

Jesus Exemplar, Jesus Exalted

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[0 : 00] So we come now to our Bible reading, and you'll find that in the New Testament, in Paul's epistle to the Philippians. And you'll find that on page 980 of our church visitors' Bibles.

And Josh will be carrying on his series in this probably familiar but majestic epistle.

So we begin reading at chapter 2, verse 1. And Josh has asked me to read verse 1 slightly differently. And I take it he'll explain why later. But here we go. So if you have any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from his 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 rivalry 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 made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[1 : 49] 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.

Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word. Do open your Bibles again to Philippians chapter 2.

And you'll see that my title today is Jesus Exemplar, Jesus Exalted.

Some years ago, I was watching a football match on TV. One of the teams were having a bad time. They were losing. They were struggling in the league table, and they'd already had a man sent off. When suddenly, out of nowhere, two teammates started fighting with each other. It was astonishing. They were up against it under pressure, and here were two teammates throwing punches at each other on live TV.

[3 : 21] A team divided like that is finished. It's beaten. That is one way of responding when things get tough. Turning on your own teammates, pointing fingers as to why things were going wrong.

Play the blame game. Point the finger. Protect yourself. Well, for a church, and particularly a church under pressure, that is not an option.

That was the scenario facing the Philippians. Paul has just said to them that God had granted it to them, not just to believe, but also to suffer for his sake, right at the end of chapter 1.

And this church was a church born in the midst of struggle. At its birth, Acts tells us, Paul was thrown in prison. The gospel wasn't popular in Philippi at all.

So Paul's aware that they have opponents. And so it was more important than ever that they were at one. They live with hostility from the world, and they also live with the threat of credible-looking teachers leading them astray.

[4 : 30] We'll see more on them next week. And so the primary concern in today's passage is that the church be united together, that they have harmony. And to have harmony, they need humility.

And that embracing these things will ultimately lead to great honor. So those are our three points this morning. And so Paul says, firstly, the fruit that he longs for is harmony.

Verses 1 to 4. The fruit that Paul longs for is harmony. A church that will last in the long run is a church united in its purpose, filled with people who hold their own rights loosely.

Paul's plea is for harmony, for unity. That's what we see in verse 2. He wants the Philippians to be of the same mind, to have the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

And he makes the plea based on verse 1. He isn't reasoning with them as much as pleading. So the four things in verse 1 are aimed very firmly at their hearts.

[5 : 46] He says, if there is any encouragement in Christ, or perhaps more helpful if anyone's got the NIV, it reads, if you have, if you have any comfort in Christ, if you have any comfort from his love, if you have any participation in the Spirit, that is, if you share together the presence of God's Spirit indwelling you, if you have any tender mercy and compassion, any affection and sympathy.

Now, Paul isn't questioning if the Philippians have these things. They're not really ifs. He's pleading with them, not reasoning. We saw Paul last week being clear that of course they have these things. Of course they know these things. Of course these things exist. Charles Simeon puts it like this. As believers, they could not but knew that there was in Jesus a fund of comfort, a mine, the treasures of which were altogether unsearchable.

So Paul's saying, because you do know the gospel, because you knew the great peace that's promised through Christ and all that he's done, because you knew the measure of his love, because you have God's Spirit living within you, because you knew the majesty of God's tender mercy, because you knew his sympathy and compassion to humanity, then shew these things to others.

Respond to these things by practicing them with one another and by being united. Respond to the great grace you've received at great sacrifice and expense on Christ's behalf by embracing graciousness as the air that you breathe.

[7 : 29] That's how harmony is achieved. Verse 3 and 4, it's in humility. It's by counting others as more significant. It's by looking to other people's interests as well as our own.

Now, the tune of the letter isn't a sharp rebuke. The letter is overwhelmingly warm and encouraging. So what Paul's saying here is perhaps largely preparatory for what will be ahead.

Perhaps he's trying to head off the threat posed by the opponents we'll see in chapter 3. It's hard to be sure if the opponents who'll take center stage in chapter 3 are already amongst the Philippians, or whether their arrival will be imminent.

If you look at chapter 3, verse 2, just notice that Paul says, look out for the dogs, the evildoers. Look out. I think it's likely that Paul is anticipating their imminent arrival.

They're not quite here yet, but he knows they're coming. And so Paul wants to prepare the Philippians to be left unscathed by what they're coming to do. So he longs for the Philippians to add to the joy that we saw him express last week by standing firm together.

[8 : 49] And so Paul's joy will be maximized by seeing this beloved church stave off these opponents that are coming. If they descend into the kind of teamwork I witnessed watching that football match years ago, then they're finished.

They'll be done. The opponents who will come are peddling a gospel of achievement, a gospel of works, a gospel of self-righteousness.

And that can be a very attractive thing because it means that it gives us something to boost about. It's something that can set us apart from the average Christian over there.

Something to criticize others with. Something to lord over someone else. Something to point to about ourselves. And so if the Philippians are given to self-interest, to rivalry and division, then that is the perfect breeding ground for the opponents to come.

The Philippians are engaged in a war. A war against the world, the flesh and the devil. And in the face of attack, the Philippian army must stand side by side.

[10 : 05] United, together as one. Strong together. Soldiers often have a very strong sense of brotherhood, perhaps the strongest.

The kind of we're in this together mentality. No man left behind. And if the man beside you as a soldier has a weak arm, if he drops his shield, if he gives up, then it spells the end for your whole unit.

Well, so too with the church. We're a lifeboat as a church. It's what any church's job is, to offer life to those who are drowning. And if the crew, that is the congregation, are more bothered about where their position is on the deck, they're more bothered about their tools being stepped on where their life vest is, if it's been moved two inches left of where it belongs, then not many people are going to be rescued.

Worse still, if that's what the crew are busy doing, then it's likely that the boat will sink. It's so easy to become preoccupied with what's going to be best for me.

We all have the tendency to see things through our own self-centered lens, asking, how is this going to affect me? Before asking questions like, will this be what's best for God's kingdom? [11:28] Will this allow more people to come to know Jesus? Will this see my brothers and sisters grow to maturity? I think I can be quite confident in thinking that it's not just me that's pruned to that. and if it can creep in to even a good church like the Philippian one, then this is certainly something that we all need to think about.

Because life as a church family means not looking at things and thinking about how to further ourselves, our ambitions, our desires, our reputation. Life as a church means in humility, counting others as more important than ourselves.

It means not looking to our own interests. It means gladly giving them up in order for the, for our brothers and sisters to flourish. we live in an age that is obsessed with what my own personal identity is, what defines me, what, what must I forbid others from telling me I can and cannot be. It's an age of self-assertion, but that cannot be in the church. If our brothers and sisters fall, we fall. And so the way for a church to flourish is to learn and to practice the mindset that Jesus has.

[12:54] Look at others and think first of what will be best for them. I once heard it said that true humility is not thinking about, thinking less of oneself, but thinking of oneself less.

There's something in that. In chapter 4, verse 2, we read of two women who've fallen out. Uria and Syntyche, they've labored alongside Paul before.

They've been fruitful in gospel work, but now there's some disagreement. And that lack of harmony is enough for their names to be forever known in Christian history as people who are a threat to a church.

Paul brings this forward as an issue for the whole church. He addresses it in a public letter and encourages the church to help these women sort these things out. Maybe we think it's a little bit of an overreaction, but any festering relationship between church members has the potential to undermine a church's ministry.

That's why seriously Paul takes it. And so we can't just shrug our shoulders and say, it's not really my problem. It falls to the whole church to work hard together to be united.

[14:18] And when there is a fallout, there's a corporate responsibility to see that counting others is more significant than ourselves is embraced by the whole church. The fruit of the gospel at work in a church is harmony.

It's unity. It's unity. But that fruit can only truly be produced by the gospel because it's so costly. And so it's through encountering all that Paul mentions in verse 1 that we're able to do this.

As we know the immense pleasures of encouragement in Christ through the gospel, then we can respond in kind to others. As we experience the comforting love of our Heavenly Father, then we can truly show love to others.

in costly ways. As we're enlivened by God's Spirit, we're able to recognize Him in others and so treat them as our true spiritual family. And as we've experienced God's great affection and sympathy towards us in our predicament, then we can respond in kind by showing that same thing to those who are members of our church with us.

All of these things come at a great cost to us. We don't get these things cheaply. They come at the expense of the Lord Jesus on His cross. They come through the Lord's humiliation, His crucifixion.

[15:44] And so Paul goes on to say that they are a distinctly Christian family trait. That's the second point. Verses 5 to 8, the family trait of those who belong to Jesus, the family trait is humility.

Humility. The Lord Jesus is the supreme example of looking to the interests of others in a costly way. And as our Savior, the DNA of humility runs through our family.

Last year, I spoke at an evangelistic event for one of the CEUs on how we could know God. And having said that we could know God because He stepped into the world in the person of Jesus, it got a Muslim guy who was there rather vexed.

Whilst he acknowledged that God could do anything, he couldn't accept that God would or could become a man and enter creation because in his words, it would be inconvenient for him to do so. Well, that's exactly the point that Paul's making here. In fact, calling it inconvenient somewhat understates the cost required. Look at verses 5 and 6.

[17:00] Paul encourages the Philippians to have this mind, which is theirs 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.

Jesus has always existed as the second person of the Trinity. He was present and active as the world was created. He has always known and experienced perfection in the Godhead. He lacks nothing. Because he has always known and had everything, his desire wasn't to use what he had to try and get more and more.

He had no need of more. He needed nothing. He had nothing to achieve, nothing to prove. And so because of this, he's truly able to give and give.

And so from the very greatest of heights, Jesus stooped low. Though He had everything, He emptied Himself. He gave up all of His rights, becoming nothing and nobody, a slave, a servant.

[18 : 08] He inconvenienced Himself profoundly by taking on weak human flesh, by entering the world He created, by becoming low.

But the inconvenience doesn't just stop at becoming flesh, becoming a servant. For verse 8, He also humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death. Now, part of me understands the revulsion that the guy he was speaking to had.

It seems incongruous that the creator of this world would subject Himself to the regular everyday experience of living in it. And not even living in it when it was perfect, but living in it in the midst of all of its fallenness.

Well, how much more incongruous then to be given to death in this world? But notice that Paul says death twice. He's careful to make clear the kind of death that it was.

This wasn't a dying in his sleep. This was a criminal's death. Not just any criminal, it was a death reserved only for slaves, traitors, and rebels, those who undermined the rule of the day.

[19 : 24] The only person who could sentence a Roman citizen to crucifixion was the emperor himself. That's how serious it was. It was a debasing, barbaric form of execution.

I was reading this week that any use of the word cross or crucifixion in the time following Jesus evoked a sense of horror. It was not used in polite company.

Any use of it provoked horror. Perhaps we're so familiar with the word that we miss the hideousness of it.

But that is what the Lord Jesus did. That's what he did to ensure that there is encouragement in Christ, that there is comfort from his love, that we can participate in his spirit, and that we can do genuine mercy and compassion.

He stepped from the greatest of heights to the lowest of loos. Look again at verse 5. Paul says, Have this mind among yourselves.

[20 : 29] the mind being talked about is clearly what Jesus models in verses 6 to 8. It's also what he said in verses 1 to 4. They're the same thing. But notice how he finishes verse 5.

He says that this mindset is ours in Christ. Now there's some disagreement about whether these verses are setting Jesus up as an example to us, or if these things belong to us already by being joined to Jesus, by being in Christ.

I don't really think it changes Paul's point either way. The DNA of Jesus is sacrifice and service. It's looking to others' interests before his own. And as we are members of his family, that DNA becomes ours.

So we see what it looks like in Jesus, and we're given what's required to do it through Jesus. Jesus is the exemplar, and so belonging to Christ means having the mind that he models.

As we are joined to him, united to him, rescued by him, then the very tapestry of our lives changes. We're members of his family, and thus we take on his family likeness.

[21 : 44] We share his DNA. And so the fruit of all that Jesus has done by becoming obedient to death on a cross is that we now have a mind like this.

And that means his people live this life, Lou. They live this life as servants, slaves. They live this life giving up claims to what will advantage them.

They give up having their concerns first. This whole pattern is so utterly counter-cultural. The old self that lives within us still resists and clings on for anything else but sacrifice.

The devil wants nothing more than for Christians to be marked by self-interest. So in a family life, he wants us to make demands of our spouse, of our parents, of our children, of our siblings.

prioritizing with them what we want. Not thinking what's best for them. The devil wants us to put our own interests first.

[23 : 01] The last thing he wants is for us to think about how we can possibly make life easier for anyone else. And the devil wants nothing more than to see a church marked by competitiveness, by

pettiness, by division.

So when there's a change to a ministry you're involved in, maybe it means that your role has to change in church. Maybe you're going to be less prominent. Maybe you're going to be more prominent.

Maybe it will require more time and effort. Well, our enemy wants nothing more for us than to stamp our feet, to jump up and down, and to insist upon our rights.

Because that leads to disunity, and so ultimately leads down the road, if left unchecked, to death for a church. Our enemy wants us to respond like that because it betrays the identity that we have in Christ.

Or if someone does something to us that we don't like, knowingly or unknowingly, then what Satan wants us to do is extract every apology, every piece of pride that we can.

[24 : 09] He wants us to drag them over the coals for it. The last thing he wants us to do is to say, that's okay. We all make mistakes. Don't worry about it. Paul's plea is that such behaviors don't riddle churches.

They rob churches of real joy, and when there's trouble to come, it will sink a church. We'll see next week just how dangerous self-righteousness is, and it feeds off this kind of self-interest.

So Jesus stooped from being very high to being very low, but that wasn't the end of the story. Third, in verses 9 to 11, we see the future.

The future is honor. Honor, verses 9 to 11. Humility in this life is met with honor in the life to come. Often in celebrating Jesus' example in this chapter, what's focused on is his lowly humility, and it can be missed then that he was also exalted.

[25 : 22] Jesus' pattern is high, low, and then high again. Verse 9, in light of his exemplary humiliation, God has exalted Jesus and bestowed in him the name that is above every other 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.

The point here is that Jesus, who is God, had become the lowest. He'd stepped down to the very lowest place by becoming a slave, dying the worst kind of death, but that at the end, after all of this, he was then raised up from the lowest place to the very highest place.

Verse 9, the name that he's given that's above every other name is seen in verse 11. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God has given Jesus the very highest name, the name reserved throughout the Old Testament for God himself.

Paul's actually quoting in verse 10 here from the prophet Isaiah. This is what God says through Isaiah. He says, to me, every knee shall bow you and every tongue shall swear allegiance.

But notice there in verse 10 what Paul changes. Paul says that it is at the name of Jesus that this shall happen. Isaiah was prophesying that a day would come when the whole world would bow down to God, when they would see and know that he was the one who delivered salvation, and the whole world would bow their knees.

[27 : 13] Some would do it gladly rejoicing because they've accepted and responded to his words. But even those who haven't done that, they too will see that salvation is from God and they'll be forced to bow the knee.

They'll be fearful for them but they'll still be kneeling before the Lord. Isaiah prophesied a day that would see the whole world know who Jesus truly is.

And so Paul's point is that there will be no doubt about the glory of Christ on that day. That day is a certainty, it's fixed. Verse 9 tells us God has already exalted him, the future is set, Christ's pattern, his example was to be brought low before being lifted high.

And if his people share his DNA, his mindset, then we can be low now because we know that a day is coming where we will have everything. Paul wants the Philippians to have their minds on the day of Christ.

It's mentioned all throughout this letter, it's everywhere. he's sure that they will and what's true for Jesus will be true one day for his people.

[28 : 33] Just as he was vindicated, verse 9, just as he was exalted, so too will his people be.

Christ's resurrection to glory is the beginning of the same event where we will experience the same thing.

So chapter 3, verse 20, Paul can say, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

Jesus had everything, but he didn't cling to his rights. Instead, he became a slave so that just as he would be exalted, so we might share that exaltation with him.

He had everything, and he became nothing to share that everything with us. So we could grasp at things now in this life, we could look for our own interests, we could have selfish ambition to make ourselves in this world all that we can, but that's the pattern of being high now, and the truth is it's not very high at all.

And if that's what's chosen, then all there is to come is being made loo, being forced to buy loo. Or as a church, we can keep on having the mindset of Christ.

[30 : 06] We've proven time and again over the last number of years that we've done this. We've made costly decisions, some of them very big decisions that have seen us lose a lot, lose buildings and much more.

But we've also done it in smaller decisions, like moving our evening services around, like seeing people head off to other locations that we don't get to see anymore.

We've given to buildings, to missionaries, to ministries. Some of us have given up careers to devote ourselves to more service. Many people have given up an easy time at work to make known that Jesus is our King.

Many of us have handed over things we love doing in order to allow others to do them. Paul is saying to us that as we partner together in ministry, as we're united in our purpose, as we all play our part and bear the cost of that together, then we are taking hold of a glorious future.

The everything that Jesus gave up will one day be ours, as we'll reign with him. but that will be ours as we live this life through.

[31 : 30] Let's pray. Lord, we know how easy it is to blend in with this world.

And so we ask that you would help us to see what is of true value and to know that it is an honor for us to walk as our Savior Jesus walked. So grant us the grace we need to walk as he did.

For we pray in his name. Amen.