The Lord & Servant of All

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] Good morning, church. Hear me okay? Check one, check two? Good. All right. So our text today is Philippians chapter two, verses one through 11. Let me invite you to turn there with me. That's page 921 through 922 in the Pew Bible. It'll be helpful to have it open before you as we dive into our text. As Pastor Matt mentioned last week, we're spending two weeks on this passage because there's a lot here, both pastorally and theologically. Last week, Matt took a look at some of the pastoral themes, and today we'll dive a little more deeply into the rich theology of this text. So let me pray, and then I'll read for us. Let's go to the Lord in prayer together.

God, as we gather together, heeding your call to come and assemble ourselves together, we come, Lord, eager and hungry to hear not merely a human word, but to hear a word from you.
So we thank you that long ago at many times and in many ways you spoke to the patriarchs through the prophets, and we praise you most of all that in these last days you've spoken to us by your son. And through the work of the apostles, we have this word written, preserved, and now here before us. So as we come before your word, would your spirit do his work, opening our minds and hearts to heed and hear and worship you. And Lord, we ask to become more like you as we hear your word. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. All right, Philippians chapter 2.
Let's pick right up in verse 5. Verse 5. Paul writes this. He says, 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. So, morning breaks, and a young lawyer wakes up, leaves her apartment, walks down the block to her new firm. Having just graduated from a prestigious law school, this isn't quite the firm you would expect. It's not the high-powered, high-paying sort of place.
She had received many offers of work like that, but she chose instead a small firm so she could work on behalf of her neighbors who can't afford the big prices of those high-powered places.
[3:13] Later that day, across town, a group of high school students gather around the lunch table in the cafeteria, and in walks one of the new kids, a little shy, a little awkward.

And of course, around the table, the teasing begins. This group of friends quickly starts to make fun of the new kid, except for one. One of those kids around that table puts his own reputation on the line, puts years of friendship on the line, and says to his friends, hey, cut it out, and gets up, greets the new kid, and sits down to make a new friend.
Still later, as evening falls, a middle-aged couple sits at their dining table discussing their plans to care for their aging parents, one of whom is showing signs of dementia.
They think about what it might mean to provide a home for them, now that their parents need more constant care. And despite the challenges, they decide that evening to make room, not just in their home, but in their lives, to take them in.
Now, what draws all these different people and stories together? Well, each, in their own way, have begun to realize what it means to have what our passage calls the mind of Christ, the mind which is yours in Christ Jesus, as verse 5 says.
[4:37] And what exactly is this mind? Well, it's a whole approach, not just to thinking, but to living and to being. A whole mindset, we might say, that has been opened up and made available by the reality of who Jesus is and what he's done, available to all who are in Christ. And what is, what is this new way, this new mindset? Well, to understand it, we have to take a fresh look at Jesus himself.

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And in looking at Jesus, we're forced to take a fresh look at God himself. And what is it that we see? Well, verses 6 through 11 show us that Jesus, the true Lord, is servant of all. And that Jesus, the true servant, is Lord of all.

Now, there are a few places in the New Testament where the kind of blazing theological core, the kind of burning heart of Christianity comes through. And verses 6 through 11 is one of those places. Here we are staring into the depths of the deepest ocean of God and God's work in the world.

And J.I. Packer, the great 20th century theologian, once said that all good theology is for devotion and doxology. That is, theology isn't just something that interests our minds. No, because we're coming to know God, it shapes our life. That is our devotion. And it inspires our praise. That is doxology. Good theology should help us live for God and good theology should prompt us to worship God.

And that's what we have here in verses 6 through 11. And you know, it's interesting that these verses are written in what many New Testament scholars think might have been an early hymn or poem of the first century church. Paul could very well be quoting here a piece of hymnody or poetry that the early churches came to recite in the earliest days of its worship. So maybe as an aside, let me just say, if you're here and you're an artist or a creative, the church needs you. Theology needs you. Some of our highest thoughts and truths about God are best expressed in rich artistic form. And perhaps right here, there's biblical precedent for that fact. Well, what is this truth here before us that's being expressed by Paul through this theological hymn? Well, as we have said, to have the mind of Christ, we must see that Jesus, the true Lord, is servant of all. And that Jesus, the true servant, is Lord of all. So in verses 6 through 8, which is the first half of this theological hymn, we see the first truth, that Jesus, the true Lord, is servant of all. Let me read these verses again, starting in verse 6. Who, that is Jesus, Jesus, 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. Now, notice the downward descent that these verses narrate. We begin with one who pre-exists in the very form of God, but who then takes on the form of a servant and then goes all the way down to death on a cross. Now, to understand the full impact of this downward descent, this self-humbling of Jesus, we have to understand where it starts.

[8:18] We've said that these verses present Jesus as the true Lord, and we see this in verse 6. Jesus was in the form of God. Now, the word form to our ears can sound like something that's merely sort of external or simply a copy, right? If I pick up a piece of wax fruit, it has the form of an apple, but not really the substance, and you figure that out when you bite into it, right? But the word form in the first century, for Paul's listeners, it can mean both shape and substance. It carries both meanings.

So when we read that Jesus was in the form of God, it's a bit like what John is saying at the opening of his gospel. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. Or what Hebrews chapter 1 says, that the sun is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his being. Later on, the church will start to use words like essence and substance to try to capture and clarify what the biblical texts are telling us about Jesus, that he was from all eternity fully God.

Or as verse 6 here in our text goes on to say, he had equality with God. Now, growing up, my brothers and I used to play a game where we dream about what we would do if we had a million dollars. That sounded like a lot of money when we were, you know, 12 and 13.

Now, I guess people, like if you're a millionaire, it doesn't even matter. You have to be like a multi-mega ultra-billionaire, right? That's what really rich is. But, you know, we were 12, so if you had a million dollars, what would you do? And I remember I was really into basketball at the time. So I would say, you know, if I had a million dollars, I would buy the Indiana Pacers because they were my team. You know, Reggie Miller, Rick Schmidt, the whole nine. I would just buy the Indiana Pacers. I'd own the team, and then they'd be my team, and I'd do with them whatever I wanted to.

[10:15] You know, or we'd talk about the cars that we'd buy or the places we'd go, kind of on and on. But consider Jesus. Consider his eternal equality with God. All the power, all the glory, all the authority, all the freedom, all the privilege and prerogative of God, the creator, sustainer, owner, ruler of everything seen and unseen. And what did Jesus do with this infinite privilege and prerogative? The text says he didn't consider it a thing to be grasped. Now, that phrase is a very

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important one, and it's easy to misunderstand because it's something like an idiomatic expression in Greek.

It's sort of a saying. It's a way of saying something. And it means something like he didn't exploit it for his own gain. Or as the ESV footnote says, he didn't hold on to it for his own advantage.
Think of an ancient ruler sitting on their throne, clothed in splendor, attended by servants, armies at their commands, and they grasp their scepter, and they make everything around them work to their own advantage, their own gain, their own glory. But Jesus is completely different.
Different than every despot to rule through history. Different than you and I, to be sure. Rather than grasping that scepter of his authority and prerogative and privilege, he lays it down. And instead, we're told he emptied himself. And in emptying himself, he doesn't become less God. You know, about a hundred years ago, it was a bit of a fad in theology to talk about how Christ emptied himself, perhaps of divine attributes when he became human.
Maybe when Jesus emptied himself, he wasn't any longer all-powerful or all-knowing or these sort of things, you know. But that's not what the word means. Jesus was fully God and remained fully God in the incarnation. The word doesn't mean he emptied himself of something. It means he empties himself.
[12:46] And again, it's a turn of expression. It's poetry. It means he laid down all of his rights and he took the form of a servant.

He became fully human. The text says he was born in the likeness of men. And again, that word doesn't mean he was sort of like a human, but that he was like a human in every way. He took full humanity into his person and was even born. Imagine that. The creator who gave birth to absolutely everything, himself becoming born, small, weak, helpless. There's nothing more helpless and powerless than a newborn.
Now, what does Jesus do in his fully humanness, what we come to call his incarnation? When the infinite God takes on finite humanity, what then does he do? Well, think of all that Jesus was qualified to do, right? He had the wisdom to confound every philosopher who ever lived, and he had the power to conquer every kingdom that ever marched into battle.
But what does the fully human Jesus do? Again, the text says he humbles himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.
Now, as the church over the years and over the centuries has meditated on this passage, Philippians 2, 6 through 11, it started on the basis of this text to speak of the work of Christ in two stages or two states. We have the stage or the state of humiliation, that's verses 6 through 8, and then the state of exaltation, that's verses 9 through 11. The state of Christ's humiliation, Christ's humiliation would include his incarnation, his obedience, his death, and the state of Christ's exaltation would include his resurrection, his ascension, and eventually his return in glory.
[15:05] But when we speak of Christ's state or stage of humiliation, we must remember this very important fact, that he humbled himself. The word humiliation to us means something often that's done to you, right? You're being humiliated. But when the church speaks of Christ's humiliation, we mean that Christ, the preexistent and infinitely glorious one, humbled himself. It was by his own choosing, his own desire, that he got low. He got low and chose the path, not of worldly power or worldly wisdom, but the path of obedience to his heavenly Father. And this obedience resulted in death.

Of course, history has many stories of great men and women who, through their virtue, end up suffering a martyr's death. Socrates, famously, was faithful to his sort of inner call to seek truth and stir up the young minds of Athens to wisdom. And as a result, the powers that be in Athens sentence him to death, and he has to drink the hemlock. But you know, Christ's death was no sort of comparably serene affair.
His death, as verse 8 says, was death on a cross. Now, 2,000 years after Jesus' death, we don't feel the shock of those words.
I know I don't. You know, we put crosses in stained glass and on jewelry and atop our steeples. But, you know, crucifixion in the first century was the most shameful and disgusting way to die.
No one spoke about crucifixion in polite company. It was a death reserved for criminals and slaves and most certainly not Roman citizens. It was basically the way the Roman Empire said, we have total control to do with your body whatever we choose, and if we want to treat it like trash and hang it up in a bloody mess, then we will. Friends, Jesus was no Socrates, defiantly sipping hemlock with his friends gathered around. Jesus became a servant and died the death of a slave, butchered and

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abandoned and shamed.
[17:40] Why? Why? Why did Jesus give up his infinite divine privilege to become a servant and die like this?

Well, because if you and I were steeped in the biblical story, and if we heard this poem, if we heard this hymn recited, it would start to remind us of an earlier story.
As we would hear this song recounted, we would start to hear echoes of Eden, and we would start to think of Adam. We'd start to think of Adam, the first human called to serve God and bear his image. But what happens? Adam, the human, reaches up to grasp the privileges and prerogatives of God.
And when he takes the fruit from the tree, you see, you see, when Adam takes the fruit from the tree, he's not sort of enacting some sort of innocent coming-of-age story. No, Adam is beginning a cosmic revolt. The creature wants to put himself in the place of the creator. The human puts himself on the throne of God. And in so doing, Adam, grasping to become like God, unleashes sin into the world.
And though we were born in freedom, we all become slaves. Slaves of sin and death and shame. But if the essence of sin is humanity putting themselves in the place of God, the essence of our salvation is God putting himself in the place of humans.
[19:36] And not just humans, but sinful, enslaved humans. Christ goes down, not just into our humanity, but into our depravity, hangs on a cross, and dies the death of sin.

Jesus goes all the way down and undoes what Adam did. Adam was a human and grasped to be God.
Jesus was God, and yet didn't grasp it. He emptied himself and became a servant. And in that act, Jesus undid Adam's undoing. And a new spiritual reality was unleashed.
When Jesus died on the cross, undoing what Adam did, a new spiritual reality is unleashed into the world. And it takes every page of the New Testament to begin to describe it. And it will take every moment into eternity to comprehend its magnitude. At the heart of Christianity and at the heart of the universe, friends, is a crucified God. The true Lord is servant of all.
And the moment you step from being in Adam to being in Christ, something happens in you.
[21:09] You know, as humans, we're all born in Adam, and we all carry the weight of selfishness, right? Don't you feel that all too often? When you know the right things to do, but the very thing you don't want to do, that's what you do? Don't you just feel that, like, always weighing on you?

This is our inheritance from Adam. But the good news is we don't have to remain in Adam anymore. Christ undid Adam's undoing.
And through faith in Jesus, we can now be in Christ. And in Christ, we have a whole new mindset, a mind which is yours in Christ Jesus, Paul says.
A mind that sees privilege and power and authority and position not as a means to get more comfort and control and praise for ourselves, but as a means to serve others because the true Lord is servant of all.
You know, sometimes in our culture, we can fall into thinking that privilege is a bad thing in and of itself. But the Bible would challenge that, you know, privilege itself kind of isn't a bad thing.
[22:35] Privilege isn't a bad thing in and of itself. Think about it. Jesus had every privilege in the cosmos, and he was without sin. So privilege isn't a bad thing, but it all depends what you do with it.

How will you use the privilege, power, position, influence that you have been given?
You know, these things, privilege, power, position, they come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, all sorts of fears of our life, financial, educational, in our family, in our church, country we happened to be born in.
You know, if you think about your life, your relationships, your background, where you live, we all start to realize that we have more privileges than at first we might think. And the question is, what will you do with it? Will you grasp it? Or will you give it?
Will you hoard it? Or will you spend it? Will you use it to serve and protect yourself? Or will you use it to serve others?
[23:51] As Christians, friends, we must use our power and privilege for the sake of others. This is certainly true in the home. Husbands and wives, as Paul will say in Ephesians, submit to one another. Wives, use your gifts and talents to respect and encourage your husband so that he might flourish. Husbands, use your gifts and talents to love your wives the way Christ loved the church

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and gave himself up for her so that she might flourish. Parents, don't provoke your children or treat them harshly. Be patient with them, bringing them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord.

And if it's true in the home, it's also true in the church. Elders, deacons, ministry leaders, use your position not to puff up your pride, but to serve your fellow church members.
And church members, you have been given the dignity, you've been given the privilege of belonging to the church of the risen King. You are citizens of heaven, the salt and light of the world.
What a privilege it is to be a part of the church. So use whatever time and talents you have to serve your fellow church members. And if this is true in the church, then Christians must also work this way in the world.
We must have the mind of Christ. The true Lord is servant of all in all that we do. When we go to the office, when we consider what public officials we'll elect, when we advocate for compassionate policies, when we just live our life amidst our neighbors, we're meant to have this mind which is ours in Christ Jesus, that the true Lord is servant of all.
[25:52] But you know, as we transition then to the second half of this theological hymn, we have to admit that the call to humble ourselves and be servants is very unsettling, isn't it?

I mean, it raises all sorts of doubts and fears in our minds if we're honest. Being a servant can make us fearful of losing comfort, losing security, losing safety.
Is it just too risky, we ask. Will I lose too much, our hearts seem to think. You know, think of the lawyer giving up a high-paying job to serve her neighbors. Think of the high school kid giving up his popularity to serve the new kid.
He doesn't know whether that new kid's even going to like him or not. Think of the middle-aged couple giving up their time and energy and home to serve their aging parent. That's all pretty scary stuff.
But when we look at Christ, we see the answer to our fears. Because Jesus, the true servant, is Lord of all.
[26:54] The one who went all the way down was exalted all the way up. Let's look at verses 9 through 11 again.

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.
Now, if the key phrase of verses 6 through 8 is, he humbled himself, if you're in the Pew Bible, take a pencil and circle it. So that way when we preach this sermon series 10 years from now, everyone knows what the main point is going to be.
Verses 6 through 8, he humbled himself. The key phrase of verse 9 through 11 is, God highly exalted him. And connecting those two phrases, he humbled himself, God has highly exalted him, is that powerful word, therefore.
We could even translate that word, and that's why. Jesus humbled himself, and that's why God has highly exalted him. You see, in the bodily resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus, God the Father is issuing his supreme verdict over the life of Jesus.
[28:23] It's as if God the Father is saying, yes, this is not just what I desire, this is who I am.

I am the God of self-giving love. Think about it. When you go to a sports stadium, or maybe you're watching your favorite team on TV, sometimes, what do you see around the edge of the stadium? Sometimes you see what? You see retired jerseys hanging around. And what's being said in those sort of retired numbers, those retired jerseys? You know, what's being said there is not just, hey, these guys were pretty great.
What's being said is, these players define us. When you see Michael Jordan's number 23 hanging up in Bulls Stadium, it's as if they're saying, that's who we are.
That's who the Bulls are. His greatness defines us. And we might stink right now, but that number says who we are.
[29:34] Friends, so it is with Jesus. When God exalts him, God the Father is saying, this act of self-giving love, the cross, defines us.

So if we are trying to think of God apart from Jesus and apart from the self-humbling act of obedience at the cross, we are not thinking of the one true God.
Any God without the cross of Christ at the center is an idol of our own human imagination. But consider the crucified Jesus is also the risen Lord.

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God the Father gives Jesus the name above every name. And what is that name? Well, it's probably what we see in verse 11. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
Lord. Now you might be asking, if Jesus was already Lord from before all time, in what sense does God the Father bestow that name upon him? Is Jesus like more Lord now than he was like back in eternity past?
[30:43] Well, no. What's happening here is that this bestowal of the name is a public declaration.

Yes, the Son of God was Lord before his incarnation, but now it is publicly known and declared to all creation. But what's more, don't you see, friends, the name is given to Jesus.
Jesus, the servant of all, the one who humbled himself and died, this one is Lord. Now imagine how that must have struck the original hearers of this letter.
The citizens of Philippi were used to hearing that Caesar was Lord. Pragmatic, powerful, pompous Caesar. Caesar was Lord.
But now here comes Christianity, and here comes the declaration of God himself that it's not Caesar who's Lord.
[31:50] Jesus is Lord. The true servant is Lord of all. I like what Morna Hooker wrote about this passage in her excellent commentary on Philippians.

She said, in the Roman city of Philippi, where the cult of the emperor was so important, that means people were forced to worship the emperor. In the Roman city of Philippi, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord would have been seen as a challenge to political loyalties.
But the pattern of behavior that Paul had placed before the Philippians would have been just as much of a challenge to the whole Roman social ethos.
In other words, it didn't just challenge maybe who we thought was in charge. It challenged our whole culture all the way down to the roots.
And I think it goes without saying that it's the same challenge to ours today as well. But brothers and sisters, when you walk in the way of Christ and when you use whatever privilege or position or power you have not to serve yourselves, but to serve others, then be assured that the true servant is Lord of all.
[33:13] That that is not a road that leads to destruction, but to exaltation. You may be humbled now, but you will not be humiliated. Because the true servant is Lord of all.

Just as God raised Jesus, so too will you be raised with Jesus and you too will be given a name. No, your name will not be Lord.
There's only one of those and it's not you. But you will be given a name that sounds like this. Daughter of the King. Son of the King.
You see, friends, everyone, one day, everyone, every living creature will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. That's how this theological hymn ends.
At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And again, the contrast to Adam is unmistakable.
[34:19] Adam fell short of the glory of God and all creation fell with him. Now we're stuck worshiping empty idols that never satisfy us and never liberate us. But in Jesus, the tongue of all creation is loosed to acknowledge in his Lordship the glory of God the Father.

So don't you see, friends, when we bow our knees to Jesus now and follow him on the path of a servant, it may look strange to the world, but that's simply because we're ahead of our time.
Way ahead of our time. Everyone is going to worship Jesus as Lord. We're the people who do so now. So Christians, don't be afraid to be a servant.
Don't be afraid to stop grasping your privileges and to give. Don't be afraid to humble yourself and be a servant because the true servant is Lord of all.
And perhaps you're here and you're not yet a Christian or maybe you're not sure you are a Christian. Perhaps all of this talk about a life of service, maybe it's been compelling to you. Perhaps you would love to live with this kind of freedom and love, but how do you get there?
[35:39] Well, friends, we all get there by bowing our knees and confessing with our tongues that Jesus is Lord. In the book of Romans, Paul puts it this way. He says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

You will be brought out from being, living in Adam and you'll come to find new life in Christ. And after you believe in Jesus, the way you make that belief public is through baptism.

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So if you want to talk about becoming a Christian or getting baptized, talk to me after the service. I'll be up front. But you know, if you're still on the fence about Christianity, perhaps take a few minutes and ask yourself, prompted by the very language of this passage, take a few minutes and ask yourself, who is the Lord of my life?
You know, something's going to run your life. And most of us think that, you know, I'm running my life by myself. I'm my own Lord.
But do you really want to live your life serving yourself? Aren't self-serving people at the end of the day some of the most obnoxious people to be around?
[37:01] Okay, so we don't want to be self-serving. So we end up thinking, okay, I'll serve a cause. I'll live for my family. I'll live for my nation. I'll live for some sort of just cause.

But you know, as good as those things are, what kind of Lord do they make at the end of the day? You know what will happen if you serve a good cause?
If that becomes the Lord of your life? You know, if the cause that you serve doesn't succeed, you end up being crushed. And if the cause does succeed, you end up being proud and puffed up and arrogant and you look down your nose at all those other people who didn't join your cause.
But what if there was a Lord who loved you enough to die for you and who promises to forgive you if you fail? What if there's a Lord who holds out a life of service and glory, a life of service that will fill your days with purpose and meaning, and a life of glory that promises no matter what happens, even if you fail miserably, you'll be safe in the end?
Friends, this is the Lord Jesus. And one day, all of creation will bow to Him. we can do so willingly now or we will do so unwillingly then.
[38:27] God will be praised either way. The invitation is to confess Jesus as Lord now, to join your life to Him, to step out from living in Adam and to take up a whole new way of being in Christ Jesus, the true Lord who is servant of all, the true servant who is Lord of all.

Friends, may this mind be ours. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge You today as Lord, as the King of glory, and as the true servant.
Jesus, thank You for laying down Your life to die for our sins so that we might have a whole new life before You and before the world. Thank You, Lord, for the forgiveness of all of our sins in the cross. Thank You for the resurrection life that You promise us. Lord, I pray that Your mind would go deeper and deeper into all of our lives, not just today, not just this week, but on and on and on. Lord, we ask this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

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