

## Selfless Like Jesus

*Philippians 2:1-11, February 5, 2017*

The passage that we're going to study today is one of the great Christological passages in the NT. It's one of the key texts for learning about the person and work of Jesus. It's also a passage that teaches us a ton about what it means to be humble. As I've been preparing the sermon this week, I relate a good bit with C. J. Mahaney's comments at the very beginning of his book on "humility." He begins by saying, "Writing about humility is a humbling experience... There've been countless times while completing this book when I've been inspired to think, *You idiot! Why did you agree to do this?* And I could entertain for hours relating the comments and facial expressions of those who discovered I was authoring a work with this title." Similarly, preaching on humility is humbling experience. So, from the outset, let me make this clear (and this is the same way Mahaney started his book), "I'm a proud man pursuing humility by the grace of God. I don't [preach] as an authority on humility; I [preach] as a fellow pilgrim walking with you on the path set for us by our humble Savior."

But let's be honest, it's hard to be humble when you've got the home-town New England Patriots playing in their 7<sup>th</sup> Super Bowl since 2002 and trying to bring home their 5<sup>th</sup> Lombardi Trophy in those years along with the greatest quarterback of all-time, Tom Brady. Can I let you guys in on a secret? Did you realize that if you're not from New England, you hate the Patriots. In fact, in the midst of a extremely divided country politically right now, do you know the one thing that is unifying our country? It's a collective hatred of the Patriots. But speaking of unity, one of the greatest challenges that an NFL coach has is to get 53 players — many with little in common, some at the beginning of their careers, some at the end, some with big egos and others not) — to get 53 players unified and pulling in the same direction. Bill Belichick is a genius at building team unity.

Why do I mention this? In our passage today, we are going to learn about the person and work of Christ along with humility, but there's a larger issue Paul is concerned with: the unity of the church. A church that is unified around a common identity and mission will accomplish great things for the glory of God.

Transition: As many of you know, over the past few weeks we've been talking about a 2017 vision for our church:

- The invitation in an invitational life.
- Everyone extending 12 irresistible invites over the course of this year.
- Everyone taking story changing steps.

Imagine what God could do through our church if all of us were pulling together in the same direction, unified around this common mission. Here's the point today: if we're going to cultivate this kind of unity, we're going to do it by being humble and selfless like Jesus.

**The Point: Cultivate unity by being humble and selfless like Jesus.**

Last week Tanner preached from Phil. 1:27-30 about unifying together around one mission. The key text was Phil. 1:27 which says...

The Philippians were experiencing opposition and Paul calls them to stand firm, unified. Steadfastness was impossible apart from spiritual unity and Paul picks up on this theme of unity in our passage today.

### **Read Philippians 2:1-11**

Here's what we learn in this passage today: if steadfastness is impossible without unity, then unity is impossible apart from an attitude of humility, specifically, the humility displayed by the one who unifies them, their Savior, Jesus Christ. This passage breaks down nicely into two distinct sections. The first four verses call us to...

#### **I. Pursue Unity through Humility (2:1-4).**

Explanation (2:1-2):

- The main verb for this section is found in verse 2: "complete my joy."
  - Paul was like a father to the Philippian church, and just like any earthly father, he got much joy from seeing his children grow in the faith. Their unity was the one thing preventing him from experiencing full joy with regard to them.
  - But, the primary thought of this passage isn't really about Paul's personal yearnings for joy but rather for their unity of mind.
- "One mind" links backwards to 1:27 and forward to 2:5.
  - Paul's fourfold repeated focus on unity in 2:2 was intended to awaken the hearts of his readers with the importance of unity.
  - Similarly, as one commentator puts it, 2:1 isn't intended to function as a set of four rational, theological arguments but rather passionate pleading.
    - Any encouragement in Christ
    - Any comfort from love
    - Any participation in the Spirit
    - Any affection and sympathy
    - Maybe 1 Cor. 13:4-5 is in his mind, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful."
- Why is unity important?
  - Think about it: there's nothing Satan would want more than for rivalry and divisions to run rampant in the church. Why? Because if we're fighting with each other, we won't be engaging in our primary mission and task, that of engaging darkness with the gospel of Christ. The mission of taking the gospel to uttermost parts of the world.
  - Rather, Paul is calling them to get their minds right, to get their heads on straight and remember their common identity and mission.

Transition: He tells them, in order to pursue unity you must first...

## 1. Crush selfishness (The Negative - Put off)

The main obstacle to unity wasn't their differences but their selfishness. Paul describes this selfishness with the words "selfish ambition" and "conceit," or "excessive pride."

Hear the warnings of Scripture against the prideful:

- "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18 ESV).
  - Pride will destroy our church.
- "God opposes the proud" (James 4:6 ESV; cf. 1 Pet. 5:5).
  - There's no way our church will receive the blessing and favor of God if we don't crush selfishness and pride.
  - Pride will not only destroy our church, it will destroy your relationships with your spouse, your kids, your co-workers and your friends.

Look inward, not side to side:

- "The real issue here is not *if* pride exists in your heart; it's *where* pride exists and *how* pride is being expressed in your life" (C. J. Mahaney, 29).
- Ask yourself a few heart penetrating questions:
  - Who are you primarily concerned about? Yourself or others?
  - Whose interests do you prioritize? Yourself or others?
  - Do you compete for people's attention and approval or do you find it easy to rejoice in the success of others?
  - Are you concerned with the needs of others?

## 2. Cultivate humility (The Positive - Put on)

Humility is the opposite of selfishness and pride because humility looks out for the needs of others.

"Humility opens the way to all other godly character traits. It is the soil in which the other traits of the fruit of the Spirit grow" (Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Godliness*, 74).

Hear the promises of Scripture toward the humble:

- "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2 ESV; cf. Isa. 57:15)
  - Humility draws the gaze and attention of our Sovereign God.
- "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6 ESV)
  - Humility invites the grace and kindness of God.
- If we want the gaze of God and grace of God poured out on our church, then we must collectively make the cultivation of humility one of our greatest aims.

“At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend” (John Stott).

- Building off of Stott’s quote, C. J. Mahaney says, “Each day you should be planning the defeat of your greatest enemy and cultivating your greatest friend” (65).

**Practical ways to daily weaken pride and cultivate humility:**

- Humble yourself before God.
  - Pray to see yourself as God sees you.
- Read and tremble at his Word.
  - Allow God’s word to shape both what you believe and how you behave.
  - Pray for the Holy Spirit to change you.
- Confess any prideful ways
- Express thankfulness to God
  - “Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow” (Michael Ramsey).
- Look for ways to intentionally:
  - Serve others (Mark 10:44-45)
  - Put others first
  - Encourage others
  - Honor others (Rom. 12:10)

Imagine how the application of these truths would change our church. If we did “nothing” from selfish ambition or conceit but “always” considered others more significant than ourselves. Not only would this transform our church, our city would take notice.

Transition: I’ve shared a bunch of great ways to weaken pride and cultivate humility but the greatest way is this...

**II. Focus on and Follow Jesus’ Example of Humility (2:5-11).**

A few introductory thoughts:

- There could be whole books written that focus solely on this section. As a heads up, we just don’t have the time today to go into every microscopic detail.
- There’s are some phrases that are hotly debated by scholars. But, my goal today is to try and help us remember the big picture. This passage wasn’t give to us to stimulate debate or argumentation, but rather to stimulate imitation and adoration of Christ resulting in a unified church. That’s our aim today.
- Most scholars agree that these passages are hymnic and could’ve been used liturgically in ancient worship.

**The Command to Focus on Christ’s Example (2:5)**

- We are to renew our minds and adopt the mindset that “is yours in Christ Jesus” or “also was in Christ Jesus.”

- The first option emphasizes our position of unity in Christ when we believed in him (theological).
- The second option emphasizes the example that Jesus displayed (ethical).
- Most scholars agree with the first option but this still doesn't eliminate an ethical focus. It is because of the fact that we are *in* Christ that we can actually live out this ethical exhortation. We are in Christ and now we must become like Christ.
- Here's what Paul makes clear: selfish ambition and pride has nothing to do with Jesus. To continue living selfishly doesn't reflect anything of your Savior.

### **Jesus' humiliation (2:6-8)**

- Jesus' whole life was marked by humility.

#### 1. His Humble Renunciation (2:6)

- "He was in the form of God"
  - Paul highlights the preexistence and divine nature of Jesus. There never was a time when Jesus didn't exist (cf. John 1:1-3).
  - The word "form" doesn't mean that he only *appeared* as God. No, he was God in his very nature and essence. He was fully man and fully God. He was more than a prophet, more than a good man, more than a fine example. He was God (see the Nicene Creed of AD 325).
- "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"
  - Another word for "grasped" could be "clothed." Jesus didn't *clutch* his rights and privileges, but he lived open-handedly.
  - Another way of saying this would be to say, "Jesus refused to act selfishly." As one commentator notes, He didn't "consider being God ground for getting but for giving" (Merida and Chan). He used his platform for giving and self-surrender.
  - We need to go from graspers to givers like Jesus.

#### 2. His Humble Incarnation (2:7)

- Jesus emptied himself
  - Some have suggested that when Jesus entered into this world he emptied himself of some of his divine attributes (this is known as the kenosis theory).
  - But the text doesn't say that he emptied himself of his divine attributes. Rather, it explains and clarifies that statement with the following clauses.
  - In other words, "emptying" is equivalent with "humbling."
  - "The *emptying* of Christ, then, consisted of an *adding*. He emptied himself by becoming fully human. The text does not say that he emptied himself by surrendering his deity; it says that he humbled himself by adding humanity" (Thomas Schreiner).
  - "By becoming human, by entering on a path of humiliation that led to death, the divine Son of God emptied himself" (George Ladd).
- Jesus became a servant:
  - A slave in the Greco-Roman world would've been deprived of the most basic

rights. Jesus became the lowest of society. He came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

- Jesus exemplified humility by being born as a human, and in the very humblest of circumstances at that.

### 3. His Humble Crucifixion (2:8)

- He not only emptied himself by becoming human, he willingly endured death, even the most degrading kind of death imaginable. Death on a cross was not only physically torturous but immensely embarrassing.
- Compare the first Adam with Jesus, the second Adam
  - Adam, instead of humbling himself, sought to elevate himself to be like God.
    - Jesus didn't use his divinity selfishly but rather humbled himself.
  - Adam disobeyed resulting in death.
    - Jesus perfectly obeyed even to the point of death so that we might have life.
- Look and meditate on and focus on your saviors humility. If we are going to be a church that's known for making much of Jesus, then we're going to have to become people who care less about ourselves and more about others.
- Review Story-Changing Steps
  - What will motivate you to serve once a month? The humility of Christ.
  - What will motivate you to connect with a group three times a month? The humility of Christ. Have you considered that your participation in a group is as much, if not more, for the sake of others than for yourself. Is it possible that your lack of serving or connecting with a group actually reveals more about your selfishness than humility?

### **Jesus' exaltation (2:9-11)**

- We see here the upside down nature of the gospel. Jesus humbles himself and he is exalted.
  - "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).
  - Jesus is exalted in a way like no one has been exalted. He's in a class by himself.
- Jesus bestowed with the divine name, LORD.
  - "The significance of the title *Kyrios* is found in the fact that *Kyrios* is the Greek translation of... *YHWH*, the covenant name for God in the Old Testament." (George Ladd). See Isaiah 42:8.
  - This title ascribes to Jesus the functions of deity.
- One day, everyone will confess Jesus as Lord.
  - Some will confess with great joy and humility.
  - Some will confess with anguish and despair.
- Believers won't be exalted in the same way that Jesus is exalted but we will be rewarded for our humility and this reward will be precisely because we are in Christ Jesus. Our reward will be the resurrected body that suffers from the tragic consequences of sin.

- What's astonishing for us, though, is that we know the King of glory and he knows us.

**Conclusion:**

- If you're like me, this passage has almost crushed me. Compared to Jesus, I'm pretty prideful. In so many ways, I care more about myself than others (than my wife, my kids, my church, my neighbors, etc.).
- Let me close with some good news
  - Jesus is not only our example he's also our Savior. The very cross that displays perfect humility for us also paid the penalty for our lack of humility and excessive pride. He died for my pride and your pride.
- Come to the cross with bowed heads and broken spirits, confessing your sin and receiving the forgiveness, grace and power to weaken pride and cultivate humility.
- Confess Jesus as your LORD.

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.