

True Joy – The Wisdom of Philippians

True Love (Philippians 2:5-7)

2-14-10

Scripture Reading – Philippians 2:5-11

Two weeks ago...

- We learned that the Philippians were struggling with selfishness.
 - **Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)**
³Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- We noted that selfishness is especially likely to rear its ugly head the harder life gets and that the persecution that the Philippians were facing was probably a significant contributing factor to their struggle.
- We could have noted the destructive effects that the Philippians' selfishness threatened to have on their church by tracing Paul's flow of thought from 2:3-4 back up to 1:27. The Philippians selfishness was threatening to undermine their unity, their lack of unity was threatening to undermine their ability to stand firm in the faith, and all of these were threatening to undermine their ability to live a life that was worthy of the Gospel of Christ.
- We talked about how in 2:1-2 Paul tries to help the Philippians with their selfishness by reminding them of three things: 1) God's love for them, 2) their love for each another, and 3) their love for Paul.
- Finally, we concluded the sermon two weeks ago by mentioning that in Philippians 2:5-11 Paul tries to help the Philippians with their selfishness in one final way, by reminding them of Jesus' ULTIMATE example of unselfishness and urging them to walk in it.

Before we begin looking at this passage I wanted to share a recent example of my own selfishness along with a very important lesson that God taught me through it that I think has significant bearing on our understanding of today's text.

- THE EXAMPLE: Two weeks ago, on the heels of my sermon on selfishness, Jess and I had a night out...
 - Things started out GREAT (conversation, doors, dinner, first half of Viking's game)
 - Second half of Viking's game (Sunday)
 - Opportunity for a serious talk in the morning (Monday)
- THE LESSON: I struggle with selfishness the most, in other words I find it the most difficult to put the needs of others before myself, when I feel *my rights are being infringed upon*. Explain above.
- THE SIGNIFICANCE: This has significant bearing on our understanding of today's text in that I think that the Philippians had the same struggle I did. Whether it was persecution from without, relational issues from within, or the simple everyday stressors of being a sinful person living life in a sinful world, the Philippians felt as though *their rights were being infringed upon* and it was causing their remaining selfishness to come to the surface.

With that in mind, let's look at verses 5-7.

Philippians 2:5 (ESV)

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

- Transition from 2:3-4 to 2:6-11
- “*this* mind” refers back to 2:3-4.
- Though I don't think it was their intention, the ESV translation seems to suggest that the Philippians should not only adopt or exercise the unselfish mindset of 2:3-4 but that *they already have it within them* as a result of their union with Christ Jesus (read 2:5 again).
- the NIV, NASB, and most other translations I read, seem simply to suggest that they adopt or exercise the mindset, not that they already have it.
 - **Philippians 2:5 (NIV)**
⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
 - **Philippians 2:5 (NASB)**
⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

- Though both are Biblically and theologically true, the evidence seems to be in favor of the NIV being a better translation of this difficult to translate verse.
- Thus Paul is encouraging the Philippians to adopt and exercise the unselfish mindset of 2:3-4 BECAUSE it was the mindset of Jesus Himself.

Before we begin looking at Jesus' mindset in 2:6-7 let me say a few things about 2:6-11 on the whole.

- Many have referred to it as “the hymn of Christ”
 - Because of its poetic qualities
 - NIV sets it apart this way (indented)
- Many scholars think it may have been an early Christian hymn not written by Paul himself.
 - This is important because some of these same (more liberal) scholars argue that because Paul himself may not have written it, it carries less weight and significance.
 - First, note that there is no conclusive proof that Paul himself did not write it.
 - Second, even if Paul didn't write it originally, he was still inspired by the Holy Spirit to write it to the Philippians.
 - Third, whether Paul wrote it originally or not, it is clear that it was still commonly understood and believed by the early church.
 - The unqualified, factual manner in which He wrote.
 - Amazing given that Philippians was written within 30 years of Jesus' death.
 - Imagine if these claims were being made of a man who was born in 1947 and who died in 1980.
- Though there are many rich and deep truths to ponder about Christ in this passage, it is important to remember the context in which it was written. Unlike his letter to the Romans, for instance, where Paul's purpose was to spell out and explain several important theological doctrines in detail, that is not his purpose here. As we talked about

earlier, Paul is simply reminding the Philippians of the unselfish mindset of Christ that he wants them to emulate. Therefore, although all of the wonderful truths about Christ that we are about to read are true, we must look to other passages of Scripture to work out the details. In getting caught up in the nonexistent details of the passage many have missed its main point. We will try not to make this same mistake.

Philippians 2:6 (ESV)

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

- “who, though he was in the form of God”
 - “form” = morphe (mor phay) which means “*form*” or “*shape*” *not in terms of external features by which something is recognized, but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Or in other words that which truly characterizes a given reality.* (Fee p. 204)
 - Thus Paul is saying that before His incarnation, *Jesus was in the “form” of God – not meaning that he was “like God but really not,” but that He was characterized by what was essential to being God.* (Fee p. 205) In other words Paul, is saying that before His incarnation, Jesus was in every way God, God Himself.
 - We see this truth expressed in several other passages of Scripture as well
 - **John 1:1-3 (ESV)**
¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 - **John 17:5 (ESV)**
⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.
 - **Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)**
¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke

to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...

- Thus being in every way God prior to His incarnation, Jesus possessed not only all the attributes and qualities of God, but all *the rights and privileges* of God as well.
 - As Creator and King of the Universe *every right* was His and no one could ever take them from Him or infringe upon them in any way. Jesus was in no way obligated EVER to serve or answer to ANY created being. He was eternally content as the second Person of the Trinity in perfect union with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. One in being, One in essence, One in nature, One in purpose. Perfectly One in every way. Owing to no one or to no thing. All created things owing everything completely to Him
 - Though the praise of the 24 elders in Revelation 4 was directed specifically at God the Father, the same praise could certainly be directed at the Son as well.
 - **Revelation 4:11 (NIV)**
¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
- “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”
 - What Paul is saying here is NOT that Jesus let go of *being God* when He came down to earth, in the sense that He emptied Himself of some of His divine qualities or attributes, but rather He let go of *His rights and privileges as God*. Had Jesus emptied Himself of ANY of His divine qualities or attributes He would have ceased to be FULLY God, which the Bible clearly states time and again that He was. Jesus was no less God while

on earth than He was while in Heaven. He maintained ALL His divine qualities and attributes while on earth including things like His omniscience and omnipotence, which you see Him exercise on many occasions throughout the Gospels. In submission to His Father's will, what He let go of was not His divinity, but *His right to exercise it fully*. In sharp contrast to the human lords of His day, who grasped and clung to their rights and privileges with every fiber of their being, the TRUE LORD AND GOD JESUS CHRIST unselfishly relinquished His rights and privileges as God and became a man. We see this in verse seven.

Philippians 2:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men...*

- “but made himself nothing”
 - This phrase means literally that Jesus “emptied Himself.” NOT that He emptied Himself of any qualities or attributes, as we talked about above, but that He emptied *Himself*; He poured *Himself* out, He gave *Himself* up.
 - We should understand “made himself nothing” in the same sort of metaphorical way we understand “he became poor” in 2 Corinthians 8:9.
 - **2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)**
⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.
 - Thus, in one sense in His incarnation Jesus lost nothing (that is nothing of His divine being) while in another sense in His incarnation Jesus lost everything (that is all of His divine rights, privileges, and reputation)
- “taking the form of a servant”

- “servant” here literally means “slave”
- “form” here means the exact same thing it did in the earlier phrase “Though he was in the form of God” Thus in the incarnation Jesus took on the essential being of a slave, *a person without advantages, with NO RIGHTS OF PRIVILEGES, but in servanthood to all.* (Fee 213)
- The King Creator and King of the Universe became a slave to all, which is exactly what He implies in Mark 10:42-45.
 - **Mark 10:42-45 (ESV)**

⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"
- “being born in the likeness of men.”
 - Does NOT that Jesus wasn’t FULLY human, but that unlike other humans, He was *more than that*. Unlike other humans He was both fully human and fully divine. He was both fully God and fully man.
 - I was meditating on the fact that Jesus gave up His rights and privileges as God and became fully man earlier this week when I was sick with the flu and I WAS AMAZED!!!
 - Jesus gave up His divine right to never have to experience throwing up, and He did it for a me, a person who has spent a lifetime throwing up on Him, even since becoming a Christian. THAT’S TRUE LOVE!!!

- Anyone can love someone who loves them back. Jesus says so at the end of Matthew 5.
 - **Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)**
⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- Anyone can forfeit a few of their rights to someone they know loves them when they know they'll get something in return. Even the pagans and tax collectors do that. As Christians, we're called to forfeit all of our rights all of the time even for those we feel do not deserve it. THAT'S TRUE LOVE. That's the perfect way of our Heavenly Father. That's the way of Jesus.
- Let me close with this. Though giving up our rights for the sake of others is extremely difficult and often times is not accompanied by any external reward, inwardly it is a HUGE blessing.
 - My impatience with Adalayna and the reward of giving up my rights for her.