

This week we're picking up where we left off, early in chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Philippians. And for our recap this week, I'm going to give you some of the key verses that we've looked at so far which help to remind us of the context.

"Paul and Timothy, servant of Christ Jesus." (1:1)

"I thank my God every time I remember you." (1:3)

"And this is my prayer, that your love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...." (1:9)

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." (1:12)

"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...." (1:18)

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (1:21)

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel... stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel." (1:27)

"...make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit..." (2:2)

Right before our passage for this morning, Paul's just finished encouraging the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel in their interactions with one another. Not just with people 'out there' but with each other.

Because their witness 'out there' will be indicative of their witness *in here*, among themselves. They can't pull a Pharisee and be clean on the outside but not on the inside.

And there's a word that Paul uses—which we didn't touch on last week—but in many ways it encapsulates what Paul is hoping to see manifested in the life of this church. A quality that comes from the very heart of God, that is made manifest in Jesus Christ, and that we should never cease to be baffled by.

Humility. **Read Philippians 2:5-11.**

Throughout history, there have been many paintings done or photographs taken of great leaders—military leaders, political leaders, kings, etc.—who sought to become great by their own mechanisms or strategies but then experienced a downfall.

For example, there's a painting by a 19th century Victorian painter called Charles Eastlake, who made an image of Napoleon standing as a prisoner on board the HMS Bellerophon. Napoleon was trying to conquer all of Europe for France—a very lofty goal—and the draped union jack flag on the left symbolizes that Napoleon is now under British authority.

In similar fashion, there's a photograph that was taken back in January when the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia were arrested. The once-powerful figure is now handcuffed and escorted by armed Federal agents.

And people are fascinated by these kinds of images. Artists and painters throughout history have been fascinated by these kinds of moments and have sought to recreate them through art. Partly because it feels so dramatic, but also because it highlights a great irony.

The higher we seek to climb, the further we have to fall. “Oh how the mighty have fallen,” right? It's a famous line from the Old Testament, when David is lamenting the death of King Saul and Jonathan. But it's often been used as a dramatic or even sarcastic way of addressing the sudden collapse of someone that previously had power and status.

As if you say, “You've been degraded. You've been humbled.”

And nobody ever wants to be humbled. Nobody ever wants to fall in order to climb because that's just not the way the world works.

But it's exactly why we should never cease to be baffled by the humility of Christ. Because Christ did exactly what humanity has never sought to do.

He fell first.

Verse 5. Paul writes, *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”*

If you remember from the last two weeks, he's just told the Philippians twice that they are to be of one mind with one another—one Spirit, one person.

Now he's telling them that this one mindedness—in order to truly be of one mind, one love, one Spirit—it must be rooted in and reflective of the mindset of Christ. As if we should be of the same opinion as Christ, the same attitude. We need to think and reason like Christ did.

Because what did Christ do? Verse 6-7: *“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*

Can you imagine if Jesus *had* used His equality with God to His own advantage? When the disciples asked Him to move a mountain, it moved. When the Pharisees asked for a sign, there's a hundred of them. Make Rome go away—it's gone. God is once again King—hurrah!

It's hard to imagine what that would have looked like, or what choices Jesus would have made if He had actually taken advantage of His equality with God. But what Paul is saying here is that this would never have happened.

Why? Because Jesus would never have done that. How He lived—how He emptied Himself—is indicative of who God is. Jesus would never have done anything that wasn't 'God-like', that didn't look like God or reflect who God is.

Compare Him to Adam, for example, back in Genesis 3. What did Adam (and Eve) do? What were they tempted to do? To grasp for equality with God. Because the lie that was fed to them was that, in taking the forbidden fruit, they could become *like* God.

And we've been experiencing the impact of that decision ever since.

Jesus refused to grasp onto equality with God. He made himself nothing. As some have put it, He practiced 'downward mobility.' He lessened Himself. He demoted Himself. The text literally says that He *emptied* himself. And He took on the nature—the text says—of a servant.

Now, if you remember from earlier, Paul's already used that word. It's the same word for slave. He starts his letter by saying that he and Timothy are slaves of Christ Jesus.

So Paul's practicing what he's going to preach. He is taking on the mindset of Christ in identifying myself as a slave because he is owned by the Lord Jesus who *himself* became a slave for Paul.

As if he's saying, "I am a servant to He who became a servant for me."

Again, this should never cease to baffle us and amaze us. We're often far more comfortable—I think—with the imagery of Jesus as a King, Lord, Saviour, and Master, but there is clear evidence in Scripture that there's something even deeper here.

Look at this passage in Luke 12. Jesus is speaking to his disciples and encouraging them to be ready for God's arrival in their lives.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes."

Why? What do you think follows that verse? It will be good for the servants to be ready for when He comes because... then He will know that we've been watching for Him? Then we will have proved ourselves good enough for His arrival? Then we will have demonstrated that we were faithful and reliable enough to be his servants?

No. Look at what follows. *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."*

Wait, what? When the Master comes back—when He visits with His servants—He isn't expecting them to wait on *Him* and demonstrate all the ways that they've been good servants.

He takes off His heavenly glory, clothes Himself in humility, and waits on *them*.

I remember—almost exactly ten years ago—when I had come up for air after a season that felt like I was drowning. I was sitting one afternoon by the living room window of my community house in Vancouver. And I was reading a devotional on John 13 where Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

In the scene, Jesus wraps a towel around His waist and kneels down to literally wash the feet of his disciples—which would have been filthy and, you know, gross. And Peter instinctively has this impulsive reaction: *"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

Now, Jesus assures Peter that yes, what He is doing feels strange; but one day Peter will understand. But Peter refuses Jesus. *"No,"* he says. *"You shall never wash my feet."*

The writer of the devotional then posed the question, "Would you let Jesus wash *your* feet?" And when I pictured Jesus kneeling before me, it was too much. I had the exact same response.

Don't make this confusing, Jesus. You're supposed to be my Lord and Saviour. No one's going to believe in you if this is how you behave.

Not to mention that my feet, too, are filthy. *I'm* too filthy. This is embarrassing—everyone's looking at me. Just stop it Jesus, *stop!*

But Jesus says to Peter, *"If you don't let me wash your feet, you have no part in me."* Why? Because you won't know me. And you won't understand what I'm about to do.

Because the way that Jesus knelt down in humility to clean His disciples' feet *was a sign* of what He was ultimately going to do in His death. *This* was the mighty and powerful sign that everyone was asking for but was too blind to see.

And we should never cease to be amazed by it. Because if He had to, He would do it all over again.

Is this the Jesus you know? Because look at where Paul takes us in this passage. We need to get this. Because I think many of us recognize that Jesus was obedient to God's will and died as a ransom for our sin and brokenness.

But notice what Paul includes into these verses. Verse 8: "*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*"

In other words, it's not just about the fact that Jesus died. The emphasis here is on the fact that Christ—in humility—took on the role of a servant, and in that state humbled Himself *even further* to die, not just any death, but the most shame-filled death known in the Roman world. The kind of death that, as one scholar put it, was so vile that it was considered an obscenity.

Think about this. Jesus didn't become one of us, show off His power like how the devil encouraged Him to do, remind His disciples routinely about His divinity, and then one day think, "Okay, fine, I'll do the humility thing."

Humility is who God is. It comes from God. It was invented by God. The very idea of intentionally demoting oneself for the betterment of others *comes from God.*

It's why Christianity is never about lording it over one another. It's never about who has the most authority or 'deserves' to be the leader or has done the most work to get the highest status.

Paul has just encouraged the whole congregation at Philippi to *have the same mindset at Christ Jesus.* Do you have status in society? Wealth? Accolades? Acknowledgments? Accreditations? Authority?

Doesn't matter, says Paul. Jesus had divinity. He *has* divinity. And He intentionally emptied Himself of it so that His life could point others to the very heart of God.

Just imagine if Paul's dream, here, became reality. What would it look like if the body of Christ took on the same mindset as Christ? If He who is the Head was truly the brains of the whole operation?

Paul himself is going to do this later for the Philippians in chapter 3, but what would it look like for each of us to empty ourselves in humility, to set aside anything that we think gives us status or seniority, anything that might intimidate others, and instead make our life together about one thing?

Jesus said in Matthew 23:11 – "*The greatest among you will be your servant.*" What could this look like?

Recently I had a bit of a collision with Diane, our daycare Director. Our offices are right next to each other, and there was a moment when I was running out of my office and she was whipping into her office, having just printed a few things out. And we practically ran one another over.

And it could very easily have been one of those interactions where we just shrug it off and keep going about our business. But both of us immediately asked if the other was okay.

And I thought to myself later on, “That’s what it’s like when you are with somebody who cares more about you than about themselves.” That’s the kind of interaction you can expect to have, where both parties are genuinely seeking the interest of the other, as Paul said earlier in chapter 2.

Just imagine if everyone had that kind of intuitive response, with everything. Say you’re driving on the road one day, and you see two cars get in a fender-bender. And rather than getting out of the vehicle and yelling accusations at each other, both drivers hop out saying, “Oh my goodness, are you okay? I’m so sorry. Did you get whiplash? My leg is broken, but are *you* okay?”

It may sound a bit silly, but what Paul’s talking about here *is about* having our impulses changed so dramatically that the attitude of Jesus just bursts out of us. Where we genuinely start to think about others’ well-being before our own—like a parent who impulsively puts themselves in danger to protect their child from being hurt.

That impulse is in us. It just needs to be nurtured in relationship with Christ, so that we actually *let him* do the work in us.

Because, as Paul writes, our servant-like attitude is not simply about pointing to the servant Jesus on His cross.

Verse 9: “*Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

It’s actually a quote that’s been taken from the book of Isaiah, where the Lord says: “*By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.*”

This is what God had planned—all along. That His Name—the name that Israel didn’t dare to utter, the Name above all names—*His* Name would be the name that every tongue would proclaim and before whom every knee would bow.

An honor that He has given to Jesus. Because it is now at the Name of *Jesus* that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I mean, can you believe that these two sections go together? That the God at whose feet every knee will fall in worship is the same God who got on *His* knees to serve us?

If we are to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, this must be abundantly clear to us: that it is not His *glory* that we need to come into like-mindedness with but His *humility*.

And you and I—no matter how often we have sought to serve others—can always use more Christ-like humility in our lives. It never ends. Because our egos always have a way of squirming back in and disrupting the sanctification process.

I know that *you* know that we've all had moments when someone has behaved toward us in a way that lacked humility. And the behaviour is often contagious. Perhaps it's someone who won't own their side of a conflict. Perhaps it's someone who has never said sorry or who struggles to see things from your perspective.

It's difficult to seek someone's interests above your own when they aren't doing the same.

But whatever the case may be, Paul's words here in Philippians seem to imply that our lack of humility is a sign that the humility of Jesus simply hasn't dumfounded us enough. It hasn't amazed us enough.

Because once it does, we can look at *everyone* through the eyes of Christ—whether they understand humility or not—and we can genuinely ask ourselves, “What would Christ do for you?”

Are we really so above Him that we can't do as He did? Is His 'mindset' so beneath us that we won't stoop to wash one another's feet—let alone the feet of our enemies?

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

He got on His knees for us.

May we—in worship—bow our knees for Him.