

Philippians 2:1-11

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[0:00] I've been trying to get fitter recently. I've been trying to lose a bit of weight. And what I've done is I've tried to eat less and exercise more.

So some days I imagine that example would spur me on. It would help me get out of bed. And some days I imagine that it would depress me. I'd compare myself to where they are.

And their sunny optimism would just bounce off me. And I'd want to give up. What you do need is someone to help you along, don't you? You need someone to say, in that situation, I'll take the kids. You go for a run. Your husband or wife to say, you know, it's important we spend this money on this, on fitness. But above all, you need someone to say, I love you.

And I'll celebrate when you run the marathon. But if I do find you on the sofa eating a share bucket of KFC, that's a setback. That is a setback. But I still love you.

[1:20] And I will help you get back up on your feet and keep going and help you get there. You need someone whose love doesn't depend on your performance, but whose help is strong enough to keep you moving towards the goal.

What I want to say this evening is that, in the Christian life, Jesus Christ is the motivation. He's the example.

He provides this love. And he also is this help every step along the way. If we think of the Christian life as one in which Jesus sends us on our way with our running shoes and a note saying, I'm your example.

Get going. I'll be waiting for you at the finish line. We shouldn't be surprised when we start to run out of pace and purpose somewhere around the track. What this passage shows us, I think, is that the whole Christian life is lived in Christ.

Christ sets us off. He's our example. He is waiting at the finish line, but he's also present to us by his Holy Spirit to enable us to put one foot in front of the other and to give us strength every step of the way.

[2:36] So whether you're struggling with sin, the Philippians are struggling with unity, or just suffering and under a deep darkness, the key here is that the Christian life is Christ.

We live in Christ. And he gives us strength every step of the way. I've got three points. And the first one is this. Christ unites us. Christ unites us.

Or you could say, you are in Christ. This is from Philippians 2, 1 and 2. Now, if you were here last week, you'll know that Paul is writing this as a prisoner.

He's under house arrest in Rome, and he's writing to the Philippian church who are facing strains in their fellowship with one another. But before he addresses their disunity and their problems, their fallings out directly, he begins with a prayer.

And he writes this. He says, He has confidence. Despite their present struggles, he is sure, chapter 1, verse 6, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[3:48] Now, in a way, we might think, look, he may as well have ended the letter there. It will definitely happen. You'll get there. But a few verses later, he prays in verses 9 to 11, that their love would abound and that they'll be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.

Let's just hear this before we move on to chapter 2. To a divided church, he tells them that he's sure that Christ is working in them. And he prays that they would work that out themselves by loving one another.

In our passage, Paul encourages these people to unity and to humility. But, if God is at work in them, as we read in 2.13, for it's God who works in you, how can Paul command them to humility?

How do those hold together? He says, God will do the work, and you've got to do the work. And they hold together because of this. Paul doesn't see Christian living as something done separately to Jesus Christ.

Your obedience in the Christian life, your putting one foot in front of the other, is not something separate to the work of God in you. But it's empowered and enabled by him every step of the way. [5:09] To be a Christian is to be in and to live in Christ. When you become a Christian, it's not just a change of status. You don't just write it down on the census. It's a living union with the crucified and risen Lord by his spirit.

That means that whether our issue is deep distress or disunity, whether you are feeling as though every spiritual affection has gone cold, your hope isn't wrapped up in the intensity of your present emotional experience.

It's wrapped up in Christ, and you are in Christ if you believe in him. And he doesn't abandon the work of his hands. He's not just an example or a moral messenger, but he is alive.

And any spiritual life we have is from him. If you have any kind of heartfelt sorrow over sin, any hunger and thirst for righteousness, or love for the church, if you make any genuine efforts, even the slightest towards holiness, these are activities, aren't they?

They're desires. And only living beings can have those. These are the Holy Spirit living in you, and he will not let you go. So when we come to verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, when Paul writes this, so if there's any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, and any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, and having the same love in full accord, these four ennies, if you notice them, are not a test.

[6:50] He's not trying to motivate the Philippians to unity by asking them to examine their own lives, or their own obedience. He's reminding those, who as he says in verse 1, 2 verse 1, and again in 2 verse 5, are in Christ, he's reminding them of the reality of the warm fire of affection for God and for one another, which the Lord Jesus first lit in their hearts.

In a way with these first two verses, Paul's asking one simple question. He's asking this, is that flame that Jesus first lit in your heart still going?

Whether you feel much warmth from it, or whether you can only see a puff of smoke, he's reminding them that even a faintly smoking wick in your heart was lit by Christ, and he will not put it out.

The Philippian church was struggling with disunity, struggling with divisions and pride among the body, but this is what they needed to hear first. You are in Christ.

Your unity is based on the unity of Jesus Christ himself, because you are his body. And this is true for us today. As you're hearing this, if you trust in Christ, you are his body.

[8:10] And by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is at work in your heart, renewing it, and conforming your mind and your affections to his own humble pattern.

It says in 2 verse 5, you have this mind in him. There's some attitude, some kind of vision, view that Jesus Christ has that is called his mind.

And this is yours, if you're a believer. 2 verse 5, this mind which is yours in Christ Jesus, in him. He's planted something in you, and we water it by his strength.

And God grows these affections. So, if you are plodding along in the Christian life, and you're not feeling much joy or warmth from this flame, all I encourage you to do is to keep living into it.

You become a Christian all at once, but you keep going one step at a time. And you do it in his strength. What is the first reason that we can all be of the same mind and have the same love and be of full accord with the church?

[9:19] It's because we're in Christ. It's not just that we need motivation from some outside source, it's that we are in him. It's not a shared interest that keeps unity, but a deep truth of the spiritual life.

As you look back through church history, as you see in the day of Pentecost, where there's flames that flickered over the heads of the disciples, those united people from different tribes and tongues and nations, and they united them in Christ.

And if you're sitting here and you trust him, the same flame which flickers there flickers in your heart too. And with these four questions, the Apostle Paul reminds us it's still there.

It is still burning. Whether dealing with disunity or in deep distress, you are in Christ. And your spiritual life and health is that which he has given you.

So, keep that in mind as we go on to the second point. Most of this passage is taken up with unity. And my point here, second point, is that Christ humbled himself for us.

[10:31] Christ humbled himself for us. And so, his humility should shape our life. Have a look at verses 3 and 4. Paul tells the Philippians what Christ-shaped unity looks like.

He's tackled their unity in Christ. He's prayed for them. He's told them about himself in the gospel going forth. And now, he's showing them a little vision of Christ-shaped unity.

But he can't help but soar upwards at the end of this. From the commands we ought to obey to the Christ whose obedience saved us. His first prescription in verses 2 and 3, 3 and 4, sorry, are, is this, is to look outwards.

Each member of the church needs to look first to the needs of others. This is part of what it means to have the mind of Christ. Verse 3, avoid rivalry.

We should avoid rivalry like the plague and do nothing from conceit. Never chase after an empty glory for yourselves that puffs yourself up.

[11:43] But more than that, verse 3, in humility, count others more significant than yourself. And verse 4, let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

There's a common theme and Paul's prescription for disunity is not to preoccupy ourselves with our own needs or our own rights but to look outwards to the needs of others.

But then he, he kind of looks upwards as he looks to the Philippians and he shows them this vision. From verses 5 to 8, he looks upwards and he sees the reason.

And the reason for doing this begins to overwhelm him. Paul can't help but soar upwards from the commandments we ought to obey to the Christ whose obedience saved us and made him the object of our worship tonight.

He says this, verse 5, 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.

[12:50] 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 even to the point of death and even death on the cross.

It's not Paul ultimately but Jesus Christ who calls us to display his humble mind. That's what he's saying here. He's revealing the Christ that is above and below and behind it all.

To consider others in the same way as he considers them, to see them as he does, as Jesus does, is to have the mind of Christ. I want us to enter into this a little bit.

This is what Christ did for you. You and I were not worth more than the eternal son of God. We were sinners and we were guilty before God but though we were unable to claim anything from him, Christ looked on us and freely loved the unworthy.

Paul points to Jesus and he says it wasn't in his mind to claim a right to remain in glory.

[14:05] This is what grasping means. He's not grasping at the heights that he's already got. He's not holding on to them but he let go and came down.

It was in his mind to set out from heaven and take the form of a servant so that he could claim you. This is how Christ thinks of you if you are in him. I want us to imagine seeing others as Christ sees us.

The same people who do the things that annoy you, who leave the fridge door open, the same people whose kids mess up the bookshelves, those in church who've hurt you with their words, the people who've ignored you, they too should take on the mind of Christ and it's a mercy to them to point that out surely, but point it out in love.

See them as Christ sees them as part of a people that he's renewing by his spirit and he's conforming them to his own humble-minded pattern. Here at IPC Ealing, how does Christ see us? He does not see us as a collection of frustrating and friction-creating people. He sees us as we are in him, as part of his own body.

[15:28] The same God who knit you together in your mother's womb has now, by the spirit, knit you into the fabric of Christ's own mystical body. What's the point?

The point is this, don't pick at the seams because not only do you live in him, but so does each person around you who trusts in Christ.

This is the mind of Christ which is yours in Christ Jesus to look on even the unlovely in love. The eternal destiny of the person that you've never spoken to in this church as well as the eternal destiny of the person who frustrates you, no end, and the destiny of the one who's hurt you but has repented are entwined with yours forever in Christ Jesus.

In any family, I think especially in the family and household of God, which is the church, people come to know each other's flaws very well, don't they? we know what makes someone tick over time, we know them very well and with one lash of the tongue, we can cut down a brother or sister. I think in congregations that have been going quite a while, we must be aware that the closer that we run the Christian ways together, the sharper our elbows feel to those who run alongside us. [17:00] and the more that we run the course together, the more that each little jab to the ribs can drive us to disdain one another. This is when we need to remind ourselves that Christ took more jabs and blows than we can ever imagine and even now, we ourselves often think it no great thing to strike at the unity of the body for which he gave himself.

But Paul says, have the mind of Christ? Look with his eyes at your brothers and sisters and see a blood-bought people whom he loved. And he will never require your patience to extend as far as it did for him to extend his patience with you and with me.

It says, do nothing from conceit, avoid rivalry. It's because in our rivalries we want to be seen don't we? When Christ gives gifts to his church but they're given to another person we fear that those gifts will eclipse our own.

We're not going to be honoured as we should be. We are just often conceited in this way. The word conceit means to pursue an empty glory. That's what it means. To pursue an empty glory. Someone who's conceited wants to kind of bag up glory for themselves and they become puffed up. I love this image. I think it's kind of like the glory wants to escape. Sometimes we call it the same word as vain glory.

[18:35] It's good for nothing. It's good for nothing down here and the glory that we try and bag up it's like it wants to go upwards towards the heavens. It wants to be spent on something eternal but we won't let it.

I want you to notice that this word empty although it's not in these translations but the word empty is used again in verse 7. Paul compares this conceit this empty glory that we try and gather for ourselves to what Christ does with his glory.

He made himself nothing it says verse 7. It's the same word he emptied himself like in the hymn he emptied himself with all but love. The son of God was and remained all glorious in his divine being even when he took on flesh.

But when he took on human form he truly left the heavenly glory and blessedness that he openly enjoyed with the father and took the form of a servant.

I want us to compare the two because this is what Paul does isn't it? When offended what does conceit say? What do we say when we're trying to gather up our own glory? Conceit says they shouldn't treat me like this.

[19:55] But we are those for whom Christ came down and if anyone should say I should never have been treated like this it was him. but he gave up his heavenly place to suffer mistreatment.

Although he was a king he willingly suffered treatment as though he were worse than a slave. The mind of Christ was to humble himself for us.

So we're free. If you are a Christian here today you are free to count others more significant than yourself because the son of God counted you more significant.

Despite his eternal worth he counted your salvation worthy of his humiliation. So if you're tempted towards rivalry or selfish ambition as we all are know that our conceit our trapped glory is worthless in the end.

It will find its way up one way or another and we see that in verses 9 to 11 that the human form that Christ took on leaving glory behind is today in heaven and is still worth all of our worship.

[21:11] It's the point I want to leave us with which is that Christ rules over you today. You are in Christ if you are a Christian and Christ humbled himself for us but this same Christ rules over us today.

Christ rules over you today because he didn't remain in the humiliation of verses 6 to 8 but because of his obedience to death even death on a cross therefore verse 9 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 so the glory of God the Father here from the cross and the grave Paul immediately raises our eyes to glory I want to address you if you're here today and you don't believe in Christ if you have questions and you have doubts I was once not a believer and I had these questions and

doubts I want you to voice them and ask them please find me Reuben Paul after the service please ask us

I want you to examine them and discuss them but I want you to do it today and do it now because your knees as well as mine and everybody here's are pictured in verse 10 have a look one day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and even those under the earth the dead and every hostile power no creature escapes the dominion of Jesus Christ no one will finally stand no unbelief will one day endure no denial of Christ will even be possible on that day today is the day to ask and examine and question and discuss then it will be made plain the lordship of Christ will be obvious to all then both for those in Christ and those outside of him no pride will be able to endure and no glory will remain trapped forever so if you are not in Christ

Jesus is seeking you and he wants you to turn and be saved and if you don't believe me just listen to the passage that Paul is quoting from here this isn't just something that Paul came up with for himself hundreds of years before Jesus took on human form God spoke through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 45 of that book and he said this turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other by myself I've sworn from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return and to me every knee shall bow every tongue shall swear allegiance these lines that God spoke of himself the praise that was offered to God alone is now applied to this one man Jesus Christ and he stands today in the heavens exalted and he wants to see that he is not a tyrant we can read these verses and be scared but remember that he is the same Christ that has no conceit and no selfish ambition we bring that into heaven or we would were we allowed to but he does not the same servant who went to the cross he is the one who now reigns over heaven and earth and around beneath

Christ alone possesses the name that is above every name and he alone is Lord of all so as we wrap up today if you're one of his people he's not let you go by his spirit he is still fanning the flames that he lit in you when he first drew you to wonder at this great salvation he didn't just bring his people to faith and then leave us to sustain ourselves if you're struggling to put one foot in front of the other know that even now you are in Christ and the risen Lord reigns over his church today in the confession of faith which wasn't planned to be on the same day as this but it says how does Christ execute the office of a king and he is doing that now he subdues us to himself he rules and defends us and he restrains and conquers all his and our enemies right now he is risen and reigning and he is doing that and one day fully and finally he will do that the risen

[26:02] Lord reigns over us today and he supplies you with everything that you need to follow him in humility we're not just trying to imitate him as a distant Christ but by faith and by the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Christ we united to so whether you're tempted to envy someone else's gifts tempted to protect your own place to speak sharply and to pull at the seams of Christ's body what I want you to do for this week is look up the Christ who died for you is risen and now the crown of glory rests on the head of the servant king let's pray