

The Humble King

Philippians 2:1-11

Pastor Jonathan Neufeld, July 16, 2017

Well good morning. It is a pleasure for me to be here. As was said, my name is Jonathan Neufeld, and I'm a native to BC. I grew up in Abbotsford, Surrey, and Burnaby. I just recently accepted a position at Central Community Church here in Chilliwack. So, my wife and I are going to be moving out here, and we are looking forward to planting a new campus in Promontory Heights. If you think about us, pray for us. We would certainly appreciate that.

This morning, it is a great joy for me to be here and to preach the Word of God for you. If you have your Bibles, let me invite you to open to the book of Philippians. We're going to be in Philippians chapter 2 this morning, the first 11 verses.

It was the novelist Mark Twain who wrote what is now a very famous story, *The Prince and the Pauper*. I'm sure it's a familiar story to many of you, even if you haven't read the book. You've probably seen or heard one of the adaptations that people have made over the years, whether it's other books or movies. It's a classic example of a mistaken identity. The story takes place with two young boys. They meet by chance, one obviously a prince, the other, a pauper, or a beggar. They meet, and they become fascinated with each other's life. The prince is curious as to how the beggar lives day to day, and the pauper is also curious as to what it would be like to be the prince. As they discuss it, they decide that they're going to change clothes, just to see what it would be like. What would it be like to wear the beggar's rags, or the prince's garments? And of course, as it would happen, the moment they change clothes, one of the palace guards runs in and catches them. Mistaking the prince for the beggar, he throws him out of the palace. So, the story is set. They're trying to figure out how they can properly convince people of who they really are.

There are a lot of things we could draw from that story, but one that first becomes the most obvious is how easy it is to judge people on their outward appearance. How easy it can be if you are simply looking at the exterior of a person to come to the wrong conclusion. The problem comes when we do this with our Bible, when we come to Jesus and we look at Him merely on the exterior. We look at Him and say, "He's a teacher, a revolutionary, a martyr, or a prophet, perhaps." But, if we do not actually listen to what He is saying, we'll miss the King standing before us.

This morning, what I'd like us to do as we look into the book of Philippians, is to see how Paul presents Jesus Christ. Paul, in one of the most beautiful passages, peels back the veil of who Jesus is and lets us see His true identity. So, this morning, that's really what I want us to consider. If you have your Bibles with you, please follow along with me in the book of Philippians. We'll start in Philippians chapter 2 verse 1:

1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind

regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Would you pray with me. Father, we thank you for this church. We thank you for the time that we can gather together, that we can worship your Name and sing praises, we can exalt who you are. Father, we pray that every time we come before the Word of God that it would not be merely words on a page, but that our hearts might be changed. Father, especially as we look at this passage, as we consider your Son, as we consider how He humbled Himself, Father, I pray that these would not be words on a page, but that these would be living and active, a hope that we have in you. We pray that you would impress this upon our hearts this morning. We ask these things in your Name, Amen.

This morning, we are jumping into the middle of a book. We're jumping right into chapter 2. So, just as a little bit of a background, to know what happened in chapter 1, I wanted to go over this a little bit. But, by a very wonderful providence of God, you were actually looking at Philippians chapter 1 last week, so my job becomes a little bit easier; not to instruct, but to remind you of what has happened in chapter 1. You'll remember that Paul is writing to the Philippian church, and he's writing to them primarily to say thank you. Thank you so much for your support. You'll remember that Paul, while he is writing this, is actually writing from jail. He has been imprisoned in Rome. If you remember, in the book of Acts, Paul goes all around the Roman empire, preaching, teaching people about Jesus Christ, he's starting churches, and eventually people start to take notice of him. The wrong people start to take notice of him, and by the end of the book of Acts, Paul is actually imprisoned. He is taken into custody, standing trial, and you'll remember that Paul appealed his case to Caesar. He was a Roman citizen, so that was his right. He said, "I'm going to go and stand before Caesar in Rome." So Paul ends up going there, and that's where he is writing the book of Philippians, awaiting his trial, where he will find out if he will live or if he will die. What makes this entire letter so surprising is that continually throughout this book, he is talking about joy! The joy that he has, even as he is sitting in jail. Even as he is undergoing suffering, Paul is rejoicing constantly and talking about how thankful he is, how joyful he is in the Lord.

So Paul is writing this church not only to remind them of that, but also to spur them on to continue. Whether or not Paul actually lives or is put to death, this church might continue on to serve the Lord. Back in chapter 1 verse 27, Paul says, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Paul's emphasis here was for this Philippian church to keep on going in the work of the ministry. "To live in a manner," he says, "that is worthy of the gospel." Now, that is an incredibly high calling. Living in such a way that is worthy of what God has done for us - that is what Paul says. Interestingly enough, he connects that with the second half of the verse. He says "live in a manner worthy of God - whether I'm there or not - that you might be unified. Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together." Paul's desire is not just that the Christians in Philippi would be striving after Jesus - yes, he wants them to do that - but he says that the outcome of doing that is unity in the church. He wants them to work together for these things. That's what Paul is picking up here in chapter 2. That's the theme that he is going through. He is going to give us not only a high calling for it, but also the example of Jesus that it is based upon.

Look with me in chapter 2, starting at verse 1. Paul says, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ" - now just pause there for a moment. In verse 1, there are a number of these "if" clauses. "If there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit..." What he is meaning is that we, as the readers, would answer "yes, there is encouragement in Christ! Yes, there is consolation of love! Yes, we have fellowship with the Spirit." And for everyone who is in Christ Jesus, these are a resounding "yes." So, we read verse 1, "if there is any encouragement in Christ" - and there is. "If there is any consolation of love" - yes, we have that. "If there is any affection and compassion." Yes, we have all of those in Jesus Christ. We have been given these gifts. So Paul says "therefore" in verse 2, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Paul is saying, "if you have all these gifts, if Christ has been an encouragement to you, you ought to therefore turn to your brother and encourage him so that you might strive together in this unity, that you might work together and be of one heart, one mind, one purpose, striving forward so that the gospel might actually be known."

You see, Paul is arguing that unity becomes a picture of the gospel. The things we have received in Christ, we are to use as a living demonstration in the church. We are to be united together because the church is made up of people from all different backgrounds, cultures, languages, and all manner of other things, yet the gospel breaks down those barriers and calls us to a new purpose. It makes us into one people. So, Paul is saying, "You, church in Philippi, just as you have received these gifts, use them and be a living demonstration of the gospel." That is what we are to do as the church. There are no lone ranger Christians. That's not how we are intended to live. We are intended to learn to live together, to work together, to be a demonstration. We are called to strive for unity.

But, Paul knows that there is a looming danger present. There is a danger present in every church and in every one of our hearts. It is the danger of pride. Look at verse 3 with me: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit."

Paul warns that the great enemy of church unity is pride. It is selfishness, conceit, and thinking primarily about yourself. It is this self-centred, self-focussed attitude that we can have. And, it must be killed if we are to have unity in the church. You can ask yourself, "Why are you serving in the church?" Is it so other people can look at you and say, "Well, they're quite spiritual. Look at them, they're out there serving." What is the motivation that actually drives you to do what you are doing? Is it so others might see and say, "Oh, he looks good." Or, is it so that we might

actually serve one another? See, if we are just looking to puff ourselves up, Paul calls that empty conceit. There is nothing there. It's merely empty. Pride is like poison running through the veins of a church. Everything it touches, it begins to destroy. And, the great blindness of pride is that it is so self-focussed, it cannot even see the great damage it's doing. As we are so self-focussed, we stop looking to serve other people's needs, don't we. If we are simply concerned with our own welfare, our own status, our own desires, wants, and needs, we stop even thinking about how we could possibly serve others. Paul is warning the church to kill pride.

But he doesn't just give them a warning. He doesn't just say there's a poison there. In fact, he says there is an antidote as well. Look at how verse 3 ends: "3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

So, Paul calls the church to put aside pride. Put it away by humbling ourselves. But, here's where we need to realize what Paul says and what he doesn't. It's really easy to get the wrong understanding of what pride looks like. We naturally think of a proud person as one who is boasting all the time, right? "I have the biggest boat; we had the best vacation; I have the nicest car; the best job; the biggest house..." Whatever it is. It's all about me. We think of that as pride, and it certainly is. But, the problem is, if that's all we can conceive of as pride, we are going to miss the pride in our own hearts. Notice what Paul said, "but with humility of mind." Paul didn't say, "with humility of speech, with humility of actions," or "humility of just external works." Humility of mind. Paul is actually calling us to think differently. Actually change how we think about other people. He says to value others as more important than ourselves. We are to even kill pride in our own thoughts. To put others first, to consider their opinions, wants, and needs as more significant than our own.

Right now, I'm going to bet that this is causing some of you concern. If you're really honest with yourself, you don't believe it. You don't believe that the gifts and service of those around you are actually more important than your own. Because, a lot of us operate with the idea, especially within the church, that there is a sort of hierarchy of service. The service of people on the stage is more important, they are more holy, than those who work behind the stage. Those who serve in a different place who are seen. We naturally tend to value them more, don't we? But in fact, that's exactly what Paul is calling us to kill. Think about how he describes the church in 1 Corinthians; he talks about the church as a body. He says, there are some members that are more visible than others.

I don't know about you, but I have never seen my internal organs. In fact, I hope I never do. That being said, there is no way that I would ever give up my lungs to save my hand. I would never give up my lungs, my heart, my liver, these internal organs that I've never seen. They operate in the background, yet they are vital to me continuing to live. So it is with the church body. It is not merely those that we see that are most important. Paul tells us, "Let us value other people even above ourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

As we consider others more important, we naturally start to have an others-focus. We begin to kill pride. Pride is focussing on ourselves. Humility calls us to focus on others. It calls us to live

in unity together. Strive for unity through humility. That is how unity is protected in the church. That is what Paul is calling for the church in Philippi to do, to strive for this unity and this humility in our own hearts. But, that's not an easy thing to do. As soon as we start doing it, we're going to realize that it hurts. We will realize that we can't keep doing the same old things and add this on. In fact, it's a call for a change in my heart, a change of my thinking, a change to my actions, to say "I am not going to be the centrepiece of my life." Rather, in service to God, seek out the good of others. It's the call to demonstrate the example of Jesus Christ. In fact, that's exactly where Paul takes us. In verse 5, Paul says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."

Here's really the centrepiece of Paul's argument. The centrepiece is "Look like Christ! You who call yourselves Christians - Christ-followers - do you follow His example?" We are not merely to humble ourselves because Christ has done so much - He has blessed us with so much. And yes, we are. We are not merely to humble ourselves because it safeguards the church. We are. But ultimately, we humble ourselves because it is the example of Jesus. Paul describes what this life begins to look like, and he practically breaks out into song. His language suddenly becomes so much more poetic, very literary, in fact. Some scholars have even speculated whether or not Paul is quoting from some ancient Christian hymn. There's no way for us to know that for sure, but suddenly his language becomes very poetic.

One of the things we need to realize, that I'm sure many of you know, the Bible wasn't actually written in English. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament written in Greek. For any of you who has ever learned another language, you'll know that it's not always easy to translate one phrase or saying into another. It's always hard to get those lined up perfectly. It gets harder and harder with proverbial sayings and poetry. Poetry especially draws on these nuances of language. It really reaches for what each word means and encompasses. So, when you translate that, it doesn't always line up exactly. I say that, because verses 6 and 7 especially are often misunderstood. We read them and it's easy to come to the wrong conclusions just because what we're reading is more poetic. So, look at verse 6 with me. Paul says, of Jesus, "Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

So, here already we run into this problem, don't we. Jesus is in the "form" of God. So, naturally, when we talk about someone's form, we talk about their shape. If you can imagine that we're out in the woods looking for someone, you look out and you say, "well, I think that looks like his form." But, you're not totally sure. It's kind of the right shape. It could be a stump, it could be a bush, it could be that person; you don't really know. We talk about a form as an outline. That's really not where Paul is going. He's not saying that Jesus is sort of an outline of God. Rather, he is saying that Jesus' form is the very essence of God. Jesus has the very essence of God, the very thing that makes God God is Jesus. He has the very thing that God has. His true, vital essence.

So, all that is true of God is true of Jesus Christ. All of His glory, majesty, and power, His eternal existence, His holiness, His righteousness. All of that is true of Jesus Christ. He stood before all of creation. In fact, John 1 tells us that it was by Jesus, the Son, that the world came into being. Hebrews says, "He is the exact imprint of the nature of God." True God of true God. The One before whom angels cry out day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is He." Before whom the nations

are as dust; He holds the oceans in the palm of His hand. This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Eternally existing in perfect joy and relationship, never for a moment has their relationship even had a hint of sin or corruption within it.

Think of one of the most joyful occasions we've had in our lives. Maybe our wedding day? We see the bride and the groom, smiling from ear to ear, and they're so overwhelmed with joy and love. We come together to celebrate because of this beautiful expression. They make a covenant before God. We rejoice and celebrate with them. But, even in that moment, the bride and groom looking beautiful, dressed up, and it seems that nothing could ever go wrong. But, we know that's not the case. We know that they are still two sinners, and at some point their sin will come into that relationship, and there will be a breaking. There is a taint of sin on that, even then. But, within the Trinity, there has never been even a moment when that has been the case, where sin has come in and disrupted that. For all of eternity, the God-head has been in love. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit. The Son loves the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit loves the Father and the Son; eternal joy.

We need to understand this, because we need to see the heights from which Jesus was and to understand the depths to which He humbled Himself. He was God Himself and in command of all the prerogatives of His deity. Yet, Jesus, as a Son, became a man. The second half of verse 6 says, "[He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Once again, we need to pay careful attention to what Paul is saying. It almost sounds like Paul is saying that He's grasping at equality, and He's not quite there. But, Paul has just said that Jesus is fully God. So, he's not saying that. Rather, he's saying that Jesus did not grasp and hold on to His deity for His own purposes. Other translations will say "held onto His own advantage." Jesus did not hold onto His own advantage or His prerogatives of deity, but rather, in verse 7, "He emptied Himself," or "He poured Himself out."

The end of the verse says, "Taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." So what does that mean, "He poured Himself out? He took on a bond-servant?" Does that mean Jesus got rid of His deity? He's no longer God? For a number of reasons, I can say "no." The Bible clearly doesn't teach that. The Bible teaches that Jesus is God. So, what is He doing? What it is saying here is that Jesus did not hold on to His divine prerogatives, but poured out His deity into being a human. He no longer held onto His rights as God. As God, Jesus had the right to demand everything. It is His creation; He's God! And yet, He did not.

Let me give you an example. There was a TV show called *Undercover Boss*. It was a show where they got this CEO of a big company to dress up and take on an entry-level position in his own company. He was going to sweep floors or whatever they got him to do. The premise of the show was that they would follow him around and see how he would act as he was doing these menial jobs. What they never asked the CEO to do, however, was quit his job as CEO. He was still the CEO as he was sweeping floors, but he gave up his rights. He had the right to order someone else to do that; it was his company. But, for a time, this guy would give up his rights and his prerogatives as the CEO and serve.

In fact, that's an excellent example of what Jesus has done. Jesus does not give up his deity. He's not no longer God. He still has that title; He is still fully God. But, He has given that up for a time in order that He might serve. In fact, Paul says, "He took on the form of a servant." Just as Jesus was in the form of God, so now He is the form of a servant. He took on every aspect of humanity, even our weakness.

Do you remember when Jesus was being tempted in the desert? Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan. Satan comes to Him after He has been fasting for forty days and forty nights. He is exhausted, He is tired, He is hungry. The very first thing Satan does when he comes to Him is what? He tempts Him with bread. But, notice that he doesn't bring food to Jesus. Satan doesn't come and bring bread saying, "Here, try and eat this. You want to eat this, don't you?" In fact, he tempts Jesus in a very different way. He comes and says, "If you're God, you can turn these rocks into bread." The temptation that Satan was getting to was "Jesus, use your power for your own selfish ends. Don't put your prerogatives aside. Rather, use them for yourself." But Jesus, of course, does not. He resists the temptation and humbles Himself to live as a human being.

Jesus had every right to demand His own way and seek His own good, yet He comes as a servant, and this is what we need to hear. Lest we think that we are too good to serve, Jesus Christ, God Himself, having every right to demand His way, comes to serve. He is our example. He is our model. He is the one we've come to follow, so we could never say, "I'm too good for that; I'm better than that; I deserve better." There is someone who deserved better, and He humbled Himself. Let us follow after Jesus Christ.

In verse 8, Paul says, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus humbled Himself to become obedient to the will of the Father. To become a human being, and not even an important person. Jesus didn't come as a king or a governor or a ruler, or even someone influential; He came as a servant. And, He became obedient to the point of death. The very King of the universe, who stood before creation, who formed man from the dust and breathed life into him, humbled Himself to be put to death by men. Not a noble death, but the death of a criminal. He was mocked, He was abandoned, He was tortured, He was killed. He was hung on the side of a road to be derided.

But we should ask, "why did Jesus do this?" Was it simply so that He would give us an example? Certainly He has, but there is far more to it. In fact, Jesus has gone to the cross in order to pay for our sins. You see, we have sinned against this very God. Against our Maker we have sinned. We have rejected Him, we have scoffed at His standards, and we have ignored Him. We have sinned against this infinite and eternal God, and our sin has earned us an infinite punishment. And so steps in Jesus; the infinite eternal God Himself has stood in our place and has paid that debt on our behalf, so that anyone who would place their trust in Him would be saved. You see, Jesus came to accomplish salvation for us. That is why we follow Him, because He has given us salvation. He has borne the wrath of God so that we might be reconciled to Him.

But this is not the end of the story. The story doesn't end with Jesus in the grave. He is raised to new life, and for all who would trust in Him, we would be raised as well. Paul says in verse 9,

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The grave is not the end of the story. That is not where things end; in fact, it is where they are beginning. In Jesus, we have new life, and He is highly exalted. Notice that word right at the beginning of verse 9, “For this reason *also*.” You see, Jesus already was exalted, God Himself. But now, in the cross of Jesus Christ, we have so much more reason to give thanks, to exalt what He has done. “He is given the name that is above every other name.” We should ask, what is that name? What is the name that He is given? In fact, verse 11 answers that, “That every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Jesus is being given the name “Lord.” Not merely in title only. Yes, He is Lord in the sense of King, Ruler, or Sovereign; He is that, but He is given this name “Lord.” We need to hear that in the context of the Old Testament.

Remember back in the story of Moses in Exodus chapter 3. Moses is in the desert, and he finds this bush burning, and God speaks to him. He says, “Go into Egypt and rescue my people.” Moses asks, “If the people ask me, ‘what is your name,’ what should I tell them?” God answers with His name; He says “Tell them, I Am who I Am. Tell them ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” You see, “I Am” is the covenant name of God. It is the name reserved only for the God of Israel; no one else takes this name, no other ruler, no other false god or idol is ever taking this name. It is His name and His name alone. In fact, in Judaism, this name was so revered that they would not even speak it. Rather, they would simply say “Adonai,” which means Lord. So, when you read your Bibles and you come across the name “LORD,” all in capitals, what they are telling you is that behind that is the name of God, I Am. So Paul says that Jesus Christ is being given the name Lord. He is saying that Jesus Christ is being declared the I Am, the eternal God. Every eye shall see Him and declare that He is God alone. Jesus Christ is God Himself.

You might say that’s where we began. We began with Jesus being declared as God Himself. So, what has changed? Let me give you an example. Imagine a king at his coronation. The king stands before the whole congregation and the crown is placed on his head. He is given the title “defender of the realm.” On his coronation day, he has that name. Yet, a year or two later an army invades, and the king is now called upon to put that to the test. When that king returns from the battle victorious, when he comes and he has defended the realm, you then cry out and say “Yes, he is the defender of the realm.” So it is with Jesus. His name as God is vindicated in His death and resurrection from the grave. In the salvation of His people, He has been given and has vindicated His name. Every person on earth shall declare that Jesus Christ is God. He is Lord of all.

You see, history has a direction. History is going somewhere. History is going to come to its conclusion and climax in the return of Jesus Christ. I hear people say things like, “We need to be on the right side of history.” What they mean by that is that people will look back and say that they were going in the right direction. Brothers and sisters, I want that to be the case. That when Jesus Christ returns, we might be found faithful to Him. That when all people come to worship

Him and everything is brought together under His name, we might be found faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we finish here, let me close with one final exhortation. There is so much we could say about this passage and probably should say, but let me call us to remind ourselves, let us humble ourselves after the example of Jesus Christ. Let us strive to serve one another in unity and humility, while all the time looking forward to that day when our faith is made sight, when we will see Jesus Christ face to face. Brothers and sisters, let us strive onwards to that day.

Let's pray together.