

Philippians 2:8

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[0 : 00] Please take a seat. And can I invite you to turn to Philippians again, which we began looking at last week.! Philippians chapter 2. We're going to carry on this morning, looking at some of the details that Paul gives us! of the key moments in Jesus' life in Philippians 2.

At the birth of Jesus, we saw last week, didn't we, who he was and what he became. That he was in the form of God. That the person of Jesus Christ didn't come into existence at Christmas, but we saw his pre-existence.

At his birth, the one who was. And he was in the form of God, with all the qualities of divinity. And so Jesus is a true man, doesn't he? He shares with us everything that it means to be human, and yet he is no mere man.

No other man is able to pray to God, glorify me in the presence that I have with you before the world began. No one else can say that, can they? So he came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all, who he was.

And then we saw what he became. That he became a servant, taking on humanity. And this morning, Paul elaborates on what that service looks like.

[1 : 25] What did it mean for him to serve us? And we're going to focus on just one verse this morning. Philippians 2, verse 8. Look there.

Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. There are different levels of service on there, which require different levels of thanks, I guess.

If someone serves you a cup of tea, say, cheers. If someone serves you a free course meal, you're really thankful, aren't you? We want to give greater thanks for greater acts of service given to us. And as we look at this verse this morning, as we look at his service, my prayer really is that we will only have this urge to give him the greatest thanks that we can.

Because what sort of service was it? I want us to see two things. Number one, his service is a deadly service. It's a deadly service.

[2 : 34] The argument for Paul flows really smoothly, doesn't it? But God's service for humanity did not stop at his birth, where there was new life, when he was born, when he appeared in the womb by the power of the Holy Spirit.

No, he humbled himself by taking on flesh in obedience to the point of death. Actually, his birth, apart from other things, is the necessary condition needed for his death.

The womb is his entrance to the tomb. So, it's right, this morning, no sooner do you think of Christmas time, and you're thinking of Easter time.

The beginning and the middle of his life, sure, it was all service. But the best of it was the end of his life. The climax of his giving to mankind, the high point of his service, was at his lowest point.

And that's what Jesus himself says and believes, isn't it? That he will serve others the most, that he came not to be served, but to serve, how? To give his life as a ransom for many.

[3 : 57] Maybe that seems odd this morning, maybe you don't quite get how him dying is a service to you. If I say to you, I really want to serve you this morning, and then I just go and jump on the bridge, that that is not something that inspires thanks today, it just confuses you.

But the New Testament is clear over and over that his death is a gift, because he dies in our place. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus pays that debt.

So we need to have that in our minds, don't we? You may have heard this story before. During the war between Britain and France, men were conscripted into the French army by a kind of lottery system.

When someone's name was drawn, he had to go off into battle, most likely to his death. There was one exception to this rule, though. A person could be exempt if another was willing to take his place.

So on one occasion, the authorities came to a certain man and told him he was next to go to battle. But he turned around and said, no, I can't go, actually, because two years ago, I was shot and killed.

[5 : 15] At first they said, have you lost your mind? You're clearly alive. You're stood right in front of us right now. But he said, no, it's true. Two years ago, a close friend of mine said to me, you've got a large family, but I'm not married and no one's dependent on me.

I'll take your name and address, and I'll go in your place. So just check the records. The case was referred to Napoleon, who decided, looking into it, that he was right.

The country had no legal claim on the man. He was free. He already had died in the person of another. In the person of this good friend who had taken his place.

And that is the service that Jesus gifts us with. That he comes in human flesh, with a human soul, in order to receive a human death in our place.

A human body and soul. That your body and soul would be immune to death in the end. Because you've already died 2,000 years ago.

[6 : 30] And he couldn't do that as a spirit. He couldn't do that in his glory in heaven. He had to enter in with the necessary equipment for his death.

It's as if in the incarnation, he is taking on not just human flesh, but he's taking on mortality.

It's as if he is strapping himself with the paraphernalia, with the equipment of some kind of execution device.

As if he takes himself to death row. He takes to himself a human nature, but that nature is the body of his death.

It's the bone of his suffering and his greatest service. The deadly service. So just think of it. The one who was always in the beginning.

[7 : 27] Through whom all things came into being. Through whom all life is given and comes into being. The one who gives breath and life to all his creatures.

Became a man in order to breathe his last. You see, it's not only that he came down to earth from heaven, is it? But he came down to the grain from heaven.

As he says himself, greater love has no one than this. That someone lay down his life to his friends. And so he was born to die.

The way, the truth, and the life dies. To take our place. So it's a deadly service.

But perhaps more importantly this morning, I want you to notice a second aspect of his service. It is a deadly service, but it is a secret.

[8 : 28] If I can put it this way, a secret and deadly service. As we read that section in Mark's Gospel earlier, that the death of Jesus has two perspectives, I think.

There's what we can see about the death of Jesus that is happening to him physically. But then there is what is hidden about it in Jesus' service.

So there's the physical brutality of his death, isn't there? The flogging and the mocking and the spitting, the splintered words, the thorns, the blood, and so on.

But there's also a hidden, a more secret side to his suffering. And if we turn back to Philipians, I think that side of his suffering is loaded into just three words in the Greek.

In verse 8, it's five in the English. Philipians 2, verse 8. Paul adds that there.

[9 : 36] As if he is saying, yes, his death was one thing, but there is more to his death than meets the eye. It was a crucifixion.

It was a death on the cross. He served even in that way. I'm sure he has in mind the particular brutality of that form of execution.

But it's more than that for Paul. Because in the Bible's way of thinking, to die on a cross for Jesus involved going further down into the depths of a kind of secret suffering.

So, you can trace the line of Jesus' journey in our passage, can't you, Philipians 2. We've traced him coming down from heaven and coming down to earth.

And he goes down to death. But Paul adds, no, the journey doesn't stop there. Because he goes down to death, even on a cross. Because the cross itself is a continuation of that journey.

[10:48] Of that line. Where Jesus is moving even deeper into the abyss of suffering. On the cross there is a hidden suffering, like a bottomless cavern.

That is as far below earthly life as heaven is above it. And actually you can see this movement in the Gospel accounts.

Like in Mark 15 that we read earlier. One writer, Donald McLeod, he really helpfully notes how the Gospel writers give us the timings.

Did you notice that as we read it out? Mark gives us the timings, doesn't he? Which indicates a kind of gradation of Jesus' suffering and what is happening at a certain time.

It shows his movement further down on the cross. So, Mark tells us it starts with the physical crucifixion. He says in Mark 15, 25, It was the third hour when they crucified him.

[12:01] It doesn't add any more to that. But that's the kind of physical element, isn't it? And then Luke adds that for the next three hours until the sixth hour, he had the conversation with the thief on the cross.

And he talks about being in paradise in Luke 23, verse 43. And then Mark tells us that the sixth hour comes, And darkness comes over the land.

Then, switching back to Luke, He says, He then calls out to his Father, Into your hands I commit my spirit. But then the final cry comes in Mark 15, My God, my God, why can you forsake me? Now, through those timings, You can see the increasing intensity Of his decreasing, Of his downward movement.

One where he begins, Sustained by the vision of paradise, To an experience of increasing darkness, To a call to his Father in heaven, But then a loss of consciousness of Father, And he calls out simply, My God.

[13:20] You see that the secret service is the agony, He knows, In spiritual abandonment. And it fits with Paul's understanding, What he means by saying, Even death on a cross.

He says, No, that there is more to this than meets the eye. He says, Doesn't he in Galatians, For it's written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

So there's the seen, And then there's the unseen. As his body is pierced, And we all see that, So is his soul.

We've got to be careful, As we speak about this, But it is right to say then, That it was a hellish kind of death for him.

It's accurate actually, To say that he experienced hell. Paul says that he became a curse for us. That means that he took our place, And he had to experience, The whole penalty of sin in himself.

[14:27] He had to experience everything that we deserve. He had to experience the whole righteous anger of God, The Father. One writer says that he wrestles, Under the totality, And the utmost of what is threatened to us.

So in his consciousness, As to his humanity, He becomes increasingly aware, Of abandonment, Like it was, And of his wrath.

He becomes aware, In his consciousness, Not just of what men think of him, But of what God thinks of him. That he is treated by God, As a first and condemned man.

As if he were the sin of all of his people. As if he were the worst sinner in history. It's a moment of suffering, In history, That is unsustainable, For anybody else, Apart from him.

It's a hellish death. John Calvin says, That as far as Jesus Christ's experience, Was concerned, He lost everything he had, With the Father.

[15:37] Stand with me. Just as a damned soul would, He lost God's presence, Favor, Communication, And any feeling, Or sense of his love.

It's not that there's a, A split, In the persons of the Trinity, Of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Don't hear that this morning. For God to be God, He is triune, One God in three persons, And that communion, Amongst persons of the Trinity, Can never be torn apart, Or changed.

There is a sense, Where you can never say, That the Father, Hates the Son. He always delights, In his one and only Son, And the Son delights, In the Father. But there is an important sense, Where we've also got to say, And we can't downplay it, That Jesus Christ, Has never given the Father, So much pleasure.

He has never been so delightful, To his Father, And saved, Beloved by his Father, As when he is under his wrath, And his displeasure, And his hatred.

He never loved, And admired him, So much, As when he is under his wrath, In our place. In his human consciousness, Then, He felt like a lost soul, In hell.

[17:07] That's why, In the Garden of Gethsemane, If you remember, He was dreading it, Wasn't he? The man of sorrows, He was equated with sorrow, And grief, He knew much pain, Throughout his life.

He was never one, To shun suffering, And turn away from it, Or others, But in this moment, He recoiled from it. Father, Do I have to drink this cup?

Not my will, That yours be done. You see, It was the unseen things, That he dreaded. Not the suffering, In the eyes of men, Although that was great, But what he would feel, In the eyes of God. He consciously, Truly feared, For his own soul, And for his, It's a lot of safety. He felt a lot, Of the Father's safety. And so it's the unseen service, And often it's the case, Isn't it?

But the unseen things, That are done for us, That are more valuable, The things that are done, Behind the scenes, That we never watch. The sun, The stuff that gets, Done out of sight, Hidden to the eyes of men.

[18:18] So we think to ourselves, This morning, No matter what we're going through, No matter what I'm going through, In this life, Any day, Any day, However bad it is, Is not this bad.

If it's not like this, For me today, Any day is a good day. Any day, Any day I am not facing, This hell, Is a good day.

For every soul, That lives today, Today is a good day. The one who was, Became a servant to die, And not just a peaceful death, In his sleep, Surrounded by, People that love him, But death on a cross, Surrounded by people, Who hate him.

Scorned by his own, Sinful creation, And worse, Worst of all, Scorned and rejected, By his righteous father. Rejected by everyone, Totally alone, In a hidden hell, A deadly service, And a secret service.

But actually, Lastly, It's all done, At your service, Isn't it? All done, At your service. Can I say, If you're visiting, Or you're new, Or you're watching this, With us this morning, The first time, The servants aren't always, This heavy going, This is not easy listening, Is it?

[19:56] It's pretty brutal, But his horror, Is for our relief, This morning, Isn't it?

We need to leave this morning, Thinking, What a relief, What we see, Is a saviour, Who not only, Sympathises, With our greatest needs, He's not just, Going through this, To be able to say, I know how it feels, No, He is going through this, To say to us, You don't have to know, How it feels, I'm not simply, Giving you sympathy, But I'm giving you, Immunity, He is taking the place, Of his people in this, The righteous, For the unrighteous, To bring you to God, And so, With all the things, That you fear in life, You don't have to dread this, Do you?

And actually, What he has done for us, Means that we don't have to dread anything, It doesn't mean, That we're not going to fear things, The fear of ill health, The fear of the future, The fear of death even, But the dreadful end, Of those things, Where those things take us, The dread of that, Is taken away, The dread of having to, Face God in death, And having to, Bear the punishment, Of our own rebellion, Against him, And so, Actually, We need not dread, We need not dread anything, You say that sort of thing, Don't you?

Maybe you're thinking, Like that at the moment, Maybe you're thinking about, Things are coming up, You say, I'm really dreading that, There can be fear, Of course at times, But there should be, No dread, No dread, For those of us, Who belong to Jesus, The great comfort, Of his incarnation, And his death, And even his death on the cross, Is that Jesus dreaded it, Didn't he?

He was terrified, The fact that he faced it, With dread, Is actually our greatest comfort, It's not that the fact, That Jesus went to his death, Happily, Without fear, That comforts us, But that he went to it, Absolutely terrified, He felt the full dread, Of our condition, And it shows us, That he faced the totality, Of the dreadful state, That we're in, That he suffered, Not just physically, In the eyes of men, But spiritually, In the eyes of God, That his soul suffered, The whole Christ, Suffered for the whole, Of his people, Body and soul, Someone puts it like this, That the shepherd of the sheep, She lays his life down, The whole sheep, Not just the skin of the sheep, That's our comfort, The ending of our fears, Where our fears, Have their truest source, That end of our fears,

[23:05] Is exhausted, And emptied of dread, So he is born to die, And shout on the cross, My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?

So we dread not, A hell, Where we've got to ask God, The same question, Think of those words again, Becoming obedient, To the point of death, Even death, On a cross, Those words, That Paul asked, Should make us shudder, From the inside, In his feelings, They made Jesus shudder, With dread, That he really did fear, For his own soul, And his eternal, Safety, And yet, He remained obedient, Through it, What strikes you, Is how he suffers, Obediently, And graciously, Isn't it? It is a hellish, Experience, Of the very same experience, That sinners, Deserving, In the hell, And yet, He takes it differently, He receives, Condemnation, Without condemning, And he receives, Scorn, Without, Scorning, Either man, Or God, No cursing God, No shaking his fist, At God, He still calls, To the one, Who forsakes him, Struck me, Thinking about that, Is one of the many, Many differences, Between Jesus Christ, The son, And, And Satan, Looking at this passage, We actually see, Something similar, In the journey, Of both of them, Don't we?

Both of, The son, And the, Satan, They both follow, This journey, Of beginning in glory, And descending, That they both, Begin in heaven, Don't they?

That they both, Have a time on earth, And they are both, To have a time, In a kind of hell, Under condemnation, But in that similarity, We see the vast difference, Between the two of them, Don't we?

[25 : 14] Because the difference, Is that Christ, Comes willingly, From the glory of heaven, And obediently, To earth, He is not, Cast out of heaven, But he is sent, From heaven, And he suffers, Willingly, And graciously, Not hatefully, And resentfully, And even were, Even when, It's as if, He were in hell itself, He refuses, To gnash his teeth, And curse God, But says, Even from the heart, Of his hellish suffering, I will obey you still, And so, Never has the Father, Loved the Son, As much as when he is, Condemned in this way, In our place, When he is engaged, In this deadly, And hidden, Service, For you and me, He says in John 10, Doesn't he, This, This reason, For this reason,

The Father loves me, Because I lay my life down, And lay my life down, That I may take you up again, And the response, Of the Father says it all, He is, He is delighted, He is, He is sotted, With his beloved Son, And the end for him, Has to be, That God, Highly exalts him, And gives him the name, Above every name, For his hidden service, For others, Just look with me, As we close, At the lifting up, He deserves, In the foot, In the foot, And actually, It corresponds, To his going down, If you look at verse 10, So that, At the name of Jesus, Every knee should bow, Where?

In heaven, And on the earth, And under the earth, Do you see what, What's happening there? Do you see how, His praise and adoration, Is in the precise locations, Of his service, And his lifting up, And his, Point by point, Is going down, Doesn't it?

So that, Those in heaven, Praise him, As he is sent, From there, To those, Who praise him, On earth, For walking there, And becoming, A man there, And those, Who lie in the grave, Will one day, Praise him, Who died there, Even death, On the cross, And say this morning, Take courage, For Jesus, You can say, Although I fear, I have nothing to dread, What a relief, What a service, What a saviour, Let's pray.