

UNITY, DEATH AND GLORY

A SERMON

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This letter, as I'm sure you know, was written to the Christians in Philippi. When Paul initially wrote this letter he was probably in chains tied to a Roman soldier or even in prison itself. In the first chapter of the letter Paul give thanks for all God was doing in the church, and lets them know he is praying for them continually. He also wants them to know that even though he's imprisoned, he is not without hope, the gospel is still going forward. In all the Philippians are doing, Paul encourages them to continue to living for Christ. To be reminded of all Jesus has done for them, and to continually walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. This has all been made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

Now as we move into chapter 2 Paul is going to encourage the Philippians to serve one another and continue to walk in unity together. He will show them how Christ is the perfect example of humility. How He left Heaven and came to Earth as a man how he lived the perfect life, and died the perfect death, paying the cost of sins, past, present and future. Finally Paul will tell the Philippians how Christ will be exalted to King of King, and all will bow before Him.

For our message I've broken things down into three key points, our first point I've called "Unity through Humility". Our second point is "Humility even to Death", and our third, and last point is called "Risen and Lifted Up". However, before we get too far into things, let us read the scriptures together, I'm going to go back to Chapter 1, starting a verse 27.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

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

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

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.

Philippians 1:27 - 2:11

Paul begins Chapter 2 with the word “so” and it’s important to remind ourselves what Paul previously said. At the end of Chapter 1 Paul calls us to live a life worthy of the gospel, that we would stand firm together in one spirit, side by side for the gospel. Paul then reminds us, like Christ, we too will suffer and go through trials. And finally we are reminded that even in our suffering we will grow, become more and more like Christ, And having the same joy that Paul felt for the gospel. So in light of these things, let us move into our first point - ‘Unity through Humility’.

Paul calls the Philippians, and us, to a life of unity and humility in Christ. However before Paul does this, he make an appeal to the Philippians, In verse 1 and 2 he says, “if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the

Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (Philippians 2:1–2, ESV). This section can sometimes be a little hard to understand, but listen to how Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*. “If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other... (Philippians 2:1–2, *The Message*). When Paul calls the Philippians to, “complete my joy by being of the ‘same mind’, having the ‘same love’, being in full accord and of one mind.” He is reflecting back to his earlier comment from chapter 1 where he calls them to “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side...”. When Paul uses the phrase ‘same mind’ he’s thinking more about ‘attitude’ and ‘world view’ than he is about ‘doing all things exactly the same way’. Having the ‘same mind’ speaks of ‘thinking about things in the same way’. Instead of doing them in the same way, we are to have the same goals, the same values. Everything we do should be rooted in the gospel, but allowing for different gifting’s, and different ways of doing things.

Think of a team in a tug-of-war, each person pulling in the same direction, with the same goal, but using different techniques. Some use under-hand holds, while others over-hand. Some have their feet together, while other spread their feet apart. In whatever stance they use, they are all pulling together. They are likeminded, driving forward towards the goal, working together in unity. If a player decide to push instead of pull, or go in a completely different direction, it would effect not only the individual but the whole team. This is what Paul has in mind when he said for the Philippians to have, the same mind, have the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Else where in the Bible, Paul reminds the Corinthians that love “...does not insist on its own way...” (1 Corinthians 13:5). And James, the brother of Jesus, tells us, “... where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” (James 3:16). So to avoid disorder, not insisting on our own way, not having selfish ambition, we are to have the same mindset, the same disposition, the same focus. We are to have ... the mind of Christ. Paul then goes on to reminds the Philippians to, 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. (Philippians 2:3–4)

Paul now begins to really drill down, He knows if things remain disconnected, the Philippians could fall into serious trouble. Clearly some people were proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition, and looking to bring disrepute to Paul. They where becoming prideful among themselves, and vain in their thinking. Isn’t this something we all struggle with? Can we not all be tempted to sinful ambition? How often is our way of doing things more important to us?

It can be much easier to say “My way or the highway”, than it is to come alongside someone else and take their ideas onboard. The artists were not doing anything wrong, they were simply doing things in a different way. Here in Chapter 2 we see Paul calls us to working in unity, to have the ‘same mind’, to love one another, and not always to insist on our own way. In contrast to selfish ambition Paul calls for humility, to put others first, their interests before our interests. Gordon Fee in his excellent commentary on Philippians points out, “the fundamental difference between the Greek and biblical use of humility is that lowliness is looked on as shameful, to be avoided and overcome by act and thought. Whereas in the New Testament humility is used to describe those events that bring a person into a right relationship with God and one’s fellow-humans.” (Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, Gordon Fee). In our day and age humility is often looked down on. However this is a fundamental virtue of the Christian faith, and something that Christ himself modelled perfectly. Let’s now move onto our second point which I’ve called “Humility even unto Death”.

In verse 5 Paul says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”, (Philippians 2:5). The King James Version put a different slant on things, instead of saying, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...”. The King James says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...”. Here Paul is saying, in all these things, these ‘attitudes’, these ‘world views’, let them be in you, like they are in Christ. Let your mind be like His mind.

From here Paul goes on into one of the most amazing and beautiful sections of scripture we have. “...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. (Philippians 2:6-8). Firstly what Paul wants us to know is that Christ is fully God, The ‘Nicene Creed’, written 300 years after the death of Christ, describes Jesus this way “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” Christ was, and is fully God, part of The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one, all God. And yet Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but instead he emptied himself, expressing His love for God, and us in humility. Christ goes from being equal with God, to taking on the role of a man, a slave. The Greek word is, δούλος (doulos).

The NIV says Jesus “...made himself nothing”, where as other translations describe it as Christ “...emptying himself.” But what does this mean? At surface level it feels like he removed something from himself, like His deity for instance. But this isn’t the case. If He did empty himself of his deity He would of course no longer be God. So what does the phrase - “He emptied Himself” - mean? One way to think about it is Christ “abandoned his rights; and became a nobody.”

Listen to the words of D. A. Carson, author, and co-founder of The Gospel Coalition. “...Paul does not tell us that Christ exchanged one form for another; he is not saying that Jesus was God, gave that up, and became a slave instead. Rather, without ever abandoning who he was originally, he adopted the mode of existence of a slave. To do this, he literally became “in human likeness”. The idea is not that he merely became like a ‘human being’, but rather, he became a ‘being’ fashioned in this way: ‘a human being’. He was always God; he now becomes something he was not, a human being.”

What is key here is that Christ gave up something significant to come to earth, to become a man, and die in our place. Here we begin to understand how much He love us. And how important humility is. Look at Christ to see real love. Love that impacts our lives daily. In light of what Christ has done for us, how much more should we humble ourselves for those around us. How much more should we lay aside our wants and desires to serve each other. Let us look to Christ who emptied Himself for us. Emptied Himself and took on the form of a man, becoming the very thing He created. The potter becomes the clay, still fully God, but also now fully man. But not any man, not a Pharaoh or President or Prime Minister. Not someone of great influence in the world. But that of a slave, a servant. The king of creation came as a servant to serve the creation He made. That same creation that should have brought Him honour and glory, instead brought him the cross to die on.

Paul tells us in Romans, “For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:21–23). And yet Christ still humbled Himself and came.

Returning to verse 8 of Philippians, Paul tells us, “...being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8). This is the very heart of the gospel, the very heart of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ, God’s own son, left Heaven and was born as a man, lived a sinless life, and died in our place, taking our sins upon himself. He was the perfect sacrifice, the sinless one, spotless lamb of God. Paul reminds the Philippians of Christ’s humility and sacrifice in light of all they are going through. He reminds them they are united to Christ in life and death, and Paul wants them to be united to each other too. Not proud but humble. Not self-seeking but in unity together, being of the same mind, the same Christ-like world view. God was not selfish, but gave up Christ for us all, and Christ was not selfish, but came willingly to die. And not just die a happy peaceful death, but the worst most agonizing death, death on a Roman cross. An agonizing death, both physically and spiritually.

In the well know song , “How Deep the Fathers Love”, Steward Townsend writes “How deep the Father’s love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son, to make a wretch His treasure. How great the pain of searing loss – The Father turns His face away, as wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory.” This is how much Christ loved us, and this is partly what Paul is calling the Philippians to. Not necessary to die - though some of them did, and maybe some of us will too - but for us to live a life of humility and sacrifice to each other. But how are we to think about this? How does this affect our day to day? In light of all Christ has done, in light of His humility, His sacrifice, how should we live?

This is not about doing the right thing towards those around us. This is about worship. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8) Let us make sure Christ is on the throne in our lives. Let selfish ambition die, and let humility live. When we look to Christ let our selfish ambition be put to death. When we look to the cross let us be humbled. When we look to each other, let us be unified. But Paul isn’t finished, in our final point - “Risen and Lifted Up” - we discover what happened after the 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.” (Philippians 2:9–11). Now remember the Philippians are living in a Roman colony. The Philippians lived in a place where where many different Gods. And even the ruler of Rome, Julius Caesar, saw himself as God. As the Philippians lived in this culture day to day Paul wants to give them a peek behind the curtain of God’s amazing plan. God sent Christ to fix everything that was corrupted by Adam’s sin, to redeem His people, to pay the price of their sins, to make them righteous in God’s sight.

And now because of all this, God has highly exalted Christ, giving Him the name above every name. Christ becomes the King over all creation. Now He is worthy of our praise! God now gives Christ the name of ‘Lord’ and ‘Messiah’. But how does should we think about this, this morning? How should we live in light of this? Because of what Christ has done, we are now objects of God’s amazing grace and mercy. Sometimes life just seems mundane, same old, same old, but we need to remember we are part of God’s amazing plan. Listen to these words by Paul to the church in Ephesus, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which

he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Ephesians 1:3–10)

When life gets hard or even just boring, remember we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. This is who we are, this is what we’re about, we have been drawn into God’s story of salvation. We have been chosen before the foundation of the world. We are not just called to be united with each other, we are already united with Christ the King! One day everyone will acknowledge this, everyone, in Heaven and on Earth will bow the knee. Angels and Demons, Man and Creation, all will confess ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’. One day everyone will humble themselves before the King of Kings. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:12-13).

So let us remember, we are all called to unity, to have the same mind, and to work together in humility. Christ is our example, in that He humbled Himself, He became a servant, He died in our place, taking our sins upon Himself. And because of all of this, Christ is lifted up, and given the name above every name. Our response? Worship, humility, and unity.