

The servant King of a servant people

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[0 : 0 0] Our preacher this evening is Johnny Miss Campbell. Johnny was apprenticed with us here for two years at the Tron. He's now working as an accountant in the meantime, but he is a preacher regularly in a number of different congregations around about Glasgow and beyond where we have fellowship and contacts in the gospel.

And we're delighted that Johnny is going to be preaching to us this evening. He's going to bring God's Word to us from Philippians chapter 2. So you might like to turn there with us now and we're going to read together. If you have a church Bible, it's page 980.

And it's Philippians chapter 2. And we'll be focusing especially on verses 5 to 18, but reading from the beginning of chapter 2.

Paul has, in chapter 1, introduced himself to the Philippians, a church he knew well. And which had been in close partnership with him from the very beginning of much of his gospel mission in Europe.

Philippi was one of the very early churches. You read about it in Acts chapter 16. And it's a letter full of partnership in the gospel and mutual service, one of another.

[1 : 1 6] This was a church, of course, that had funded Paul, had sent him money so that he was able to go on evangelizing in Corinth and other places without having to spend a lot of time working to keep himself in funds.

And there was a dear bond of fellowship between them. And there's much about that partnership and service in the letter and very much in this chapter, which in some ways is the focus of everything as Paul takes us to the Lord Jesus Christ and his example for us.

So he says in chapter 2, verse 1, If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation, fellowship 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, being 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.

[2 : 5 1] 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 the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. And likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, good evening, everyone.

[4 : 37] It's good to be with you this evening as we study God's word together. If you could turn in your Bibles again to Philippians chapter 2, which is on page 980.

And as you do that, we'll have a moment of prayer. Father God, our Lord and Savior, we thank you that we can gather here this evening as one people to hear your words.

We thank you that your son entered our worlds to die in our place, that we would be yours. Lord, we pray this evening that our minds would be reshaped into his likeness, and that our lives would glorify you in all things.

Open our eyes, we pray, that we might behold wondrous things out of your word. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. In recent years, we've been told quite often that we're all in this together.

Now, whatever you think of our current government and their economics, it is a very clever and well-judged slogan because it carries a sense of togetherness, of community.

[6 : 08] It prepares everyone to expect their share of austerity while affirming that it's not just you.

Everyone else is in the same boat. And in some ways, this slogan, we're all in this together, it does a decent job of summing up the message of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul is writing to encourage them to stand and to strive together for the gospel in the face of considerable suffering and opposition.

And so their unity and their partnership in gospel work, in joy, and in gospel suffering is all important. If they lose that, if they become self-centered and self-serving, then the church will become ineffective.

They won't build up God's people and they won't shine the light of the gospel into a dark world. So if the gospel is going to survive and flourish, then in Philippi then, or in Glasgow now, then the church needs to be striving together as one, rather like a well-drilled Irish scrum in the Six Nations.

[7 : 27] Look with me at chapter 1, verse 27. Paul says this, 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 unlike our politicians, you can't possibly accuse Paul of being disingenuous. He is all in this together with them.

The conflict that they are engaged in is the same conflict that Paul's been in. In fact, he's writing this from prison in Rome in chains for Christ.

But surprisingly, this letter is not gloomy or austere or pessimistic. No matter where you go, Paul's warmth and joy bubbles through.

[8 : 56] Because they're partners in the gospel, in suffering and in mission, Paul cares a great deal about them. His concern for their welfare and their progress in the gospel is far higher on his priority list than his own predicament.

But there is a danger that though their partnership with Paul is going strong, their partnership with one another seems to be beginning to fray at the edges.

Again and again, Paul reminds them to have oneness of mind, togetherness of spirit as they strive for Christ. He commands them to avoid envy, rivalry, and ambition in the church, problems that we see are causing at least one argument already.

So we can assume that Paul has heard that there are some dangerous symptoms, symptoms of a breakdown in the church. His solution?

He must think more of others and less of themselves. Chapter 2, verse 3, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[10 : 18] Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interest of others. And so throughout the letter, he points them to several examples of this self-sacrifice in the service of others.

People like Timothy, like Epaphroditus, and Paul himself. But the greatest example, the example par excellence, comes in these verses that we'll be studying in chapter 2.

These verses are not here to give us the textbook answer to the questions of the incarnation. No, they're here to show the Philippians and us the ultimate example of serving others rather than ourselves.

If this is the mind that Christ had, then it's the mind that everyone who follows him needs to have as well. Our ordinary everyday living needs to be shaped by these eternal cosmic truths.

Our everyday obedience is very important. Serving God in a Christ-like manner is not a vague platitude.

[11 : 38] It has an impact on the nitty-gritty of the day-to-day lives. And Paul points the Philippians to their everyday relationships with one another in the church.

How they treat their fellow believers ought to reflect the way that Christ has treated them, selflessly looking to the interests of others, not himself.

So the church can't be a place where we sing praise to God and then spit poison at one another, squabbling and arguing.

It's a place where we're working together, striving together, serving one another to create a people who glorify Christ, both in these last days and on the day of Christ when he returns.

And so the Philippians need to share Christ's mindset. Verse 5, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. They are to be the servant people of the servant king.

[12 : 47] So let's look at these verses together. First of all, at verses 5 to 8, where Paul shows that the mind of Christ is selfless service of others.

Christ's mind is clearly shown by his actions. He shows what it means to be in partnership with others in the gospel. And he shows all the consequences and all the costs that go along with that.

So in every phrase of these first few verses, we see Jesus humbling himself again and again and again and again. Verse 6, he was in the form of God God.

He had equality with God. He had all the status, all the privilege, all the glory. If anyone deserved a place of honor, then it was him.

And yet, he chose not to grasp onto it. Instead, he made himself nothing. He exchanged the form of God for the form of a servant.

[14 : 05] a slave. Someone with no glory, no status, living to serve the interests of others. That's something that's very easy to take for granted.

But it's a huge truth. Jesus had equality with God. He was living in a perfect world, a world with no sin, no pain, no death, no imperfection at all.

And as God all rightly bowed and worshipped and glorified him, and yet he humbled himself, he left that, he came to a broken world, a world full of evil, pain, and suffering, a world where no one recognized him, where people despised and rejected him.

he knows what it's like to get his hands dirty. There's not a hint of ambition or conceit in him, or even the legitimate enjoyment of his own rights and his own privileges.

He set all of that aside to humble himself, to serve us. So how exactly does that serve and benefit others?

[15 : 28] We see that in verse 8. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He lived a life serving others, but it's in his death that he accomplished his mission. His death was not a tragedy or some grand empty gesture showing us what sacrifice looks like, as some argue.

No, it actually accomplished our salvation. In Deuteronomy 21, God says that anyone hanged on a tree is cursed.

And so Paul emphasizes he was obedient to death on a cross, a cursed death, a death bearing the Father's anger, the Father's curse, in our place.

God's God's love. That's the consistent teaching of the Bible that on the cross, Jesus was suffering in our place to take away the anger of God.

[16 : 36] Isaiah, speaking about the Lord's servant, says that he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquity, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus' death accomplished our salvation. He took our place and our punishment so that we can be forgiven. No cost was too high for him to pay for the eternal good and well-being of his people.

When it comes to suffering for the gospel and for the good of the church, then even Jesus is all in this together. Jesus did many extraordinary things in his life on earth.

He taught with wisdom and authority. He emptied hospitals. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. But Paul tells us that perhaps the most God-like thing that he did was that he didn't exploit his power and authority for his own advantage and gain.

He used it for hours instead. That's what our God is like. He came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom.

[17 : 59] He veiled his own glory so that his people could be glorified. Most people think that that's not how religion should work.

People are supposed to serve their gods, not be served by them. God. What other God is known for taking the form of a slave? That is what our God is like.

Perhaps if you're new to church and to Christian things, you might find that surprising or shocking even. You don't serve Christ to earn your salvation.

He served you to give it to you freely. He experienced total humiliation from the heights of heaven to the depths of the grave for you.

And isn't that an affront to our pride, to the self-made man? It is profoundly humbling to us and renders all our religious efforts, all our achievement, all our status irrelevant.

[19 : 09] And that's what the mindset of Christ looks like in action. And that's the example that Paul is urging the Philippians to follow, the example of looking to the eternal good, the eternal well-being of others, no matter the cost to yourself.

At my work on the company intranet, there's a place on the page where statements from their ethics and values appear when you log on, perhaps to inspire us that they're not all evil corporate people.

But one of them says this, never ask anyone to do anything if you aren't prepared to do it yourself. Now, leaving aside a management cliché, that is the pattern that Christ follows.

He's not commanding anything. that he wasn't prepared to do himself. And what he did was much bigger than, many times bigger, than what we might have to suffer.

None of us can step down from heaven. None of us can or need to bear the full weight of the Father's wrath against sin.

[20 : 33] Paul is commanding them to love and serve their brothers in Christ because Christ loves and serve them when they were his enemies. It's not grudging or half-hearted because Christ was not grudging or half-hearted.

Your love and your service of others in the church is a reflection of Christ's love for you. God has vindicated Christ's selfless service of others.

That's what it means to have our minds shaped by gratitude to our heavenly king. So we've seen that the mind of Christ is selfless service of others.

But Paul goes on to show them in verses 9 to 11 that God has vindicated Christ's selfless service of others. Perhaps you're thinking, well if that's what it means to share the mind of Christ, then I don't really want that, thank you very much.

That sounds like an awful lot of hard work and pain. But the whole shape of the passage turns at the start of verse 9.

[21 : 52] So having stepped down again and again to humble himself in the service of others, Christ is lifted up. Verse 9, therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

The passage has a very definite shape, a V-shape to it. Christ stepped down again and again and again to the lowest point and then was lifted up and exalted on the other side.

for him the grave was not the end and he has ascended to reign forever. Notice that very important therefore at the start of verse 9.

This exaltation, this lifting up, comes as a result of everything that Christ did in verses 6 to 8. he was lifted up because his mind was set on serving others rather than himself.

That's why God did not abandon him to the grave, why he didn't leave him to corruption and decay in the tomb. His mindset was vindicated, his actions were shown to be right.

[23 : 13] See, the route to glory in God's kingdom is not selfish ambition, pushing yourself to the top of the pile, pushing others off the top of the pile.

No, the route to glory is humility, humbling yourself to serve others so that they will be exalted. And so all the glory that Christ stripped himself of has been lavished on him again.

He has been given, verse 9, 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.

He has been given the highest honor and he shares again in his father's glory. And at the day of Christ every eye shall see it.

Every tongue will acknowledge that he is Lord and God and everyone will bow the knee and submit including you and me. As Psalm 2 says, God will make the nations his heritage and the ends of the earth his possession.

- [24 : 33] Not as a tyrant or as a despot, but as the servant king who served his subjects. So God exalted Christ because he humbled himself and we naturally find that a very difficult example to follow.

The Philippians as a church are in danger of exalting themselves. They're in danger of falling into patterns of conceit and ambition.

the false teachers that Paul talks about in chapter 3 are full of it. They're coming to spread a false gospel that takes pride in self, my works, my circumcision, my adherence to the law, assuming that the route to glory is my good performance.

others. But the truth could not be more different. Remember what Jesus said, the one who would be great, let him become a slave of all.

So God is not pleased by proud, self-righteous hearts that seek their own glory. Wheel partnership in the gospel looks to see God glorified in others.

- [25 : 56] It cuts against the grain of our natural thinking. We would never put it so crudely, even in our own heads, but we want glory and recognition for ourselves.

Now, we want to be noticed, we want to be told we're doing well, and seem to be doing better than other people. I know that that's what my heart is like anyway.

But that sort of mindset is the opposite to the gospel. Seeking our own glory is not the mindset of Christ, and that's an attitude we need to keep on turning away from again and again, no matter how painful, as we follow Christ's example.

And don't miss that last phrase of verse 11. To the glory of God the Father. That has been Christ's goal throughout this whole section, not just to serve his people, but to serve his Father in heaven.

God is glorified by the people that he has redeemed for himself. And that means ordinary people like you and me, we glorify God by trusting in Jesus, and imitating his example.

- [27 : 19] That's why Christ died for us, to ransom a people for his Father's glory. That's what drove Paul halfway around the world in his gospel mission and his gospel suffering.

And that's what the Philippians' partnership with one another should have been accomplishing. and they were perhaps in danger of forgetting it.

So Paul says, no, remember Christ and his mindset. Think how he thought, putting others first and the glory of his Father.

Father, if you think that church is a good place to get noticed, to gain some popularity, or praise for yourself, then think again.

It's for God's glory, not for yours. We are all just servants, serving a greater cause and a greater glory.

- [28 : 21] So Paul, having told them the mind of Christ as selfless service of others, and that God has vindicated that mindset, Paul goes on to urge them to imitate Christ's example of selfless service of others in verses 12 to 18.

Often these verses are taken as very general command, a command to live out the Christian life. Because of what Christ has done, we live as his people. And there's some truth in that.

We do obey God's commands in response to what God has done for us. But in the context of Philippians, there's a much sharper meaning than just live as Christians.

Again, notice the therefore at the start of verse 12. these commands follow straight on from Christ's example and his exaltation.

Paul is saying, because of what Christ has done, you behave like he did, imitate him in all things. So when Paul speaks about working out your own salvation in verse 12, he's instructing them to live out this example.

- [29 : 48] That V shape that Christ followed is the pattern that we follow too. Costly service of others now, glory later. When he tells them to do all things without grumbling and disputing in verse 14, he's talking about grumbling within the church, grumbling about one another, rather than humbly serving.

Paul has already told them that the mark of true citizens of heaven is that they strive side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And that's what he's talking about here. This phrase, work out your salvation, carries the sense of continuous, sustained, energetic labor.

So this sort of partnership is not easy, and it doesn't happen automatically, but it takes effort and it takes determination. Let's notice the tone of these verses.

We might imagine that Paul could have scolded them for starting to show these signs of ambition and conceit, but no, they're warm, they're full of warmth and encouragement as a friend and brother in Christ.

- [31 : 09] Christ. And though it's all about costly service, it's not gloomy in the slightest. It's full of joy and hope for the future. Look at verse 12.

He calls them his beloved. He tells them to obey as they've always obeyed, whether he's been there to watch them or not. Verse 13, he tells them to work because it is God who works within you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Verse 15, he encourages them to be blameless and innocent, children of God shining as lights in the world. Verse 16, he expects that at the day of Christ, he will be proud that he did not run in vain or labor in vain.

He expects to have cause to be proud of them, like a father is proud of his children as they graduate from university. perhaps you find some of that language a little troubling.

Did Paul really just say that they have always obeyed, that they can be blameless and innocent in this world? Well, sinless perfection for us on this world is impossible.

- [32 : 32] No one but Christ can do that. But it is possible. It is possible to obey God, to repent and live for him because if you're a Christian, then, as Paul says, God himself is at work in you, to will and to work for his good pleasure.

It is possible for the Philippians to serve one another as a reflection of Christ's service. Now, make no mistake, that will be difficult.

It will take effort. But they can be confident as they do it in the fear of the Lord because God is at work accomplishing his good pleasure.

The mind that they're to have in Christ Jesus, verse 5, says, is already theirs. Did you notice that? Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

And if you trust in Christ, then it's yours as well. So live out Christ's example. Be the heavenly citizens that you are, the servant people of the servant king.

- [33 : 47] Now, we need to remember that Paul is not talking about just being nice to everyone for the sake of it. He's talking, first of all, about real gospel partnership to build each other up in the church.

church. The sort of squabbling and bickering that was beginning to spring up in Philippi is not just unpleasant, it gets in the way of gospel work.

The church is crucial for the eternal good of God's people. The primary place where we're taught to live the Christian life is the church.

church. It's where we obey all those commands to love one another, to build one another up, rebuke one another, disciple one another. All those commands that are one another are church commands.

It's where the word of life is preached week by week to God's people and to needy worlds. And so joyful gospel partnership in the church will give the best platform for gospel growth.

[34 : 56] And so how we serve one another in our everyday relationships in the church, that's very important. It might be very costly to back down from an argument, to admit you're wrong.

It wounds your pride. And it might mean you don't get the thing that you wanted. And you'll almost certainly have to deal with the mess that you've created.

And it's costly to invest in other people, to encourage them, to serve them, to help them to glorify Christ in their lives, rather than just focusing on yourself.

That's a really important way that we serve one another, especially younger Christians who perhaps need some help and some encouragement. Sometimes that will mean grasping the nettles, rebuking sin that we see in someone.

And all that is time consuming. It's hard work. And it can be very draining too. But it's worth it.

[36 : 11] It's a joyful thing. It really is because on the day of Christ, like Paul, you will see and you will know that you have not run or labored in vain.

That's when you'll see the final fruit of all the hard work that you put in in the service of Christ and the service of others. And God will be glorified by it.

So Paul's talking about gospel partnership to build up the church, but also to bring others into the church. Their witness is also very much in view in these verses.

Look at verse 15. He tells them that if they do all things without grumbling and disputing, they will shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.

So if the Philippians are truly united in gospel partnership, then they will be truly effective in gospel mission for Christ. They will shine like the stars of heaven.

[37 : 18] bringing the light of the gospel to a darkened world. But if they're divided, if they're refusing to serve one another, then they'll see the light of their witness grow dim and perhaps even go out altogether.

As hints in chapter four that some of them are beginning to not work together, even for Christ. Outsiders will see and hear about their behavior.

And even if someone was to hear the gospel and believe and repent, who's going to want to join a church where people are full of selfish ambition and conceit at each other's throats, either in public or in private?

Would you? Would your friends want to join a church like that? That sort of church is no different from the crooked and twisted generation that we live amongst, full of blame and guilt, not acting like the children of God and citizens of heaven that we are.

It's very easy to grumble. It's very easy to be dissatisfied with one another. But isn't Paul's attitude a wonderful counter, to that attitude.

[38 : 43] Look at verse 17. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. He's using the language of Old Testament sacrifice. Even if, he says, my life is poured out, even if I'm killed in the service of your faith, he is glad.

He rejoices in that. Isn't that extraordinary? And he says, if that happens, you also should rejoice with me.

You see, there is joy in suffering. There is joy in serving sacrificially. God because we know that as we suffer for the gospel, we are serving Christ and his church and it is worth it.

Whether that's in the extreme, like Paul was, in the extreme situation of facing death, or just in the everyday, down to earth, everyday relationships with one another.

[39 : 57] we all have the great encouragement that our struggling, our striving, and our service is what Christ has done already.

His mindset was complete self-sacrifice in the service of others. He sought our eternal good, our well-being, rather than his own glory, and his own comfort, and his own security.

And that is the mindset that we all need to share. He is the servant king, and we are his servant people. Let's pray together.

Father, as we have read and studied these words this evening, we are struck by how far short we often fall, how unlike Christ we often are, through our weakness, our negligence, or our own deliberate faults.

But we thank you that you are merciful, that your steadfast love reaches to the heavens, and that Christ has saved us and cleansed us from all unrighteousness.

[41 : 16] We thank you that he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life that we might live. Help us, we pray, to live out our salvation with fear and trembling, not grumbling or disputing, not with selfish ambition or conceit, but with all humility, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel so that your name may be glorified in us and in the world.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.