

Philippians 2:1-11

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Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[0 : 00] We all want to live in peaceful and stable communities. We want to belong to societies that are united and are pulling in the same direction.

! Societies that are completely devoid of discrimination and disunity.! Where people get on and are civil to one another. And where we look out for one another in a spirit of community.

And care. That's the sort of society that we want to live in. But of course the reality of the societies that we do live in is very different.

Feels a bit like everywhere we turn there is disunity. And people are at odds with one another. And there is conflict. And there is struggle.

The pandemic seemed to bring this to the surface more than before. And it hasn't gone away. We went through that terrible time. And the consequences. The things that happened linger.

[1 : 06] COVID of course didn't cause the strife. Because circumstances don't cause strife. Strife. They provide the situation for it. They don't cause it.

Strife is caused by the things that the apostle Paul mentions in Philippians 2, verses 3 and 4. If you've closed your Bibles, please open them up again at Philippians 2.

But look at verse 3. You saw these last week. Paul mentions selfish ambition, conceit.

Pushing yourself first. And where you have communities of people that are pushing themselves first all the time, you get conflict. Even in churches where we are united to Christ.

We share so much in common. Even in churches. Because the problem runs deep. The problem runs all the way down to the human heart.

[2 : 04] The key to this is one of the words that Paul uses in verse 2. So the phrase selfish ambition. We can kind of work that out. That means to be divisive.

To manipulate a situation in order to put yourself first. In order to get what you want. But the word conceit. The ESV translates as conceit here.

Translates a Greek word. A Greek word literally. Kinodoxia. Kinodoxia. Which literally means empty glory. It is the sense of a person who is empty of a sense of glory and honor in their own lives.

Empty of the respect that they feel that they deserve. And so they do something about that. They push themselves forward in order to get that glory. In order to get what they feel they deserve.

One of the places that you see this most obviously in our society is in street gangs. It's fascinating. A few years ago I became a bit kind of obsessed with the sociology of street gangs.

[3 : 04] And began to explore and read about it. That might not be your pursuit. I was fascinated by it. But usually what you have there is young men who haven't felt valued or respected by their families.

Or their school environment. Or by society itself. By the authorities. And they try and make a name for themselves. And they do this by belonging to the gang.

The gang gives them a sense of identity. We know that. Also, it gives them a sense of worth. You belong to the gang. It gives you the identity. And then you do the things that the gang does.

Or you kind of pursue the sorts of things. Usually not very good things. That the gang is about. And that means you show yourself to be significant. You did these things. So you're actually an important person.

All those people in your past may have said no. They may have not understood you. They may have disregarded you. They may have cast you out. Here is where you show yourself. You're empty of the glory and honor that you think you deserve.

[4 : 03] And you can find it in this environment. You might say, well that's just a social issue actually. Their circumstances create this need in them. But let's be honest. Aren't we all actually the same?

This is a human problem. Now of course we might not join a gang. But we get angry. And we resent other people. When they don't show us the respect that we feel we deserve. When they don't give us glory. When they don't honor us in the way that we want them to. And we resent them. And we hold grudges. And that burns away inside of us. Where does that come from? That grudge. That sense of being wronged in some way. It comes from us not being afforded the honor. The glory that we think we deserve. We are all of us glory hungry. Governments can't fix the problem. Can't fix the problem. Self help manuals don't ultimately work. [5 : 00] Lifestyle experts have tried and with little success. For those of you who need to hear it. Andrew Tate doesn't have the answers either. The reason that we are glory empty is because we have turned away from God.

We were made to live forever in the presence of God receiving his approval. But we have rejected him. And what happens when we reject God is that we begin to feel unstable.

We are not supposed to be separated from the God who made us. And there is something deep within all of our hearts that knows that. And that is where that instability comes from. We have turned away from what we were created for.

And the stability that would come with that. The glory. Literally the weightiness that would come with that. That we were created to enjoy. We have turned from that. And now that substance has been lost.

Life is now fragile. We know ultimately we are going to die. And that makes us feel unstable. We are scared that our lives are going to count for nothing.

[6 : 04] That we are going to be here. And then we are gone. And then we are forgotten. One author has said this. When we push God out of our lives. It leaves a space. An emptiness.

At the center of who we are. So we learn to pretend. Pride is born of fear and anxiety. So I put on a front when I meet people. Desperately trying to convince them that I count." End quote.

So much of what we see as pride and confidence around us and in our society. Is born of this fear and anxiety. This glory hunger that exists in the heart of who we are.

Think about it. In our own lives. The way we choose to dress. The way we choose to speak. The way we carry ourselves in certain environments. It is all so that people will think a certain way of us. And when you have a society of people. Any group of people. Even in a church. All pursuing their own glory in this way. It inevitably leads to conflict. Which is why the apostle Paul calls this.

[7 : 07] Philippian church to something different. For this church to flourish. The Philippians must refuse conceit. They must refuse pursuing their own glory. And pursue the opposite instead.

Verse 3. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. But in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest. But the interests of others.

For others. Have this mind among yourselves. Which is yours in Christ Jesus. What is needed for unity. What is needed in the place of glory hunger.

Is humility. If you have a group of humble people. That group will flourish. It doesn't matter what they are doing. But cultivating a humble mindset is easier said than done.

Isn't it? Because when you think about it. It's not only deep rooted in us. To be selfish. But to pursue humility is complicated.

[8 : 06] Because you can't actually work on it directly. Have you ever thought about this? If you think about acting in a humble way. What are you doing? You're thinking about yourself behaving in a particular way. I'm not trying to be humble.

I'm about to go and do something humble. Of course that doesn't work. Because you're thinking about yourself. You can't work on it directly. It's really tricky. Recently I was talking to a young sportsman.

Who had just become professional in his sport. And he was finding it difficult. He felt like he was out of his depth. And he was struggling. All the way through his life up to this point.

He was big. His size. And his natural talent. He was always the best player on his school teams. The sport had been easy for him. But now he was in a professional environment. And he found himself struggling.

He was out of place. He didn't measure up. I was talking to him about it. And he said that the coach had taken him to one side. And said to him. You need to get better. And it's going to be hard.

[9 : 08] But I want to help you. Here's what you need to do. And he took him to the best player in the world. And he took him to the best player in the club. And he said. Look at him.

Watch him. Follow his example. Do what he does. And then he said. Come with me. And he took him to a room.

That all along one of the walls. Was filled with photographs of the team. And their successes. With the trophies that they'd won. And he said. If you do that. This is where you'll find yourself.

If you think about it. That's actually what we need. When it comes to trying to do something difficult. We don't look to ourselves. Rather we need a model to emulate.

And we need a motivation. In order to do the hard work. To emulate that model. We need a model. And we need a motivation. And that is exactly what the apostle Paul gives us here. In chapter 2.

[10:05] He's calling us to do something that is incredibly difficult. Set aside your glory hunger. Set aside pride. And pursue humility. If this community is going to flourish.

And then he says. Here's how you do it. Here's a model to follow. And a motivation. That'll make you want to do it. So let's look at those two. Point number one. Our model. First of all.

Christ's work. Verses 5 to 8. 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 emptied himself. By taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men. Being found in human form.

He humbled himself. By becoming obedient to the point of death. Even death. On a cross. Here's how a church. Or a city.

[11:02] Or a nation for that matter. Will cultivate humility. Look at the example of Christ. One scholar translates verse 5 like this. Quote. Adopt towards one another in your relationships. The same attitude that was found in Christ.

Well what is that? Two things about Christ. That he highlights. That display breathtaking humility. First of all. He emptied himself in selfless service. 6 and 7.

Emptied himself in selfless service. Though he was in the form of God. Christ did not count equality with God. A thing to be grasped. But emptied himself. Taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of man.

These are technical verses. So when it says that Christ was in the form of God. It has the sense of him being clothed in the same divine garment.

He possessed all of the majestic attributes of God. He was fully God. But he didn't consider those things to be grasped. Literally to be used for his own advantage.

[12:04] To be exploited in order that he could lord it over others. He wasn't less than God. And therefore nobly refusing to grasp after equality with him.

It wasn't that he was less than God. And thinking well I know that it's not right for me to become like God. Or to seek to become like God. Like Adam had done in the garden. It was that he didn't consider his position something to be exploited for his own ends.

Instead he chose to make himself nothing. To empty himself. Empty himself. Empty himself of what? Some in the history of the church have sought to argue that he emptied himself of divinity.

That is in becoming a man God left his divine nature in heaven. No. No, no, no. Jesus doesn't exchange the form of God for the form of a servant.

Such that when he was a servant he was no longer God. For God. Alec Mateer helps us when he says this. Quote, It is not of what did Jesus empty himself.

[13:09] But into what did he empty himself. Paul is concerned not with what Jesus emptied himself out of. But what Jesus emptied himself into. So he emptied himself into humanity in the form of a servant.

He's been through. And I like that. However, there's more to say. Because I think what he's saying here is. When he emptied himself he's talking about his glory. The glory that Jesus prays about in John 17 verse 5.

That he had had with the Father in heaven. The beauty. The light. The radiance. The majesty that were his from all eternity. That which if we had seen him in heaven. Would have left us open mouthed in awe.

He emptied himself of those things. In taking flesh. You could say he emptied himself of those things. Into a human nature.

Being born. Verse 7. Like any other human being. And not just that. But a servant.

[14:15] Literally a slave. The lowest in society. Without rights. Without privileges. Without power. The king of heaven. The highest of the high.

Yet all the privileges of heavenly glory. All the love of eternity with the Father. And the joy of the Holy Spirit. He set that glory aside to put others first.

To be a servant. That is humility. And there are no comparisons. Joe Biden cleaning the White House toilets.

Doesn't even get close. Seeing King Charles down around Buckingham Palace. Sweeping the streets. Doesn't actually even get close. It is a whole different category of humility.

And yet. The biggest surprise of all. Is the reason that we are given. Why Jesus acted in this way.

[15:15] You mustn't miss this. You see verse 6. Though he was. Verse 6. Would be better translated. Who precisely because he was.

In the form of God. Did not count equality with God. A thing to be grasped. So Jesus didn't hold on to divine privilege. And power for his own pleasure. But emptied himself of his glory.

Into the form of a servant. Because that is the very nature of God. Throughout the Gospels. Jesus does remarkable things. You read the Gospels.

You see he heals the sick. He raises the dead. He feeds 5,000 people with a packed lunch. We see that divine power at work. And we look on and we say. That is something we would expect to see God do.

Paul tells us here. At the heart of what it means to be God. Is a posture of self giving. In the service of others. I wonder this morning.

[16:21] Is that how you think about God? How do you conceive of God in your mind. When his name is mentioned. You know that he is not wandering around heaven.

In a bit of a grump. Looking down. Hoping to find you in a sin somewhere. Disappointed in you. Because you are not measuring up in some way. He is not far off either.

He is not this detached deity. At a distance from us. He is not. In Jesus Christ. He came into the mess of our world.

And all of its brokenness. He became small. And rejectable. And hurttable. And he did that in order to serve you. And it is when we really grasp this.

That we are taken up in worship. And it is when we are taken up in worship. That this same selfless servant heartedness. Takes root in our own lives.

[17:21] As citizens of heaven. The language of last week. A life worthy of the gospel that we have been called to. It will mean deploying all that we have.

In terms of status and privilege. In the service of others. It will mean putting ourselves out. Do you understand that the service. That you are called to as a Christian. Means that you put yourself out for others.

In the small things. In the small things. In my experience. When there is a crisis. People roll up their sleeves. When we are confronted with a big need. When somebody really has something that they need from us.

We drop everything. And we go and do it. The crisis. People. It is all hands on deck. It is in doing the mundane things. That we find this difficult. Why? Because there is absolutely no glory.

There is no glory. As far as you are concerned. In loving your wife. Or respecting your husband. In the small things. Day after day after day. That is what we are called to.

[18:25] Boys and girls. Honoring your parents. Day after day. Fathers. Not exasperating your children. Day after day. Day after day.

Overlooking another person's faults. Again and again. There is no glory in that. That is why it is hard. We do not see an immediate reward. That is why it is hard. And yet that is what we are called to.

Not taking offense easily. Not bearing a grudge. In the life of the church. Arriving in good time for worship. In order to greet other people.

And encourage them. arranging lifts for others who find it hard to get here or wouldn't be able to get here otherwise. Small, seemingly insignificant things, but massively significant for those to whom you're directing your service. Paul's mentioned the prayer meeting, turning up to pray, striving side by side with one another for the sake of the gospel that we were called to last week. Praying together, that's one of the things that we need to do in order to do that once a month.

It's all pretty mundane. We need to ask ourselves, is the mundane beneath us? Can I look myself in the mirror and say, ask myself the question, is the mundane beneath you?

[19 : 52] It was beneath the Lord of glory to leave heaven to serve us, and He is our model. Well, as we read on, it goes further and gets better because we see just how far this service goes.

He emptied Himself in selfless sacrifice. As a man, as God, Jesus emptied Himself. As a man, Jesus humbled Himself in obedient sacrifice. Verse 8.

Being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. We could say that the meaning of this verse lies at the very heart of our understanding of Christianity as a whole. The cross of Jesus Christ is the blazing center of the whole Bible story.

Did you notice? Paul says, He humbled Himself and was obedient. You think to yourself, well, surely on the cross, Jesus was murdered by His enemies.

Is this not some kind of great error? What's this got to do with obedience? But of course, yes, He was murdered by His enemies, but in the course of that, He was also obediently fulfilling the will of His Father.

[21 : 15] Jesus was in control the whole time. The cross is deliberate in the purposes of God, intentional and purposeful in the divine plan.

And the reason for it all, the reason for it all is there in what seems to be repetition at the end of the verse. It says, Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Could have stopped there. That would have made the point, surely. The Lord of glory, He didn't just condescend to humanity. He even gave up His life. Point made. But the verse says more than that. He gave up His life, even death on a cross.

Why do you need to say that? Surely He made the point. No. Because mentioning the cross is central to identifying the sort of death that Jesus died. And crucifixion communicated something cosmic.

Paul, elsewhere in the book of Galatians, quoting the book of Deuteronomy, says, Cursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree. He's mentioning crucifixion in order to communicate that.

[22 : 24] Crucifixion signified being under the curse of God. And that is why Jesus chose the cross. He went there to bear the divine curse. Not because He deserved it, but because we deserved it.

You see, when we turn our backs on God, when we reject His glory and seek our own, it's not just that it goes badly for us. It's not just that it goes badly for society, for church community, for whatever it might be. It is that we are cut off from God and deserve to be cursed by Him. But because of His great love, God came in the person of His Son to bear that curse in our place. You remember that well-known passage in Isaiah 53, He was wounded. He was crushed. He was punished.

But what's the other half of each of those phrases? It was for our transgressions. It was for our iniquities. It was for our sin. As a man, Jesus was able to stand in our place.

And so God's justice was upheld. At the cross, we see God's justice. All that we deserved. It wasn't just passed over by God. It was paid for. The penalty was paid in Jesus. But as the God-man, Jesus was able to take the punishment in Himself, so God's love was also upheld. He didn't punish us.

[23 : 58] He took it in Himself in the person of His Son. My friends, have you experienced the salvation that Jesus has accomplished through His humble obedience?

By being cursed in crucifixion, Jesus made a way through the judgment that we all deserve.

Have you received His salvation? Have you looked at the cross of Christ? Have you seen what you deserve? And have you seen Jesus going there in your place? And have you trusted yourself in repentance for sin and faith in the One who did that? You can do that, you know, this very moment in your seat.

In the quiet place of your heart, surrender your life to Jesus. Here is the model of humility. Christ who set aside His very life that we might not be lost. Look at Him. Meditate on His grace.

Allow these realities to captivate your heart and lead you to worship, and that will transform you.

Last Sunday night, we were told of this. See Jesus. What will happen is, as you look to Him, you'll see that humility begin to grow. Why is that? Because, verse 5, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. We've been given it already by His Holy Spirit. Now, again, as we read on, we see why this humble posture is such a good thing.

[25 : 41] It is not just that humility is key to peace and unity in church or society, as I've said. It is also the mindset that God blesses. Here's our second point. First point, our model is Christ's work.

Second point, our motivation is God's work. What God does. Verses 9-11 and 6-8, the focus is on what Jesus has done. And then here, the focus shifts to God the Father. Therefore, 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 to the glory of God the Father. Do you notice that? One of the first verses, one of the first little passages of the Bible that I memorized when I was a young Christian was this great hymn in verses 5-11.

And I rolled off the tongue. Point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him kind of thing. Therefore, there's a connection here. He's saying, even death on a cross, this is why God has highly exalted Him. God has exalted Jesus to the place of highest honor and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, Lord, Lord of all, because He first walked the path of humble self-sacrifice.

And as it was for Christ, so it is for all of us who follow Him. Here's the trophy. If we try and fill the glory vacuum that exists at the heart of who we are, we'll always end up being selfish and proud. If we turn our gaze to Christ, He shows us that this glory that we're so desperate for is available, but that it comes at the end of the path of self-sacrifice. This is the paradox of the Christian life, boys and girls, the upside-down nature of the Christian life. The way up is the way down. The way to be truly rich is to give away. The way to rule is to serve. The way to joy is not to seek your own joy, but to seek the joy of others. The way to find life is to give your life for others. The greatest glory is to give away your glory to somebody else.

When we try and grasp after glory, we always end up empty. Paul tells us here that Jesus gave away His glory so that you could be full, full of righteousness, His righteousness, gifted to you, free of charge, full of the joy of knowing the Father's love, being in communion, in relationship with the One who made you.

[28 : 42] And here's the thing. To the degree that you feel this reality on your heart, to the degree that you are taken up in praise as you meditate on and experience in the deepest places of your heart what Christ has done for you as He has laid Himself aside for you, to that degree you'll give yourself up for others. So what is there to do?

But go to Him. Go to Christ. You want to be a servant? Go to Christ. Fix your gaze on Him. Because it is as you see Him doing that for you that it fills you up. You're not empty anymore.

You don't need others to give you glory. You're not thinking about yourself. And so you're freed up to go and serve. And the end of it all, verse 11, look where it leads. It leads to the glory of God the Father. When we live like this, when we have this mind among ourselves, we live well together, side by side for the sake of the gospel, and the church shines brightest in the world.

We show off God's alternative to the selfish grasping that characterizes our society. We tell the world what God is really like. And so this brings Him glory.

This is what Christ is calling us to. This is what the apostle is calling this church to. If you want to be humble, fix your eyes on Jesus. If you want glory, by faith and in the Spirit, follow Christ's example. Let's pray together.