

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18

5: THE HUMILITY OF JESUS



Historical Context & Background

The book of Philippians was written around A.D. 61. This was the last letter Paul wrote (Colossians, Ephesians, & Philemon) while he was in prison. The church in Philippi was the first church to be started on the European continent and was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). Paul had been sent to prison, and while he was there the church sent a gift to him. In prison Paul reflected on the need for community, unity, and perseverance. Paul included his desire for unity in the church when he wrote this letter of thanks encouraging them in their faith. Paul desired for his churches to find true joy in serving Christ.

In chapter one, Paul instructs the church to continue in the faith and not to worry about his own well-being, for he is both prepared to “live for Christ” or “die for Christ.” He encourages them to stay steadfast even if it brings suffering. As we enter chapter two Paul continues the theme of unity through love and serving others.



Related Passages

Mark 15:29-32 - “He saved others, but he can’t save himself.” When it comes to loving others and serving others, there could be no more fitting example than that of Jesus putting the needs of the whole sinful world ahead of His own righteousness. Able to come down from the cross and prove He was the God they mocked and wanted, He chose to remain nailed to it and be the Savior they needed.

Luke 9:23-25 - Here Jesus makes it plain that anyone who follows Him should not do so for personal gain or to find comfortable accommodations. Deny yourself “daily” and take up “your cross” and “follow Me”. Accumulating the fortunes of the entire world and losing your relationship with Christ makes for a bad trade in the light of eternity.



Key Terms

Vainglory/Conceit: An inordinate pride in yourself or what you think are your own achievements. Some seek glory, status, finances...Jesus seeks the lost.

Crooked/Perverse: Twisted and bent out of shape, warped, dishonest. A deliberate desire to behave in a way that is wicked no matter what the consequences. (Philippians 2:15)



Key Themes

Having the Mind of Christ: The mind is the seat of our emotions. It rules and regulates our thoughts, our actions, our words, and ultimately our life. When placed in our carnal control it will always go astray: “out of the heart (not the fist sized organ that pumps blood through our veins but the gray matter between our ears) proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies...” These actions must be attributed to a carnal heart (mind). In sharp contrast, when we have the mind of Christ we think like Him which inevitably leads to us acting like Him. And when we are acting like him we are pleasing God. Jesus says “I always do what pleases my Father.” When we have the mind of Christ we are completing His mission, His purpose; we are ultimately fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28).

In Acts 2 the scripture says “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” The use of the term “one accord” in Acts 2 is the same as used in Philippians 2:2—of one mind—regarding Christ. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the church that day, there were 3,000 baptisms and they were in complete harmony before being sent out to the ends of the earth. They were fulfilling the mission of loving the lost, not out of obligation or vainglory, but because they were mission minded and focused with the same mind and the same spirit as Christ. When we have the mind of Christ and come together as a cohesive body of believers to live out His purpose here on earth, nothing can stop us! It’s not just having all the body parts there as a pile of arms, legs, ears, eyes and noses but fitly joined together as a healthy, functioning body, ready to partner with one another and with the holy spirit to carry out the call placed on our lives.

Humble Yourself: Humility is an awkward topic in today’s modern culture. We’re told to run hard after what we want to accomplish in life—“Get rich or die tryin’.” The drive for ambition, though, can project to the rest of the world that we care about gaining power and prestige and not people. Even if we occasionally “inconvenience” ourselves to help the old lady cross the street or save a cat from a tree, it’s usually not a way of life. We aren’t born thinking of others before ourselves. As little children we jerk the toy from the hand of the other kid, tightly squeeze it and say “mine!” But, when using Jesus as our measuring stick and holding ourselves up to Him, we “esteem and regard others above ourselves and are just as concerned about the needs and problems of them as we are ourselves” (Philippians 2:3-4). Isn’t this the mind of Christ?

God the Son’s very act of becoming a human is itself an act of humility. That’s what Paul is highlighting here. Not just that, he was humbly born as well. Able to choose the green, rolling, slopes of Ireland, the majestic mountainsides of Colorado, or the colorful beaches of the French Riviera, He chose a stable with straw—no air conditioning, no electricity, a few animals and poor shepherds to welcome him onto the earth he had created. Jesus lived his entire life with little fanfare. He could have arrived in splendor declaring to everyone that he was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He could have summoned legions of angels to save him from the cross, but instead He “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Jesus knew who

He was, why He was here and thus did not question his place with the Father. He knew where he was going and what belonged to Him yet, He chose to live a life of service. He did not need the approval of humans to remind him that one day “every knee would bow, and every tongue would confess that He was Lord!” He didn’t need to be promoted here on earth because he already knew He was, and is, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus lived a submissive life, meek and deferential, humble. He did so because He knew what lay ahead for him: a glorious church without blemish washed in the blood of the Lamb. We must also remind ourselves of the Joy set before us. What joy? The joy of an eternity spent with Him in perfect peace! He wants to welcome us into eternity by saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord.” When you know who you are in Christ nothing else can move you or separate you.

In college, we spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about ourselves. Our major. Our grades. Our intramural team. Our free time. Our future spouse. What would it look like if we shifted our focus toward others and their needs? What if it wasn’t about us anymore, but about the person to our right and our left? How might the world change if we thought of others more and ourselves less.

Modeling the Message: Paul begins closing chapter 2 with verse 12 as he addresses the church as the “beloved.” He suggests that it is now time to put the mind of Christ into action. To do more than write a letter about it or respond to one. Paul wants these beloved people to live out their faith whether he is there with them or in prison. Real character is how you act when only God is watching. Do the “good pleasure” of God and don’t murmur or argue while doing it. If they do so they will be blameless and pure among their communities even though they will be doing so in a “wicked and perverse” culture. The darkness of their environment will only make their collective lights shine brighter, exposing the wickedness of their culture while at the same time demonstrating their godly behavior and concern for others. In many ways our culture is similar. How important is it that we have the mind of Christ and act in humility in the face of such a culture?

Avoiding Heresy: It may not come up at all (and there’s no reason to bring it up), but it’s worth saying here in case it does. Some people can get wrong ideas from verses 7-8. Two wrong ideas can come up here. First, the phrase “made himself nothing” or “emptied himself” for some people means that Jesus temporarily suspended his divinity—he gave up aspects of being God—when he became human. This isn’t the case. The church has always taught that Jesus was fully God, that his divine nature without change united to human nature. So Jesus was and is fully God. He laid aside his privileges, not his divinity; he laid aside what he was owed—praise, honor, rule, glory, adoration—from human beings so that he could save them. He didn’t smite those who cursed him, but died for them.

The second error comes where people misunderstand the phrase “being found in appearance as a man” of verse 8. Some get the idea that Jesus was God in his mind or spirit, and just looked like a man—took on a human body. This the church also has historically rejected. Jesus took on all of human nature—mind, body, will, emotions, etc. Jesus had two undiminished natures, and in himself united humanity to divinity so that through him our humanity could be reconciled with God.

66 Quotes & Illustrations

"Did I do my best?"

Around 2 A.M. on September 8, 1860, the steamship Lady Elgin collided with the schooner Augusta in the waters of Lake Michigan near Waukegan, Illinois. The Lady Elgin was carrying more than 300 passengers and crew on a round-trip sightseeing tour from Milwaukee to Chicago. Its return trip was never completed. The captain, not realizing how badly the ship was damaged, continued toward Milwaukee in the dark. About a half-hour later, the heavy boilers and steam engine broke through the weakened hull and the ship quickly tore apart. Most of the passengers and crew died. Only a handful reached the lifeboats. "Just when the Elgin took her final plunge," the captain recalled, "a heavy sea took off the upper works, the cabin floated, and several hundred people got onto this."

But the cabin, too, soon broke up, drowning many passengers and leaving others clutching small pieces of wreckage. Many victims held onto floating debris for long hours in the cold water. Some ultimately reached shore only to be pulled back into the breakers by a fierce undertow. Seventeen people were saved that night by a Northwestern University student named Edward W. Spencer, who battled the breakers for six hours. An experienced swimmer, he had a rope tied to his body, and time after time swam through the waves to grab exhausted passengers. His associates on the other end of the rope then pulled him and the victim to shore. Finally, having reached the limits of his strength, his body covered with scrapes and bruises, Spencer passed out. He woke up in his room in Evanston where his brother, William, waited on his recovery. Edward's first words were, "Will, did I do my full duty -- did I do my best?"

Although he tried to resume his studies, the physical and emotional toll on Spencer had been severe. Newspapers around the nation praised his deeds but he was never completely comfortable with the attention. The faces and cries of the victims he had not been able to save forever haunted him. Spencer never completed his education, and it was almost fifty years before he returned to Evanston to talk about the wreck of the Lady Elgin. After his death, his brother described Edward's private torment: "His face would turn ashen pale, and he would fasten his great hungry eyes on me and say, 'Tell me the truth. Did I fail to do my best?'"

What exactly is a hero? Certainly Edward Spencer would qualify. He was a student at Northwestern University in 1860, when a steamer called Lady Elgin was wrecked off the shores of Lake Michigan. Despite numerous injuries from floating wreckage, he repeatedly dashed into the raging surf to rescue passengers in mortal peril. Seeing his deteriorating condition, others tried to stop him, but on he went. He is credited with saving 18 people, one by one, finally collapsing in utter exhaustion. It is reported that, as he lay all night in the infirmary, he repeated over and over, "Did I do my best, fellows? Have I done my best?"

Spencer is honored by a plaque in the gymnasium of Northwestern University. But there are a couple of sad footnotes to his story. He was so badly injured that apparently he spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. And when visited in later years he said with tears, "Not one [of those

rescued] ever came back and even said thank you.” Though he undoubtedly did not rescue them in order to earn their gratitude, it is a sad commentary on our frequent failure in this area.

In 1924 Ensign Edwin Young (1895-?) heard Spencer’s story and published a song that draws a spiritual lesson from the incident. (Ensign was not a title of rank, but was Young’s first name.) Young served as Dean of the School of Music at Hardin-Simmons University, in Texas 1934-1956. I have been unable to find the dates of his birth and death. His song raises the penetrating question, Have I Done My Best for Jesus?

I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree?
To think of His great sacrifice at Calv’ry!
I know my Lord expects the best from me.
I wonder, have I cared enough for others,
Or have I let them die alone?
I might have helped a wand’rer to the Saviour,
The seed of precious Life I might have sown.

The refrain heaps question upon question:

*How many are the lost that I have lifted?
How many are the chained I’ve helped to free?
I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
When He has done so much for me?*

“True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”

RICK WARREN, THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

! Three Main Points

1. Have the mind of Christ; discipleship is about becoming like Jesus.
2. Live humbly and put others before yourself—it’s not about you.
3. Let the teachings of scripture transform your life.

? Discussion Questions

- If Jesus didn’t choose equality with God to be to his advantage here on Earth, why do we believe we are entitled to feel as if we are better than others?
- Paul derides vain conceit (vainglory), selfish ambition, complaining, arguing. Where do we

see these show up on a college campus? How does the passage speak prophetically to our culture and campus?

- Where do they show up in our lives?
- What is an area of your life that you've been humbled in?
- What did you learn from that experience?
- What causes the most division between you and your friends?
- What does it mean to value others before yourselves?
- What's the biggest roadblock for you entering into a humble lifestyle?
- What does it mean to have false humility?
- How does pride play into having a humble spirit?
- What are a few ways we can practice putting others before ourselves this week?
- What does it mean to be "blameless and pure" before God?
- What's the difference between God's "complete joy" and the earthly joy we experience joy?
- How do I create a heart that desires to serve?
- If my personality is a "louder" one, how do I quiet myself and let others take the spotlight?
- How does my identity in Christ affect how I feel about others and myself?

Application & Practice

Responding in Faith: Purposefully choose someone else's interests before your own this week. Don't tell them where you'd like to go to dinner, ask them where they'd like to go. Ask your co-workers to do the job that gets the limelight while you do the behind the scenes work.

Be conscious. Take note of the times you disagree with someone this week. Reflect at the end and ask yourself "were they worth grumbling about?" or "is this something I can let go and choose the other person's interests?"

Going Deeper

Sermon: "Philippians: A Colony of Heaven" - John Mark Comer