

We are continuing this morning in a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which I am calling “To live is Christ and to die is gain.” a line from last week’s passage. Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul sometime between 60-64 AD to a church in Philippi that he had a deep affection for, which he had started about 10-15 years earlier. This morning we will be in verses 1-11 of chapter 2. Remember that Paul has expressed his affection for this church, prayed that they would have a wise and discerning love, and let them know that even though he is in prison unjustly, that God is doing good things, and for this he rejoices, and will continue to be faithful whether he lives or dies.

***Philippians 2:1-11** - If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the **interests of others**. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death **on a cross!** ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Paul is clearly concerned in this passage about the unity of the Philippian church. He asks them to make his joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and truth. He exhorts them to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility to consider others better than themselves, to look not only to their own interests but to the interests of others.

This is a tall order. After all, we naturally look out for our own interests. Most of us routinely make decisions out of selfish ambition and vain conceit. We don’t usually consider others better than ourselves, or the needs of others more important than our own. Most of us just instinctively operate as if the world revolves around us. We try to accumulate wealth and pleasure and joy and to find comfort for ourselves and those we love. **And our culture promotes authenticity and self-expression as two of the highest values – you do you, and no one can tell you what is right for you.** Think about it - what do you get when you have an orchestra full

of musicians who believe in self-expression? Chaos. And what do you get when you have a world full of people who believe that self-expression and authenticity are the highest values? Chaos.

But just for a minute imagine a community like the one Paul describes, where everyone is looking out for the needs of others, where people naturally lay down their own self-interest to make sure others are cared for and lifted up. Imagine a world where the Russians looked out for the interests of the Ukrainians, where those born with resources and means were more concerned about the needs of others than they were about their own, where husbands and wives considered each other better than themselves and looked out for each other's interests. You would have an orchestra where everyone plays in harmony, a world where every person was looked out for by everyone else. What a heaven on earth that would be.

And yet it seems impossible to achieve. Our fears, our anxieties, our prejudices, our greed, our lusts, keep us from living like this. And just telling people they should be kind or care for others doesn't seem to make much of a difference in the big picture. So where is the motivation and the power to live this out to be found?

In this passage, Paul does not just ask them to do look out for each other because it's a good or right thing to do, but instead he points them to the example of Jesus.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What do we learn about what Jesus did in this passage, and what does the gospel give us that helps us achieve this loving unity?

1) A giver who eases our fears

Paul tells us that Jesus was in very nature God, but became a man, and was willing to humble himself all the way to death on a cross. What does this mean? Why did

Jesus die on a cross? It was not just a random tragedy. It was the plan of God to save us from our sins.

Romans 5:6-10 - *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Our sins had separated us from a holy God, and we were under his wrath, deserving of his condemnation. But Jesus died for us when we were sinners, and now we are saved, reconciled, right with God. As RC Sproul put it: *“The glory of the gospel is this: the one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.”* And as John Stott put it: *“Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”*

Paul knew that it was his sins that nailed Jesus to the cross, and yet Jesus willingly gave His life for him. Again, John Stott: *“Until you see the cross as that which is done by you, you will never appreciate that it is done for you.”*

This is the gospel, Jesus dying for our sins to make us right with God. So how does help us achieve unity and live for the needs and interests of others? If we are going to elevate the needs and interests of others, we need to know that someone is looking out for our needs and interests. We need a giver who will ease our fears. And nothing will give you that peace of mind like the gospel. As Paul put it:

Romans 8:31-32 - *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

If God gave you His Son, His best, when you were His enemy, if he forgave you and provided a Savior for you, if he rescued you when you did not deserve it, when you did not care for him or when you were not seeking Him, what will He give you now that you are His beloved son or daughter?

Again, remember Paul's exhortation:

Philippians 2:3-4 - *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

How can this become the motivation of your heart? When you know that you have a heavenly Father looking out for your interests and needs, then you can look out for the interests and needs of others. You can be generous, knowing that He will care for you.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 - *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

And so Jesus can say:

Matthew 6:31-34 - *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Can you imagine this? Not having to worry, because you are concerned with the needs and interests of others knowing your heavenly Father is caring for your needs. This is the incredible promise of the gospel.

What else do we gain from the example of Jesus that will help us become a generous community concerned with the needs and interests of others?

2) An identity that settles our spirit

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul encourages the Philippians to look at the example of Jesus' life and death on the cross. Why did Jesus come and die on a cross? Because our sin had separated us from a holy God, and we could not save ourselves. The testimony of the gospel is that we were so wicked that nothing less than the death of the Son of God could save us. But we are so loved that Jesus willingly gave His life for us.

Romans 3:22-24 - *There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

What does this do to your identity? On the one hand, it humbles you, as you realize that you could not save yourself, that nothing you could ever do could make you right with a holy God. But on the other hand, it lifts you up, as you realize that you are so loved that Jesus gave His life for you when you did not deserve it, rescuing you when you were lost and headed for eternal separation from God.

This was Paul's story, and most of us know it is ours as well:

1 Timothy 1:12-17 - *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive*

eternal life. ¹⁷ *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

What does that kind of identity to you? It humbles you so that you can not look down on anyone else. But it gives you a confidence, knowing that you are loved beyond anything you could ever know. This is not high or low self-esteem; this is God-esteem. I am a sinner deserving of death, but despite that, I have been loved.

Listen to Brennan Manning speak of this love in his book *The Signature of Jesus*:

“On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour of prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, ‘For love of you I left my Father’s side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten, and affixed to the wood of the cross.’

These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time, figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body, and heard the cry of his wounds: ‘This isn’t a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you.’ The longer I looked, the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice, and shouted into the darkness, ‘Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?’ I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: ‘Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable.’

How does this relate to unity and putting the needs and interests of others above yourself? **When you don’t know your identity, you go out into the world searching for validation.** You want people to see you as important, or beautiful, or successful, or good, or powerful. You are looking for what others can do for you. But when you know who you are, when you have the humble confidence that the gospel gives, then you will not look down on others, but can love and serve others, even when they don’t deserve it, because that is what God did for you in Jesus Christ. Get to know who you are in Christ.

3) A love that transforms our heart

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus was in very nature God. He was the eternal Son of God.

***Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

***John 1:1** - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

But he did not regard this equality as something to be used to his own advantage. He chose the path of obedient humiliation all the way to death. He did not give up his divinity, but He took on the very nature of a servant, giving up his rights, and humbled himself to death, even death on a cross! **Don't gloss over that** – remember, that Jesus could have come as a king, as a powerful human to be worshiped. But he came as a servant, to take a lower position in order to display His love for us, because true love serves and elevates others and looks out for their needs.

Jesus became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Remember that death on a cross was the ultimate humiliation, inflicted by Romans on the worst of criminals as a deterrent to others. Most people who were crucified were stripped naked and had their wrists and ankles nailed to the cross in order to humiliate and shame them in addition to torture them. In fact, the word “cross” was an obscenity in polite Roman society, not to be uttered in conversation.

And according to Jewish law, anyone who was hung on a tree like this was seen to be under God's curse:

***Deuteronomy 21:22-23** - If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be*

sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Paul picks up on this in his writings:

Galatians 3:13 - *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

Jesus would have been seen as the worst of criminals, publicly humiliated, and even rejected by Jews as under God's curse. Nothing was beneath Jesus in his love for you. Remember what happened at the last supper:

John 13:3-15 - *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later **you will understand.**" ⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" ¹⁰ Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said **not every one was clean.** ¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, **your** Lord and Teacher, have **washed your** feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*

This was the job for the most menial servant.

This is our God! The one who existed in heaven for all eternity as the eternal Son of God, in very nature God, was willing to clean dirty feet and undergo the most public of all humiliations out of love for you, to save you, to elevate you! This is a love that transforms our hearts, that motivates and empowers us to sacrificially love others, even those who do not deserve it, who do not appreciate it. How can anything be beneath us as His disciples? How can we not follow in His footsteps?

Nothing should be beneath you. Love means cleaning litter boxes. Giving others the best seat, the best piece of pie, taking the worse parking spot, getting up at night with the baby, making the coffee in the morning, taking in the neighbor's trash can, choosing to forgive instead of punish. The path to greatness and exaltation goes through humble service.

Mark 9:33-35 - *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"* ³⁴ *But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.* ³⁵ *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the **servant of all.**"*

Notice what humility is, according to this passage. I think that often we think of humility as thinking that we are lowly, miserable people. Not having an inflated view of ourselves. But Jesus was perfect in every way, and still portrayed as the example of humility. **Humility in this passage is a willingness to sacrifice self-interest out of love for others, elevating the needs of others above our own.** As some have said, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

As C.S. Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*:

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

Again, humility is not primarily about thinking lowly thoughts about yourself. It is first and foremost about knowing that you are so sinful that nothing less than the death of God's Son could save you. But it is also about knowing that you are so loved that Jesus willingly gave His life for you. And if the eternal Son of God was willing to lay down His life for you, to be humiliated in order to love and save you, then the best way to honor Him is to trust that He will love and take care of your needs, and to use your time, resources, money, and energy to give, to love, to serve and elevate others. We don't need to concern ourselves with our own needs and wants, because we have a God who is caring for our needs.

This is what the gospel gives us in order to help us achieve loving unity: a giver who eases our fears, an identity that settles our spirit, and a love that transforms our heart. As I said last week, we live in a culture obsessed with privilege and oppression, and in some ways, they are right. Some people have been privileged, some have been oppressed. It doesn't always fall neatly along group lines the way people want to believe, but there is no doubt that some people have more privileges and advantages in this society. And our culture wants to remedy this by pulling down and silencing and sidelining those who have had historic advantages, and elevating those who have not had the spotlight. But there is a better way, and that is the way of the gospel. It's the way of Jesus that is displayed in this passage. It is using whatever advantage you have to serve others and elevate them the way that Jesus did for you.

If the gospel means anything to you, then let the humble love of God transform you, and look for opportunities to serve and love and elevate others as He did for you.