

Philippians 2

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Date: 12 December 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And you're going to need a Bible for this sermon. So there are Bibles just in the hallway. Don't be afraid to run and get one. We won't think less of you. All right? Don't be embarrassed to do that.

But you'll find it difficult, I think, to follow unless you've got a Bible. I have a file of sermons in my final cabinet of kind of unfinished sermons, of sermon ideas which normally get to about Thursday or Friday, and then they never get any further.

And so I was kind of looking at it this week, and I thought, ah, this one I might be able to make something of. All right? But we'll, well, you'll be the judge of that. And tonight's sermon begins with a grammar lesson.

I can already hear some of you inwardly groan. To be honest, I can imagine the page in the communication textbook which says never use an opening line like that. But I don't care this evening.

I'm going to stick with it. And we're going to begin with a grammar lesson. Because sometimes grammar really matters. And I want to try and persuade you tonight that the grammar of Christmas really matters.

[1 : 12] And so in particular tonight, I want to talk to you about preposition. Preposition. Now, to be honest, I've spoken English since I learned to talk. But grammar is a constant battle for me, as you know.

And I managed to get through secondary school without really knowing what a preposition was. It was only in coming to study the Bible that I've come to see how important they are. And so let me start with the definition.

All right? Just when you thought this introduction of this sermon couldn't get any worse. Let me give you a definition of preposition. A preposition is a word in a sentence that governs a noun.

That makes it clear, doesn't it? And expresses its relation to another word or words in that sentence. Let me give you examples. You are sitting on the church chairs.

The word on is a preposition. Do you understand that? Because it describes the relationship between you and the church chairs. You are sitting on the church chairs.

[2 : 16] You're on it. Let me give you another example. I sat through an inexplicably boring sermon introduction this evening.

And the word through is a preposition. Because it describes your relationship to the start of this sermon. You get the idea? Prepositions describe relationships.

And that's why they matter. That's why we say things like, I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing with you. Which is usually, isn't it, a vaguely apologetic sentence uttered by somebody who is laughing at you.

At and with are prepositions. And there's a big difference between somebody laughing at you and somebody laughing with you, isn't there?

Let me give you another couple of sentences. Where prepositions make a big difference. Just to drive the grammar lesson home. There's a difference, isn't there, between, I swam in the English Channel and I swam across the English Channel.

[3 : 30] One is a bit mad. One is totally mad, isn't it? There's a big difference between, I found the cat hiding behind the fridge, and I found the cat hiding in the fridge.

There's a big difference. I hope you're getting the idea. Prepositions matter. And they matter especially at Christmas. Now let me show you what I mean. So for this message, what I'm going to do is I'm going to read you four very short passages from the Bible.

And each of them contains a really important preposition. And together, when you put together the four prepositions, they tell you the story of why Christmas really matters.

So we're going to start with the passage that we read. Can you turn with me to Philippians chapter 2? Alright? I'm going to give you the page numbers so you find it. And again, if you still want to go and get your Bible, it's not too late. So Philippians chapter 2, it's on page 980.

Philippians chapter 2, and verses 6 to 7. Page 980. And these are verses about Jesus' life before he came to earth.

[4 : 43] His life before he came to earth as a baby. And for Christians, this is a really important part of the Christmas story. These are verses about where Jesus was.

And who he was with before he arrived in Bethlehem in the manger. So let me read to you what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians. In chapter 2, and verses 6 and 7.

Can you see that? It's describing Jesus. And it says this. Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

So I just want you to see in verse 6, can you see the preposition there? With God. That's my first point. Jesus was equal with God.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is in very nature God. It's not only true that he's the Messiah. The Son of God.

[6 : 03] It's also true to say that he is God himself. And so that's why the wise men in the Christmas story, they traveled such a long way just to honor him. Not just to present him with precious gifts, but they bowed down and they worshipped him.

Worship is something that you reserve for God. And those wise men knew very, very well what they were doing. Jesus existed before he was a human child.

He was equal with God. He didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. Something to be used for his own advantage.

That's what he's saying. Something to be tightly clung onto. Rather, he humbled himself. And he came down to earth from heaven.

He was made in human likeness. And he came as a human in order to serve humans. So this first preposition is really important to Christians because it tells us what Jesus left behind.

[7 : 10] He was with God. He was equal with God. And when he came to earth as a baby, he didn't just appear out of nowhere.

He came down. He left behind the majesty of his throne in heaven. He surrendered his position at God's right hand. He gave up the splendor of his heavenly kingdom.

And that's a very important question because it pushes us to ask another question. Why would he do that? Why did he do that? Jesus was equal with God.

But then we're going to see secondly, the second preposition is this. Jesus dwelt among us. Jesus dwelt among us. And here I want us to go to the beginning of John's Gospel.

So the beginning of John's Gospel, it's really famous. John chapter 1, can you tune there? It's on page 886. It's on page 886 in the Church Bibles.

[8 : 15] And John actually begins his, if you want to call it a biography of Jesus' life, in a very poetic way. And it's one of the key verses in his introduction. He describes Jesus as the Word.

And listen to what he writes. He writes in verse 14, And the Word, that is the Lord Jesus, who was equal with God, remember, became flesh.

And he dwelt, here's the second preposition, among us. And we've seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

He's actually saying something very similar to what Paul has said in Philippians chapter 2. That Jesus came from his Father, and he came to earth full of the grace of God.

Full of the truth of God. That is, even though he left behind his majesty, even though he left behind his glory, even though he left behind his heavenly throne, where he was adored by the angels, he didn't leave behind his divinity.

[9 : 27] By becoming a man, he did not give up his godness. Jesus, the human, was full of divine character, grace and truth.

And though for a time, he surrendered his position at the Father's right hand, he did not surrender his godness. In fact, one of the things that John's gospel is at pains to suggest to you and I, is that as people saw Jesus, and as they heard Jesus, they saw the incredible things that he did when he

was alive, they encountered the glory of God.

Jesus was the life of God. Jesus was the glory of God. He was the grace and truth of God, wrapped in skin. I can put it like that. He became flesh, and made his dwelling amongst us.

Among us. A friend of mine was in a pub quiz, and over on the adjacent table, as he glanced over, he saw a face that he recognized.

Didn't know it was a start. And so he looked at him again, and he recognized who it was. Frodo Baggins. It was Elijah Wood, the actor.

[10:57] And my friend resisted kind of taking a photograph of himself with Elijah Wood on the other side of the table. But he did boast about it on Twitter. I thought, well, fair play.

That's pretty newsworthy, isn't it? You don't usually go down to your local for your pub quiz, and expect to bump into Frodo Baggins from Lord of the Rings. In the same way, if you were an innkeeper in a dusty town called Bethlehem, 2,000 years ago, you don't rent out your stable on a full night, and expect to find there the Jewish Messiah born in it.

Likewise, if you were a rugged shepherd, in those parts, 2,000 years ago, you don't expect to get some angels telling you to head into town to see the Son of God in a manger.

It's definitely newsworthy. So if Elijah Wood hanging with the common people at the pub is newsworthy to tweet, then the Son of God turning up in a barn is undoubtedly worth telling people about.

He made His dwelling among us. But we still haven't answered the why question. Why would He?

[12:12] And here's where our third preposition helps us. Philippians chapter 2 tells us that He came to serve. He humbled Himself by becoming a man.

And it went on to say that He ultimately humbled Himself by His death on the cross. And so come with me to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1.

Which is on page 983. Page 983. And let me read you again from the pen of the Apostle Paul.

And once again he's talking about Jesus. Chapter 1 verse 19. It says this. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of the cross.

before we come to the third preposition let me just point this out to you. Do you notice once again what the Bible says about Jesus' divinity? Look at what it says. It says all doesn't it?

[13:36] All God's fullness dwelt in Him. We're reminded that though Jesus left behind His majesty to dwell on the earth He didn't leave behind His godness.

He came to earth with the life of God in Him. He dwelt with us. God dwelt in Him and it pleased His Father not only to His fullness dwell in Him but to see Jesus accomplish what He came to do.

He came to reconcile. He came to reconcile and it would ultimately be reconciliation through His blood.

Through His blood. That's the third preposition. It was His death on the cross that reconciliation would come by. Jesus reconciles through His blood.

Through His death by standing in the place of the guilty Jesus the innocent bears our sin and He embraces God's judgment. He embraces God's judgment so that we would never have to.

[14:40] And do you notice that this reconciliation is not only available to those who are on earth but to the creatures in heaven. It is cosmic in its scope. And that word reconciliation it implies doesn't it a broken relationship.

And without Jesus Christ's humble service of us a broken relationship with God is all we would have. Because in big and in small ways we've ignored God.

Our relationship with our Creator has always been in need of repair and in need of healing. And so many people I meet today presume that everything is fine between them and God but it is not.

And what all true Christians come to realize and come to recognize is that without Jesus their relationship with God would remain permanently and tragically broken. And that is why we love Jesus.

And that is why we love Christmas. And that is why you cannot understand Christmas without understanding Easter as well because Jesus came to reconcile through his blood. He came to make peace between people and God.

[15:56] And this is the peace on earth that so often trotted out at Christmas time. It's not talking about the end of war and the end of violence and the end of fighting although that will be true one day when Jesus Christ comes again.

But it's speaking about the peace that we all need between us and God. and it is a peace that he was able to accomplish not just wish for. He came to earth that first Christmas with a mission to reconcile people to God and that reconciliation we all need can only come through Jesus through his blood.

And of course what God accomplishes through Jesus is for the people he loves. and the fruit of the reconciliation that he wins lasts forever.

Because after his resurrection from the dead Jesus returns to the majesty of his throne in heaven. And he is lifted up again just as he came down.

He goes up in order to prepare a place for his people. That's our fourth preposition. Jesus' own words in John chapter 14. Can you come there with me? John chapter 14.

[17:10] This is your last passage. John 14. It's on page 901. And as Jesus talks with his disciples on page 901 John chapter 14 and verse 2 he says this.

He says in my father's house there are many rooms. There's plenty of room. If it were not so I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also. So do you see that completes Jesus' journey?

He came down to earth from heaven in order to take people with him to heaven. He came down so that we might be lifted up.

He comes to be with us so that he can carry us to our eternal home. Jesus prepares a place for his people. That's the preposition.

[18:25] Jesus prepares a place for his people. So what these four prepositions have taught us is that Jesus was with God in heaven and he was equal with God but he left it behind in order to be born in a stable.

And so the amazing truth of that first Christmas is that he comes to be among us and because when Jesus was born his story and our story become joined. he humbled himself by becoming a man but he humbled himself further even to death on a cross and he did that in order that we might be reconciled with him through his blood.

And because of his humility and his service all who trust in him can be with him forever. He prepares a heavenly home for his people.

And that is the Christmas story. And that is why the grammar of Christmas matters. Because these prepositions tell us what is important.

They teach us Jesus with God. Jesus among us. Jesus reconciling through his blood. Jesus preparing a place in heaven for his people.

[19:51] with God among us reconciling through his blood preparing a place in heaven for his people. And so they are my four Christmas prepositions and I hope they're a little bit more interesting than you expected.

But having shared those four Christmas prepositions I want to finish today with a Christmas proposition. Proposition. I want to propose something to you.

And my Christmas proposition about this is will you do something with this Christmas story. I propose that tonight we don't just hear the Christmas story and nod our heads politely but we actually respond to it.

It's a story that is looking for response. We'll hear the phrase this week that I'm just trying to get through Christmas. I just want to make it to Christmas.

And God's message is that Christmas is not something just to be endured. And it is not something just to be enjoyed either. Christmas is for remembering something totally newsworthy.

[21:13] Something momentous and it is for responding to this momentous thing. And so for some of us tonight responding will mean what we've done many Christmases before.

It will mean praising God for Jesus and savoring his goodness with grateful joy. For some of us it might mean acknowledging that we've been ignoring Jesus lately or even for a long time.

And this Christmas time is an opportunity to turn back to him and embrace once again his word and his people. And the way of life he calls us to live. And for some of us tonight as humiliating as it might be it might be that we need to acknowledge the fact that we've never really understood what the fuss is about.

And if that is the boat that you find yourself in this Christmas then my proposal for you is that you make time this Christmas this January to do some investigating. That you really get behind why is it

that some people worship Jesus.

Why they love Jesus. Why they're willing to devote their lives to Jesus. And why they're willing to pay a great cost for the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 41] Jesus. And I think church is a great place to hide isn't it? You can hide in church life.

You can sit here week by week by week by week and enjoy the people, join in with the hymns, love being in each other's homes, but never really get to the point where you love the Lord Jesus.

Where you're willing to devote yourselves to him, where you're willing to put him first and yourself second. And everybody might think, well, they're at all the meetings, but actually you don't love the Lord Jesus.

And so you pretend. And I want to say to you tonight, tonight's the time to own up to that. To own up to that before God. There will be loads of ways that we would love to help you.

We're going to run a course in January. It's called Hope Explored. It's about the life and the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. I'm told it's really basic.

[23 : 51] I think we'll probably do it on Zoom. And you can join in. You can turn your camera off. You can eat your tea while you're watching it. You can ask any questions you want.

You can put a fake name into Zoom if you want. I couldn't care less. But I want to say tonight if you've been hiding and if you've been here and actually you recognize I do not love him and I don't worship him come on the course.

I will send the Zoom link out. Don't be embarrassed at all. If you think I just need to know more come on the course. We'll send the link out and you don't even have to sign up.

You can just join us on the night. But whatever it might mean for you, my proposition is that this Christmas you don't let a wave of tinsely nostalgia and festiveness just wash over you.

And you certainly don't let the Christmas story wash over you. My proposition is that you respond to it because it really is a stunning story. And it is true.

[24 : 58] That a couple of thousand years ago, Jesus, who was with God, came to be among us. And he came so that we could be reconciled through him so that we could be forever with God in the place that he's prepared for his people.

And I want to say to you, it is true. And it is wonderful. I love finishing books. Don't you? I love finishing books.

And by the end of the year, I'm trying to finish a load of books by the end of the year that I've started and not got through. You know what it's like when you finish a book. You get to the end and you go like this. And you put it down.

And that's it. And you have a sense of well-being. You get on with the day. Maybe put the book back on the shelf a couple of months later, if you're like me. But the Christmas story is not like that. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[26 : 16] Let's pray.