

Philippians 2:1-11 Easter 2012

We've been going verse by verse through the book of Philippians, and instead of taking a week off to look at a section from one of the Gospels, I thought it would be good if we just keep on going and see what we could learn about Jesus and the meaning of His death and resurrection from right here in Chapter Two. After all, this is considered one of the most important theological passages related to Jesus and His identity in all of the Bible. It helps us see our problem – why we needed Jesus, God's solution – who Jesus was and what He did, and finally the consequences – what difference does it make what you think about Jesus.

So, let's just keep going, verse by verse this Resurrection Sunday.

1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Now, we need to remember, Paul is writing to a group of Christians and this is how he's encouraging *them* to behave. Why is that? Because this kind of behavior isn't natural, it's not normal to think of others first. It's not normal to sacrifice my self, my stuff, or my time for somebody else.

And that's the Problem - our natural tendency is to do the opposite. Paul says, "let nothing be done through selfish ambition" because he knows we have selfish ambitions.

Ambition itself is OK, the Bible never encourages you to sit around and be lazy, the problem is when it is self-centered. We need to fight against this perpetual desire to be number one and to have the most stuff.

But we have that desire to be recognized as important by others because *we already know how important we are*. Paul says "let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit." Conceit isn't a word that gets a lot of use these days but when I was in high school it seemed pretty common – you knew who was conceited, who thought too much of themselves and thought they were too good for others.

The crazy thing was, it could be anybody. The good-looking people could be labeled conceited because they wouldn't date the average looking people. The jocks could be conceited because they had their cool Letterman's Jackets. But the nerds could be conceited because they had an acceptance letter from a good college. You can be conceited about anything because YOU decide what makes you better than others and therefore, what to be conceited about.

You know what made conceit easy to spot in those days? Diversity. We were surrounded by lots of other people who weren't just like us. And we were forced to be. But after high school you don't have so many social groups around each other and so it's harder to see the barriers we build, and the attitudes we project to show that "I'm different than you and I'm better than you."

It doesn't mean we're any less conceited though. It's just more internalized. And the person most affected by it is our self. As adults we think better of ourselves than other people do because we know, and we accept, all of our own excuses. We have this constant inner monologue running telling ourselves how good we are in spite of all our circumstances.

Or, and this is so ironic, maybe you constantly think about how rough you have it, and how messed up you are – it's still conceit – you're still thinking about yourself all the time, only instead of thinking how great you are, you think of how rotten life is. It's the same thing, just headed in two different directions.

And, it's all natural, it's organic! We naturally look after our own interests – our own stuff. We are selfish to the core. Even if you feel like you have your selfish tendencies under control, you know they're still lurking somewhere and you still have to fight them from time to time. Your button can still be pushed and you can still run out of patience with others who aren't like you.

This is the challenge of raising a family - helping the kids see that there are other people who live in the house. It's the challenge of building a team. It's the challenge of building a marriage – we bump into each other **because** we are looking after our own self-interests.

So this is the Problem this Easter morning, our selfishness. But why are we this way? Because, selfish ambition, conceit, and seeking after your own interests are at the core of sin. "Sin" is what we call it when you do what you want to do instead of what God wants. Sin is when you say, "I know best."

At the center of "sin" is "I." I do what I want to do, when I want to do it, and how I want to do it. And so, I like people who like my thing, encourage my thing, or do my thing with me. But I have little time for or interest in people who don't like the stuff I like.

And that doesn't just apply to people, I have the audacity to think this way about God.

If I don't like the things I've heard about God, I write Him off – He doesn't exist, it's all a myth.

If I like some of the things I have heard about God, I accept them, but I still reject everything else. I might accept a little bit, or I might accept a lot, but I don't accept everything, because I'm always in control and I choose what I want to believe based on what I need or what I want out of God and then I write off, ignore, or explain away everything else.

And since I can do that with God, since I can take Him or leave Him according to my own needs, I do it with people too. I use them, to get what I want or need from them.

And all of this selfishness is only made worse by our technology – I create a playlist of my favorite music so I don't have to listen to anything I don't like.

I create a Pandora station to give me more of what I do like and if for some reason I don't like what they offer, I give it a thumbs down and they promise to never play it again! That's way better than any DJ.

I use Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime so I can watch the TV shows I want to watch, when I want to watch them, without commercials that I don't want to see. And I watch the whole season, no waiting 'til next week for the next episode.

I pull out my phone whenever I'm in line or a waiting room so I can check out more of what I like instead of thumbing through these lame magazines or having to talk with anyone around me.

When I want to engage with people I have my phone, and my laptop. I can text, tweet, call or Skype – but only the people in my contact list – the people I want to communicate with.

I've got Facebook and a handy list of people who I have allowed in or asked in to my little bubble.

I go to the store and look for the self-checkout lane so I don't have to take time with a checker who probably doesn't know what they're doing or like what they're doing anyway. And I pay with money I withdrew from an ATM so I didn't have to go inside and talk to a teller.

I ride the Metro with my earphones in so I don't have to listen to all these people, or I drive in my car and wonder, "why are all these people in my way?"

Once again, all of these technologies that allow me to do more of what I want to do can actually make our lives worse, because they can make me think that getting things "my way" all the time is normal.

Then, after dealing with all these devices and their promises of my own personal utopia, is it any surprise that I get to work and get frustrated with my boss because he won't let me do things my way? Or that I come home and bump heads with my spouse because he or she doesn't see things my way? And I lose it with my kids because they haven't learned how to do things my way!?!

It's interesting to me that the Bible speaks of Heaven in Revelation 21 – the second to the last chapter in the book – as a Heavenly city where the saints live together with God. There are also several sections where it talks about the throne of God and how all the saints are gathered around it. Heaven is always pictured as a place where people are gathered

together and you never see anybody fighting with one another, or getting miffed at one another, because God is at the center of everything that is going on.

As a result, CS Lewis in his book *The Great Divorce* pictures hell as an unending urban sprawl – people trying to get farther and farther away from each other because sooner or later, no matter who you are, something about you irritates me and I want to get away from you.

When I'm just concerned about me I have little use for God, little use for others, unless they advance my cause.

That sounds harsh, but think it through – even if you're willing to accept someone and their "quirks" it's usually because you've decided the good in them outweighs the bad, so they're worth it... in your eyes.

And then we apply the same reasoning to ourselves – my good outweighs my bad, I know all of my reasons and excuses, and I like them, so why shouldn't everyone else? As long as I can ignore your faults and you can ignore mine, we'll be fine.

The problem is, while that may work with some people, it doesn't work with God. The Scriptures clearly teach that because He is holy and because He created this world and human beings perfectly, He expects perfection of us.

And no matter how well we think of ourselves, we know we aren't perfect. There's been something in all of our lives that we can admit was wrong.

So, we can't play our little game with God – I'll accept your quirks as long as you accept mine because He's perfect and we're not.

But here is where we get to see the significance of the gospel and the meaning of today, here is where we see God's solution to our problem: instead of agreeing to accept us as we are, God says, "I tell you what, I'll take it upon myself to make you better."

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Now, as we mentioned, all of our self-absorption is sin – our minds are stuck, trapped, wrapped around ourselves instead of being captivated by, caught up with, overwhelmed by the God who made us.

And, just as no good parent allows a child to persist in defiance without discipline, just as no good commander allows insubordination without reprimand, just as no good

government allows treason without punishment, God would not be just if He allowed us to continually rebel with no consequence.

That consequence is separation from Him and every good thing that He has created in a conscious, eternal torment in hell where you can have as much of yourself as you want.

But, instead of simply forcing that upon us, which we deserve, God mercifully offers a way out to those who are willing to accept it – for those who are willing to say, God is right; I am wrong. He is the center of the universe, not me.

He offers this by taking our judgment upon Himself. In the most incredible role reversal of all history, Jesus Christ – fully God - became fully man. And not just any man – essentially a nobody. He was born into a small, inconsequential town, into a poor family. With nothing glamorous or privileged about Himself, He came and offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Instead of thinking highly of Himself, instead of demanding His rights, instead of trying to carve out His version of what life should be and then building steep walls around it to keep others out, He gave up everything and came as a servant to us.

How does this verse even make sense? “He humbled Himself?” It doesn’t – and for centuries theologians have argued over what it means, because it boggles the human mind that in some way God Himself came down and died to save the human soul.

But, He did, and His willingness to do so had a consequence:

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Through humility came exaltation. He didn’t just go to the cross, He wasn’t just left in the tomb, He rose from the dead, and was highly exalted again. He returned to where He had always been.

One day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, “Jesus is Lord.” Not “I am lord,” not “I am best,” not “I had a better idea,” but “Jesus is Lord.”

The question is, will you do that because you want to, or because you are made to?

There is a God, and you don’t get to choose what you want Him to be like, you must accept Him for what He is.

And what He is, is patient, kind, forgiving, willing to make Himself nothing in order to make something out of you.

That's what we celebrate on this Resurrection Sunday – that God thought differently about us than we think about others. That God, GOD for some reason we can't fully understand, did something for us, something sacrificial, not selfish. Have you accepted that?

Paul started off this passage by encouraging us to, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Let me encourage you - start with God – esteem Him better than yourself, and then let Him teach you how to treat others. He'll teach you how to be humble, and then one day, He'll raise you up as well.

If God has been trying to get your attention lately, if He has been trying to help you see that you need to put Him at the center of your life and stop being so selfish or self-centered, you can do that this morning by simply recognizing your sin, asking for forgiveness of it, and surrendering yourself to Him.

You can pray a prayer like this:

God, please forgive me for being so selfish. Forgive me for ignoring you. Forgive me for hurting others. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me, for humbling Himself for me. I confess, right here and right now, You are God, I am not. Please forgive me and have your way in me. Help me to live, from this day on, for Your sake and not my own.

And then join all of us, as we pray,

Father, thank you for the amazing thing that you have done in sending Your Son to this earth. Thank you for not turning your back on us. Help us Lord to fulfill these Scriptures. Purge us of our selfish motives. Use us to be a blessing to those around us and help us to be more like your perfect son. For it is in His name we pray.