

“Jesus’ Humility as the Key to Being Family”

Philippians

Downtown

June 6, 2021

So I’ve known Michael since his first year of college and the very early days of our church plant. Seeing him grow up, intern at our church, marry and have kids. Still following Jesus faithfully. As the seasons of his life have changed drastically, his mission and purpose hasn’t. Beautiful.

The things that give me joy as a pastor probably aren’t something you think about a lot, but it’s that concept that comes up in our passage today. These first 11 verses in Philippians 2 are my favorite. Foundational bedrock for what it means to follow Jesus.

We’ll read through and break the passage down into three parts, and we’ll camp on the last one... which is quite literally the secret to everything Jesus has every desired and dreamed for your life.

And if that sounds like overstatement, I’m getting my cues from Paul. I’ll show you what I mean:

Part 1: An outrageous opening.

Philippians 2:1

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy

Paul starts this section with **an outrageous opening** line.

If you’re into sports you might imagine Paul channeling his inner Stephen A. Smith. Non-stop, overstated, run-on sentence full of hyperbole. Or maybe anti-hyperbole. We tend to use hyperbole to exaggerate how big something is... I ate a mountain of bacon. Paul’s doing the opposite. If there is any encouragement in Christ... if any comfort from love... if any participation in God’s Spirit.

What do you mean Paul “if there is any encouragement in Christ”? Every book you write and your whole life was given to helping people understand that there is EVERY encouragement in Christ. It’d be like saying, “If Nick Saban has any skill at coaching football...” “If lebron has ever flopped.”

Or more seriously if your spouse looked at you and said, “If you have ever loved me...”

That’s not a moment you want to blow past. I don’t know what you did, but whatever they say next is mighty important. That’s what Paul is doing here. If you’re not paying attention as you’re reading, you could blow past this thinking “that’s a lot of religious words I don’t quite understand” ... you could be dozing off when Paul is trying to wake you up! Ok what’s he getting our attention for... part 2:

Part 2: An outrageous command.

Philippians 2:2

Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Just like seeing Mikey grow and follow Jesus faithfully gives me pastoral joy... Paul says here’s what makes his pastoral joy overflow... and he ties back to what we saw last week: When the church lives as united, interwoven, sacrificial citizens of Jesus’ kingdom. Same mind. Same love.

The way our pastors burst with joy when we hear about a LifeGroup pitching in together so a hurting member can have groceries in a time of need. Or when a group of ya’ll tag-team to serve and love on a friend who doesn’t know Jesus and then in time ya’ll end up around the pool baptizing them as they say “I saw Jesus’ love in the way ya’ll loved me.”

Paul says his joy is on 100 when the church lives like the church. And if he stopped there, it wouldn’t sound that outrageous... but he doesn’t stop there. He keeps going.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

Hard stop. Let me break that down to make sure you hear how outrageous that is. “Do **nothing**” (We looked that up in the Greek and it means nothing.) ... “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit” DO NOTHING from selfishness or proud vanity. Uh-oh... Do you immediately perceive how impossible this command is? Pride and selfishness are the underlying root in all of your SIN!

African Church Father St. Augustine of Hippo coined the phrase *humo incurvatus in se* to describe how deeply engrained our sin nature is. The phrase means “man curved in on himself.” German pastor, author and reformer **Martin Luther** expounds on it in his **Lectures on Romans**:

Martin Luther

Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts (as is plain in the works- righteous and hypocrites), but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.

Sinful selfishness and pride curve us inward so much that not only will we take God’s gifts and make them about ourselves... but we don’t even realize we’re doing it. We’re blind to it.

And Paul’s wording here gives us incredible insight into the nature of our sinful curve. The phrase “selfish ambition” in verse 3 is more than just selfishness. In the Greek, it’s one word, **eritheia** and the most literal translation is electioneering or campaigning.

Paul’s saying that in our sinful state, we go through life self-promoting, self-campaigning. We live like a politician looking for ways to draw attention and applause toward our awesomeness.

- This is why sometimes when someone is talking, we get distracted thinking about what we’re about to say. Or sometimes when someone tells a funny story we start thinking of an even funnier story to tell... Because we’re self-campaigning. Listening to you isn’t enough. I need to draw the attention back to myself.
- This is why at times... and only for very justifiable reasons of course we cut someone off in traffic... But also why we curse anyone who cuts us off. Because our self-campaigning is like a little defense attorney - very good at excusing my bad behavior while eviscerating yours. Let me tell you, ya’ll are all some really bad drivers.
- This is why any mother of any bride has ever made her daughter’s wedding day about herself. Sinfully curved inward. Self-campaigning.
- This is why we are sometimes so quick to criticize others’ inadequacies... Why we tend to be patient with our own sin patterns impatient with yours.
- This is why some people never ask for help, proudly believing I can do it all myself... and why others act like they are entitled to your help for no reason.
- This is why when someone who loves us deeply confronts us...sometimes our first response is “nuh- uh... Well you do too!” instead of “Hmmm... Thank you. Let me think about that. I know you care about me and it took courage to bring this up.”
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I’m sure you realize I could go on and on with these all day. And just in case you’re hearing this list thinking, “You’re right. Some people really do struggle with this...” that is you doing it.

For the Philippians, this was a deep-seeded cultural issue. Their Hellenistic philosophy put a large emphasis on the individual. In their temples, their gods looked just like them... slightly bigger versions of themselves. The unspoken idea was with a little work, you could become a little god.

The most distinct example was Caesar - who as Ryan touched on last week called himself the savior and lord of the Roman kingdom. The Caesars expected to rule and be treated like a god. Caesars were ruthless... they claimed power through violent force, stomping out any opposition... They followed conquests with aggressive PR campaigns to convince their conquered foes, aren't you blessed to live under the Caesar's supreme rule?!

For Caesars, the pathway to divinity was up. Climb the ladder. Crush your competition. Point all the spotlights on yourself. And Paul is saying, even though you'll probably never rule your own empire, **don't go through life trying to be your own little Caesar.** Don't live like your own little god, the center of the universe who everyone should worship and cater to.

And just like this was a cultural issue for them, our culture believes deeply that the way to the good life is to center on yourself as an individual. Listen to your heart. Speak your truth. Don't let anybody get in your way. If they do, they're a toxic hater.

Now don't get me wrong, Jesus absolutely gives people a healthy and right relationship with their self -- where we see ourselves as image bearers of God, sinners forgiven and redeemed by His death and resurrection... finite beings wired to need rest and a healthy amount of self-care. But our culture has taken these ideas and made them so much about selfishness that it can get downright silly. So silly that parody instagram accounts have started to expose it. One that I find to be pretty good at pointing out the silliness is the Instagram account - The Power of Self Care -



Now obviously they're being silly...but you've run into some of this, right? Times where people really do seem to think and act like this? ...And those last two really get at the heart of Paul's argument here. That this kind of blatant, sinful self-promotion breaks down the possibility of us walking as a beautiful, united, self-giving family.

- When we're self-campaigning, constantly grasping at the spotlight, we can't build into relationships and community around ourselves. Because we keep turning it toward us.
- As long as my primary goal is to get mine... As long as we're self-campaigning, then we won't have much to offer the united kingdom of citizens Jesus is calling us to be. Because everyone else's needs and goals are obstacles in the way of me getting mine.

We know this is what Paul has in mind because of how he finishes the command:

Philippians 2:3-4

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...

See? Do nothing for sinful self-campaigning but in humility consider others more important than you. --> But like Augustine and Luther point out, this is blindingly hard-wired into us. How do we get from here to there?

Part 3: An outrageous way to win.

Paul's outrageous opening and his outrageous command all build up to a 5 verse song/poem about Jesus and His outrageous, upside-down way of life. Let's break it down starting in verse 5:

Philippians 5:5-6

Having this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

(so he's saying the secret path from homo incurvatus se to self-giving heavenly unity is the mindset of Christ...)

Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...

That's beautiful. We'll get into some of the theological nitty-gritty in the podcast this week, but for this morning, I just want us to marvel at Jesus. This poem starts with **who He is:**

In the form of God. equality with god.

Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

Colossians 2:9 says in Jesus all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form.

John 1 tells us Jesus is God and He exists eternally with God.

In other words, Jesus is already who Caesar desperately wants to be.

Caesar likes to imagine himself as a god, but Jesus is God. Caesar demands everyone worship him like a god, but Jesus deserves to be worshipped because He actually is God.

Caesar is climbing desperately, self-promoting, grasping for divinity.

But Jesus doesn't consider His equality with God something to be grasped. He's open-handed. He's so utterly confident in who He is. He doesn't have to grasp for anything.

What if every self-campaigning grasp for power, control, applause in our lives was actually all the evidence we need that we aren't God. All of it points to our insufficiency. Our inadequacy.

But Jesus doesn't have any. He doesn't have any insufficiency. No inadequacy. And in His supreme and accurate confidence, He's free to give Himself away.

And that's exactly where Paul's song goes. From **who Jesus is** to **what Jesus does:**

Philippians 2:6-8

Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, 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.

Jesus. Son of God. Right hand of the Father.

Emptied Himself.

He poured Himself out.

He lowered Himself.

He lowered Himself by becoming a human. Divinity Himself wrapped in human flesh.

To love, save and unite sinful humans, Jesus became one.

And not just any human. Not a top of the mountain elite. He lowered Himself to be a servant.

A servant who washed the filth off His immature, never-quite-get-it, constantly bickering and fighting disciples. A servant who engaged the highest in society with courageous confrontation and the lowest of society with gracious hope.

And from His position as servant, He lowered Himself even more by obeying and sacrificing all the way to the point of death.

His perfect sinless life... non-stop service for self-ambitious sinful humans like us... leads to a horrific human death. Death on a cross.

A criminal's death. An absurd mockery of His perfect life. And the perfect picture of who He was and

what He came to do.

Remember last week when the good news of Caesar would be shouted? When he won the war.

But this is Jesus' victory. He wins by losing. He conquers by condescending to a cross. He gives eternal life by dying in our place.

History has never seen a more beautiful picture of man not curved in on himself? For the joy set before Him. For the love of the Father. To ransom our lost, enslaved sinful curved souls.

Jesus lowers Himself and gives Himself away. Paul ends this theological poetic tour de force with the unfathomable reality of Jesus' end.

Philippians 2:9-11

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.

Who Jesus is - God Himself - made Him free to do what He did - lower Himself unthinkably, because He knew in the end where real exaltation comes from. God Himself.

The massive twist ending is that Jesus didn't stay low. The Father exalts Him. Up from the grave the Father raises Jesus from death. Up from a torturous execution, the father gives Jesus' a healed resurrected glorious body. Up from human service the Father gives Jesus divine reign at His own right hand. Up from an obscure preacher, the Father gives Him the name above every other.

Can you imagine the shock of a first century Roman if you could go back in time and tell them that 2000 years from now Caesar will be worshipped by no one... but the little Jewish preacher from Galilee will be worshipped by billions around the planet.

And this magnificent poem is not a detached-from-reality worshipful reflection on Jesus... It's also the very practical means by which Christians walk in the kind of self-giving loving unity Jesus leads us in. To walk this path of humility, considering others interests more important than ours, free from self-campaigning... we need three things:

1.) We acknowledge who Jesus is. Daily, hourly recounting that Jesus is God and I am not. He deserves to be worshipped and I do not. He deserves to get everything He wants and I do not. The secret to serving others and being the beautiful people Jesus died to unite us as starts when we open our hands and stop self-campaigning for our own fame and goals and grasp tightly instead onto Jesus and start campaigning for His fame and His goals.

- How does Paul keep serving and ministering the gospel no matter what His circumstances are? Well in 1 Timothy 1:15 he says that he knows Jesus came to save sinners of whom he is the worst. There's an unshakable confident humility that flourishes when we set our hearts and minds on who Jesus is and what He's done for sinners like us.

2.) We follow Jesus in what He did. You want to know who the best spouses are? The ones who legitimately make their goal to serve their spouses' interests freely with no need for reward or acknowledgment. You know what I've never seen as a pastor? A married couple who comes into counseling and goes "They just won't STOP serving me."

And it's not just with marriage. The best parents, the best roommates, the best neighbors, the best coaches, the best bosses, the best employees, are those who are so full of Jesus' love that they're free to give themselves away in service to those God puts around them.

- The heart of Christianity is Jesus' call to come and die. To die to the American Dream. To die to self-esteem. To die to self-campaigning and pride. To die to fighting for yourself. And filled and fueled by Jesus' love and Spirit to give your life away putting God and others first for the rest of your life.

This is one of the unifying elements in our family of churches. This aim to display the humble servant attitude of Jesus toward our community. It's a central question for all three of our churches..."how do we serve?" In our contexts of Lexington, Downtown or Two Notch road...what are the best needs we can meet? And those answers are sometimes different.

- In Lexington where there are a good many solid, stable families the possibilities of serving through things like foster care or adoption are more obvious possibilities. There tends to be more financial stability so generosity becomes a needed act of service to others.
- In Downtown, homelessness is a huge need. So we have a great relationship with Transitions, which is a homeless shelter. In fact one of our pastors is on their board and often conducts funerals for residents there.
- For our Two Notch church, a particular area of need is engaging with the generational impact of racism and racial injustice in America. Because they are looking at it right in the face. So there are particular opportunities available to us based on context but the vision is the same. Let's show people what Jesus is like, in part, through humble service.

3.) We remember where real exaltation comes from.

See, some of you are new Christians and the beauty of Jesus dying for you and the excitement at the thought of serving someone like Jesus served you... it's palpable, fresh joy. I love that.

But I'd like to speak to those of you who have been walking with Jesus for a bit longer. And maybe the privilege of joining Jesus in His self-giving kingdom has worn a bit. Maybe your kindness has been repaid with undo criticism or rejection one too many times. Maybe the hardship of walking in community is just outshining the beauty of it right now. Maybe you've been pouring yourself out faithfully in prayer and service toward someone, and there just isn't any fruit.

And there's a temptation and doubt creeping in - "Is this worth it? When's the payoff Jesus? This doesn't feel like it's working."

I'd like to give you this encouragement. Is it worth it? Yes. When's the payoff? Well if we've really let go of self-campaigning for our glory and our goals, then the payoff is already happening. Because Jesus is currently reigning at the right hand of the Father.

And today is another day that we get to repent from centering on and campaigning for ourselves. Today is another day to renew our minds in the reality that truest, deepest joy is found when we focus on Jesus first, others second, and ourselves third. There is coming a day when the Father will welcome home all those clothed in Jesus' perfect righteousness and He will say "well done my good and faithful servant". But even that won't be because of our servant records. It'll be because of Jesus'. So one more time today... and tomorrow, let's Consider Jesus who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that we may not grow weary... Let us draw near to the throne of grace asking God to restore to us the joy of His salvation and empower us with His Spirit to walk in self-giving service until such a time as He sees fit to exalt us. **Let's pray.**