration of God's way to humility.
God's way of humility. So Paul is dealing with this divided church in Philippi. He tells them, folks, let's get unified. Let's contend for the gospel together.
The enemy of that unity, what can harm that goal, is self-interest. So be humble, he says. Treat others as more significant than you. And he places before them the cross.
And he says, here is the example. Because it's only through the cross that our hearts can be changed. You know this. I don't know if you guys saw the Avengers or Thor or anything like that, but there's this idea of what God-likeness is.
[14:36] You know, what would it be like to be a God? How would you define God-likeness? Being God-like would be awesome. You could do whatever you want, whenever you want it. Perhaps that's what you think.

This verse tells us it's the opposite. The Christian view of God-likeness is this. It means giving away your rights. And this is what the line Christ says, he says, Paul says, Christ did not count equality with God as something to be grasped.
It means Christ didn't use his godness as a thing to be exploited for gain. No, he became a man.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-06-08 11:16:19

He condescended himself to become a man. Not just a man, a slave. Someone committed to serving others, no matter the cost. And he ended up on the cross as a result of that.
So Paul brings this example of Jesus before us because in seeing the selflessness of Christ, that's where our self-interest dies because how can you look at the cross and know who's up there and want to serve yourself?
[15:44] This man who came all the way down to your level but didn't stop by just coming to your level, middle class North American, he kept going, kept going, kept going to become the lowest on the rung, criminal on a cross.

If you think of Christ's journey as a staircase that he descends, how can we watch Christ walking down this staircase of humility and self-denial and spend our lives going in the opposite direction? You know, trying to claw our way up the staircase, grasping for power and status and honor and privilege, going after the crowns that Christ gave away, that Christ set aside.
Now, our passage doesn't finish on the cross. Verse 9 and 11, that after Christ's condescension, we'll call it, is his ascension.
Therefore, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So after the cross, after the resurrection, Jesus is exalted, he is crowned.
[16:54] So there's, we see a pattern here that what happened to Jesus will happen to us. We will be glorified as well. But you know, there is no shortcut to that glorification.

There is no shortcut to being made new. The only way to glory is not by avoiding the cross, but it's by going through it.
So folks, to end, let's be about the gospel. Let's be about it together. Let's be unified. Let's be unified contending for the gospel. Self-interest will hurt that.
So take your self-interest to the cross, bring it to Jesus, no forgiveness and no freedom from the things that grip our hearts, things like radical individualism, like self-interest, self-centeredness, materialism, consumerism, and know what it's like to be free.
Because folks, this is how Jesus builds his church. Amen. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-06-08 11:16:19