

MONDAY, 8/26

Read Philippians 2:1-2.

Ok, this is one of my favorite passages. This will be a fun week as we dive deeper into Philippians 2.

Verse 1 begins with a word that should catch our attention. Paul says, "Therefore...". This should cause us to pay careful attention to what surrounds it. Paul holds out several "if" statements that are meant to draw the believer in. If you know Jesus and have experienced His love, then there is only one answer to Paul's questions: yes. Yes, we are encouraged in our life with Christ. Yes, we are comforted by His love. Yes, we share in His Spirit. Now that we have answered his question, we need to consider what Paul is asking of us. "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind," he said.

The core of Paul's plea to the church is for us to have "phroneo," which is the Greek word for "mind". He wants the church to have the same mind, the same attitude. To give you an idea of how important this is for Paul, "phroneo" is used 20 times in the New Testament. Half of them are in Philippians; he uses it 10 times in chapter 2 alone.

For Paul, it is vital that the church have the same mind. What mind or attitude does Paul want us to share? The mind of Christ. We'll continue to build on what this looks like in the next few days, but Paul wants us to think like Jesus. He wants the attitude of the church to reflect Jesus' attitude. Paul wants this because he believed that it was essential that Jesus' disciples become more like Him. He isn't just talking about the Twelve who walked with Jesus, either. He means you and me.

Paul's vision for the church here is that our attitude and love reflect that of Jesus--that we together are being formed into the person and work of Christ. Paul wants us to think the thoughts of Christ, to love what He loves, and value what He values. This process is not instantaneous. This is why we are consistent in our practices of worship, scripture study, fellowship, and prayer. We exercise our faith together, calling upon the Lord to transform us, heart, mind, and soul.

Our aim is to grow in likeness to Jesus, our Lord. We want to be a church that is unified in our commitment to Christ by sharing His attitude and embodying His love.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we have indeed been blessed by our life with You. We have been left in awe of Your love. We want to bless You. We want our life as a church to reflect Your mind, Your attitude. We want to show Your love in all we do. Transform us from the inside out. Amen."

TUESDAY, 8/27

Read Philippians 2:3-4.

From the moment we were born, it seems that we are driven by our wants. "Mine" may not be the first word from a baby's mouth, but it becomes the one used most frequently. I'm not sure that many people grow out of that.

One of the effects of sin is that our nature, that once looked beyond ourselves, is now focused on the self. We look out after our needs first. There might be a few exceptions, but not many. We say this is what it means to be human, and that is true right now.

This wasn't always the case, though. We were created by God in His image. We shared in His character. Before the sin in the Garden of Eden, there was harmony in all of our relationships, including with one another. However, after the fall, Adam and Eve turned on each other. Adam didn't consider Eve's needs, but tried to protect his own hide.

Jesus' vision of God's Kingdom is one of a newly created order of humanity. This redeemed humanity is no longer driven by their own desires and interests. Their heart is for the other. They have a greater concern for their neighbor. They are willing, as an expression of their Christlike love, to serve their neighbor and give of themselves to meet the needs of their neighbor.

Now we can read that and think that's all well and good, and, sure, things will look like that when we get to heaven, but let me tell you something: God's Kingdom isn't merely some future reality. It is a present-day reality into which Jesus invites us to live. Jesus is calling us to practice heaven here on earth. That's one of the reasons for the church. As a community of Jesus' redeemed people, we embrace His vision of the Kingdom in our life together. We invite Jesus to reign in us and over us. We lift up His example; and with His help, seek to embody it in our life together. That's what it means to be the church. We can experience a taste of the goodness of God's Kingdom when we live this way.

So, consider what desires drive you and your life. Do they reflect God's Kingdom or the kingdom of the world? If you find yourself closer to the latter, ask Jesus to order your desires. And let us consider how we can value the interests and needs of others above our own.

Praying Together:

"God, I confess that I have often lived by own desires, chasing my own wants and wishes. That isn't where life is found. True joy is found when we, like You, value others more. Help me to serve not my own interests but the interests of others. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 8/28

Read Philippians 2:5-8.

Humility hasn't always been considered a virtue; in fact, most historians will tell you that before Jesus came, no one espoused humility as a virtue. It was often dismissed as a weakness. Given the cutthroat world in which we live, I can see why they would seek to avoid humility.

For Jesus, humility wasn't simply a virtue among many virtues. It was one of the chief virtues of God's Kingdom. It was Jesus Himself who put the virtue of humility front and center when He "took the very nature of a servant by being made in human likeness." Even though He had every privilege of being God's very own Son, He stepped down from the heavens to be one of us.

Stop and think about that for a moment. In Jesus, God took on human flesh. He subjected Himself to the troubles that we face. These are the troubles we would avoid if we could, but we don't have the choice. Jesus did, and He embraced them that He might embrace us.

I can't understand the glory of the heavens or comprehend the infinite majesty of Jesus. We don't have the capacity this side of heaven to grasp such things. We may not even fully understand them in heaven, which is why we will just worship, enjoying and basking in His glory. But just think: Jesus traded His glory and majesty to live among us in order to share in our struggles and be subjected to shame and death at our hands--all so that He could give us life. How could we possibly wrap our minds around such love and mercy?

In lifting up Jesus' attitude, Paul bathes verses 6-8 with humility. It's embedded in the story of Jesus' coming to us and offering His life for ours. Paul holds the story out for us so that we might give praise to Jesus, but also as an example of how we are to treat one another.

In verse 5, Paul says, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." All that we just considered about Jesus--His humility and self-sacrificing love--we are to exercise in all of our relationships.

So, I want you to spend some time in prayer. I want you to ask yourself, *how am I bringing the attitude of Jesus into my relationships? In what relationships do I need my mind to become more like Christ?*

Praying Together:

"Lord, we are in awe of Your humility. You, the only One who deserved glory, emptied Yourself for us. We choose to empty ourselves for You so that You may be glorified in all we do. Amen."

THURSDAY, 8/29

Read Philippians 2:9-11.

These verses describe Jesus' reward and inheritance. In verses 5-8, Paul speaks to the spirit out of which Jesus gave Himself both for us and to bring His Father glory. Those verses lift up Jesus' humility, which is most clearly seen through His sacrifice.

If we want to sum up verses 5-8, it would appropriate to say Paul is describing Jesus' stooping down as a servant. In those verses, Jesus descends rather than ascends.

Jesus leaves the majesty of the heavens to come be among us. He trades His glorious heavenly body for a human one. Jesus empties Himself.

This runs against everything that we are taught and is natural to us. We have an internal drive to ascend. We want to excel and set ourselves apart through our accomplishments. We can often see servanthood as something that gets in the way of our progress.

For Jesus, servanthood didn't get in the way of what He wanted; it was *the* way. Jesus didn't seek to ascend. In fact, He chose first to descend--to empty Himself and serve. In verses 9-11, Paul says that because Jesus stepped down into service, the Father lifted Him up and glorified Him. Since Jesus descended, seeking to lift the Father and us up, so Jesus ascends to a place of glory that He deserves. In this, Jesus teaches us that the way to ascend is to first stoop down.

This is the way of the Kingdom of God. Jesus told us that He did not come "to serve but to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many." If Jesus our Lord served, what does that tell us about His will for our lives?

Herein lies our purpose as those who are chasing after Jesus. Dallas Willard once said, "I have never heard anyone question their purpose who was busy serving others." So often, we wonder what our purpose is or what a life that matters might look like. Take a long look at Jesus. We will find our purpose and significance when our lives begin to look more like His, especially in how we serve others in His name.

This passage should lead us to gratitude and emulation. We give thanks and rejoice in the glory that Jesus receives from the Father. How He deserves every blessing and honor! We bow on our knees before Him and join the chorus of confessing His Lordship.

We also hear the call of being servants like Him. As those who want to bring glory to God and show that we are indeed citizens of the Kingdom, we also want to give of ourselves. When we do, we share in the wonderful inheritance that Jesus earned but longs to share with those who belong to Him.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we confess that You are Lord to the glory of Your Father in heaven. We bow before You in humble praise. You are worthy to ascend to the highest place, next to Your Father. We are awestruck by Your humility and Your majesty. Show us how to stoop to serve as You did. In doing so, we show ourselves to be Yours and point to the glory of God's Kingdom. Amen."

FRIDAY, 8/30

Read Philippians 2:12-13.

This is a great yet often misunderstood passage. In it, Paul speaks to the believers' view of and participation in their new life in Christ.

When it comes to salvation, people often wonder if it is something God alone does for us, or if we are expected to do at least something. The answer is yes, but let me explain.

It is Jesus alone who can save. He is the One who made our new life in Him possible. He became the sacrifice we could not make so that our sins could be atoned for. He is the One who was obedient where we were disobedient. He is the One who was raised to new life and shares that new life with us. So, I want to be clear: salvation belongs to Jesus. He alone can give it, and He is pleased to do so when we turn to Him. As Paul says in Ephesians 2, "It is by grace alone that you are saved."

With that being said, we do have a part to play in our new life with Christ. Our part is in response to Jesus' saving work for us. We don't do anything to earn God's favor, but there is a genuine response that comes from us when we have received God's favor.

This is why Paul words verses 12-13 the way he does. He says, "Carry out your own salvation" as a way of saying that once we have been saved, we are to live in a way that reflects the new life we have been given. Our salvation brings us into a new existence with Jesus that was bought by His most precious blood. When we realize that, we will desire to live lives that bring Him glory. Such lives are lived out with "fear and trembling," which means something along the lines of awe and reverence. We know the wonder of the love we have been shown. We don't want to squander it. We understand, at least as much as we can, what Jesus has done for us and that we are accountable to Him. Therefore, we want our lives to bring Him glory.

While we are called to a faithful response to the salvation we have received, we know that it is God who "works in us" to bring about such a life. God empowers our faithful response to our new life in Jesus. Without God's help, it is impossible for us to move any further toward holiness.

The right word here for our role as we grow in grace and likeness to Jesus is "cooperation". Our new life in Jesus is one of partnership. He is the power that gives us life and transforms us. We provide the willing spirit. We submit ourselves to His care.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we offer ourselves to You. We surrender to Your will so that You may have Your way in us. We long to grow in You. We need You and Your grace to be at work in us. Amen."

SATURDAY, 8/31

Read Philippians 2:14-15.

"Do everything without grumbling or arguing," Paul says. My kids surely needed to hear that today when they looked at their homework and chore chart. Truth be told, I needed to hear that as well.

I am by nature a grumbler. I don't intend to grumble. It often doesn't feel to me like grumbling, but it is grumbling. Those around me can feel it more than I. This is something I have to keep in check; otherwise, it gets out of hand.

In his book, *Soul Keeping*, John Ortberg writes that in every interaction with another person, we either bless them or curse them. What he means is that we either leave them encouraged or discouraged. They either walk away feeling enlightened from our conversation or as if they've taken on a burden. We all know people who bless us with their presence. We also know those who leave us in a heavier emotional state after a visit. Which person do you want to be?

The answer to that is obvious. No one sets out to be a grumbler who dumps burdens on everyone else. So, consider which one you tend to be. Be honest with yourself. Better yet, ask the Lord to open your eyes to which one you are. Sure, we all have a few people with whom we share our burdens. That isn't what I'm talking about. Are you the person who seeks to bless or unknowingly burdens others around you?

When we seek to live as those who bless, we show that we are children of God. Belonging to God gives us a firm foundation out of which we can live. We can have assurance and peace that transcends this world. We want our attitude to reflect this internal peace and joy that is ours because of our life with Jesus. That's when we will shine like stars in the world.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, am I a grumbler or a blesser? Show me. I want to be someone who touches lives with every interaction. If there is a change in my heart that is needed, please change it. I want to shine in the midst of a broken world for You. Amen."

SUNDAY, 9/1

Read Philippians 2:16-18.

I believe that every believer wants to bring glory to God. If you've been touched by the love of Jesus, you cannot help but want to bless Him in return.

Paul reminds us here that we are to shine like stars in the sky while in this world. We are to cast a light upon the goodness and glory of Jesus. Paul said we do this by holding "firmly to the word of life." This is a determined choice to not only put our trust in what God says to us, but also to invite Him to shape our lives according to His Word.

God's Word is a gift to us. It reveals God, His plan, and His vision for our lives through His commands to His people. When I was young, I often saw how God's Word limited my freedoms. I felt like it was too full of "Thou shall nots". As I have come to know more of God, I don't believe that at all anymore. God's commands bring true freedom. Even the "Thou shall nots" are a safeguard to keep us from harm. We know that we can trust the Lord because of all He has done for us. He invites us through obedience to His word to walk in His ways and in the life that is truly life.

Paul says the faithful witness of the church will be a blessing to him. The evidence of their growth in God's grace is proof that the Lord is moving through his ministry. Paul isn't just spinning his wheels, so to speak. He is an agent through whom the Lord is doing a great thing.

This is a source of comfort and hope for him given that he sees his life as a drink offering that is being poured out. Perhaps Paul is thinking about the uncertainty of his circumstances. He knows his time on earth might be short. He isn't grieved by that. He is blessed when he knows that God is working through him even when he is in chains.

Praying Together:

"Father, I choose to hold firmly to Your Word. Use Your Word to shape my mind, my heart, and my hands so that I might shine for You. Help me to be fruitful in my work for You. Amen."