

Philippians 2.5-8 Sermon / COB / 10.02.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Have you heard the saying, “You are what you eat”? My sister used to say this to me. As children, twice a year, we would have a week with our father in Florida. He would take us to our favorite restaurant, the Camel’s Den. I would order a pita filled with salad, ham, and cheese, which was called “The Fat Pig.” So my sister would tell me I was what I ate. Not to let her win, I would tease her back that the lemonade she was drinking was called “Camel Aid” on the menu because of how good the camel felt when relieving himself of it. The joys of two children getting along. We went through this routine every time we ate there.
- † “You are what you eat,” say teasing children. Theologians say, “You become what you contemplate.” Have you ever heard that? You become what you contemplate. Another way to say it would be, whatever you spend time thinking about will affect who you are.
- So if you dwell all day on materialistic desires, you will become more materialistic; if you let your mind wallow in sexual lust, you become more lustful; if you think all the time about sports, fan fanaticism will characterize you. I would pause here to say how happy the Eagles made me last week, but don’t want to give you the wrong idea about me. If you allow your mind to dwell in anger, you will become more angry, maybe even violent.
 - What if you were to spend time contemplating God? You would become more godly. One reason I encourage you to read, study, memorize, and reflect on scripture is I know this exercise would lead you to grow spiritually to become more like God. Praying is known to conform our will to God’s, even if we were praying [as we so often do] in the hope of shifting God’s will to our own. Just sitting in quiet contemplation, considering God while drinking our coffee or tea, would lead us to become more like him.
- † What if you were to let your mind dwell on Christ? Christ is uniquely useful for our contemplation, because he is God in the flesh.
- As the divine Son of God, he reveals God’s character, will, and wisdom in a way we can understand. As a perfect, sinless, person, he reveals an example of how we were designed, created, and saved to live. If we were to reflect on Christ, we would grow to be more like him, and thus we would become more godly in character, and in behavior we would become more how God desires us to live.
 - For this reason, in our letter, Paul reveals something important to the Philippians [and thus to us] about Christ, so we can know what we should grow to be like, and so that – through contemplating this passage – we will.
 - This is one of the most important passages in the Bible about Christ. But let’s not lose sight of the fact that Paul shares it to teach us how to live.

Exposition

- † **[2: Outline]** You can open your Bible, if you want, to Philippians 2.5. We have been a couple of weeks away from this book, so let’s remind ourselves what Paul and Timothy have been saying.

- Point 1. 1.1-2: The authors are slaves of Christ who are writing to saints [holy ones] in Christ. Even when we are suffering, we are God’s holy children, and as we grow spiritually, we will see that holy children are as submitted and obedient to God as slaves.
- Point 2a. 1.3-8: Paul is thankful that they have partnered with him in the gospel mission.
- Point 2b. 1.9-11: Paul prays they will grow spiritually so as to discern what is right, so they will continue pursuing the gospel mission.
- Point 3a. 1.12-18a: Paul’s imprisonment surprisingly has helped the gospel mission. Like him, we can learn to rejoice and trust God even while suffering.
- Point 3b. 1.18b-26: Paul’s suffering is not shameful, rather it exalts Christ, which to Paul is the purpose in life.
- Point 4a. 1.27-2.4: Believers need to be willing to suffer and sacrifice for the gospel, as Paul has.
- In this last passage, the authors exhorted us to live worthy of the gospel, by standing in unity against our opposition regardless of the suffering that might cause us, and by sacrificing for unity in the church, by sharing Christ’s love, living harmoniously, adopting the gospel mission as our purpose, and being humble enough to care for each other, not just ourselves.
- **[3: 2.5-8]** In 2.5-11, the authors develop these thoughts. This week and next, we are going to look at two parts of the passage; in each we will ask first what we learn *about* Christ, and then we will ask what that means for us, what we learn *from* Christ.

Philippians 2.5-8 NIV: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 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. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

† Let’s ask first, what do we learn about Christ? There are seven things we learn here about Christ.

† **[4: nature]** First, before Christ came to be born as the baby Jesus, he was in very nature who? He was in very nature God: he existed in the form of God. He had the divine essence of God, and he existed with this divine essence before the baby Jesus was born.

- We believe in one God, but God has revealed himself to be three individuals – God the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit – each distinct from the others in personality and actions, but so unified in essence, character, and will, that they somehow are one God together. Each is all of God, yet God is all three. This is what we mean when we talk about the Trinity or the Triunity of God.
- This is impossible to fully grasp, but that is not that surprising, since we are talking about God, who so much transcends our understanding. The Trinity is what scripture teaches and it is one of the most important fundamental truths of our faith: God – the Father, the Son, the Spirit – is a trinity, is triune.
- Scripture reveals that the Son of God came to be born as the baby Jesus, to fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah-savior, also known as Christ. Paul is making reference to this: before Jesus was born, Christ eternally existed as the Son of God, fully as divine as God the Father.

- † **[5: not father]** A second, related, truth is that, though Christ is fully as divine as God the Father, and has the same essence or nature of God as does God the Father, still Christ is not God the Father. He is the Son of God, distinct from God the Father. If this were not true, they could not relate to one another as we see in the gospels, nor could Paul compare Christ to God the Father here.
- In the foundations class two weeks ago, we read scriptures in which this is clear, for example when Jesus [who is the Son of God in human form] comes up out of the water of his baptism, and God the Father speaks from Heaven, while the Holy Spirit descends from Heaven. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all exist distinct from one another, even though they are unified as one God.
 - Now listen, it is heresy to teach that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one individual showing himself in three ways; it is heresy to teach that they are like steam, water, and ice, one substance in three forms; it is heresy to teach they are like a three leafed clover or the skin, juice, and meat of a fruit. There are no metaphors that work for explaining God, so please do not use them. When you encounter these in curriculum for GEMS, Good News Bible Club, our children's ministry, or even in adult studies, you must excise them and teach the truth instead.
- † **[6: equality]** The third truth: Christ, though distinct from God the Father, is equal with God the Father. He had equality with God the Father before coming to Earth as baby Jesus.
- For all twenty centuries of the Christian era, the Trinity has been a foundational truth for the true church and the true gospel. If you do not teach the Trinity, you are a cult; if you do not believe in the Trinity, you are a heretic. This is not my determination, this was laid down by the early church fathers.
 - So Jehovah's Witnesses, also known as The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, are a heretical cult, because they do not believe in the Trinity. Also a heretical cult are the Mormons, known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Also heretical cults are the Unitarians, the Christian Science Church, some Church of God denominations. Stay away from these places; warn your friends to get out. They worship a false god.
 - So to summarize so far: Christ is the eternal Son of God, who shares the divine essence and equality with God the Father, but also is distinct from God the Father, though they somehow are unified completely as one God. This is his identity. Now we learn his character.
- † **[7: advantage]** The fourth thing we learn is that Christ – the Son of God – did not view his equality with God the Father as something to be grasped or claimed, to be used for his own advantage.
- There are 492 billionaires in the US. Suppose one of them gave you a billion dollars. Would you decide to give away every penny, not to use any of the money to your advantage? Not me! I might not be materialistic, but I have some financial goals, I need to make some house repairs, I would like security for retirement. I am sure I could rationalize the use of some of that money.
 - We have two unlovely candidates for the presidency. What if by some fluke of arcane election law, the whim of the voters, and a well-orchestrated Facebook campaign, enough people wrote in your name that you won! You were now the most powerful person in the world. Would you not use your position to do a little good for yourself? I'm not talking blatant corruption, but would you not have some pet project you wanted to see come to reality, some relative to hire?
 - The Son of God, being equal and of the same essence as God the Father, was the most powerful being in the universe, he was creator rather than creature, he was omniscient [all-knowing] and

omnipotent [all-powerful]; but he did not see the need to grasp or lay claim to his position, power, and authority for his own advantage. Instead, he was willing to sacrifice and suffer to meet our needs. People say “power corrupts.” It didn’t corrupt the Son of God. It only corrupts sinful creatures.

- † **[8: human]** Truth #5: Christ – the Son of God – being willing to sacrifice and suffer for us, took on the nature of humanity. Christ always existed, even before the creation of the universe, as the divine Son of God, but now he came to be born as the baby Jesus, and lived among us, fully divine but also fully human, fully God and fully man.
- He was really human, with flesh, bone, and blood. He got tired and slept; he got thirsty and drank; he got hungry and ate. I am sure his sisters told him, “You are what you eat.”
 - He had a human nature, but he was human in the way we were designed to be, without corruption to his nature, without sin in his life. So when we look at his attitudes, his lifestyle, we see what God intends for us.
 - This dual nature of Christ [both divine and human] is another foundational truth of the church which has existed for the full twenty centuries. To teach Jesus was only human, not God, is heresy. To teach Jesus was only God appearing like a human, not being a real human, is heresy. Jesus was the Son of God taking on human nature. That is why we call the birth of Jesus “the incarnation”: it was the Son of God taking on human nature.
- † **[9: humility]** As a sixth truth, please notice that this was an act of humility. Being the divine Son of God, Christ was willing to condescend to become one of us; being creator of everything, he was willing to be creature; being Lord of all, he was willing to be slave. That’s being humble.
- The NIV says Christ made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, that is being made in human likeness. The word for servant here is the Greek δούλος which means slave. The divine Son of God became human, thus he traded his status as Lord of all to be a mere creature like you and me. As a creature, he willingly was an obedient slave to God the Father; as the Savior, he would become a slave so as to save us. That shows true humility.
 - **[10: Isaiah]** In calling Christ a slave, Paul might be referring to the famous “Servant of Yahweh” passage in Isaiah 52.13-53.12. Isaiah described the coming Messiah-savior as a slave or servant of God, who would sacrifice and suffer for mankind, particularly to take our sins.
 - For example, consider Isaiah’s vision of the crucifixion in **Isaiah 53.5 NIV: ...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.**
 - So while he lived as our example and did what had to be done to save us from eternal condemnation in Hell, Christ also fulfilled prophecy about the savior to come.
- † **[11: death]** Now we get to our last sentence. Scholar Steven Runge points out that Paul inserted the phrase, “and being found in appearance as a man,” to slow down the narrative for a moment, to build suspense for a big idea, our seventh truth.
- Christ, with divine rights and powers, humbled himself by becoming a human slave of God. But even as a mere human, Jesus was born as the rightful heir to King David’s throne, he was the rightful king of Israel, which also meant he was born to be God’s ultimate representative on Earth, because under the covenants God established with Israel, the king of Israel was to

represent God as he led Israel, and Israel was to obey her king as they represented God to the other nations. So Jesus was born to be the most powerful and exalted person on earth, and as the promised Messiah-savior, he was destined to be the most powerful and exalted person in all of human history, because his kingdom was prophesied to never end.

- With all that to live for, Jesus further humbled himself with slavish obedience to God the Father to the point of sacrificing himself on the cross for us. He already had given up his divine rights, now he humbly gave up his human rights, to obey the plan of God the Father and to provide the means of salvation to all of us.
- This is extreme obedience and humiliation. By first century standards, crucifixion was the most loathsome and degrading way to die, involving torture and public humiliation. And Jewish belief was that crucified people died under the curse of God. So to Jews and Gentiles, Jesus – born to be king – humbled himself to the lowest rung of humanity in his death.

† **[12: notes]** Everyone take a deep breath. That’s a lot of very serious, very important, very deep theology. Christ always existed as the divine Son of God, distinct from God the Father but equal to him. Christ did not use that equality to his own advantage, rather humbly taking on the nature of humanity and living as God’s obedient slave, even willing to be crucified for the gospel mission.

- Let’s talk about implications. When I say God wants all of us to grow to be like Christ and to follow Christ’s example, that doesn’t sound too attractive right now, does it?
- Still, let us ask what we can learn from Christ about ourselves here. After all, Paul is writing all this about Christ to illuminate something for our own application. He started this passage by telling his readers to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”
- **[13: sacrifice]** In the previous passage [1.27-2.4], Paul told the Philippians that as believers they should expect to suffer for the gospel, and they needed to sacrifice to live worthy of the gospel. If we are saved by the grace and truth of the gospel, then we should live worthy of that gospel. Having explained that, now Paul holds up Jesus as the ultimate example for how to live out what he just commanded. They are to have the same attitudes, the same mindset as Christ.

† **[14: mindset]** He just said in 2.2 that they should have the same mindset as each other, now in 2.5 he says they all should have the mindset of Christ. In 2.3-4, he said they should be humble enough to sacrifice for each other, now he explains how humble is Christ, our ultimate example, who was humble enough to sacrifice everything for us and for the gospel mission.

- This seems so counterintuitive to our flesh: with all the power and authority of God, Christ chose to humble himself to become human and die on the cross for us. Why? Scholar Steven Runge says Jesus is like a superhero, human but with a superpower; the question is, what will he do with that superpower?
- **[15: disciples]** Contrary to our own tendencies, Jesus chose to humble himself, sacrifice himself, so he could multiply more superheroes; he humbly sacrificed to make more disciples who would live for him, like Paul said he did back in 1.21. This is the opposite of the selfish ambition and empty vanity Paul warns us against in 2.3: Jesus had true glory and is exalted, as a humble slave who sacrificed for us.
- **[16: interests]** Paul just said we should not act out of selfish ambition or empty vanity, rather being humble enough to value others above ourselves and to tend to each other’s interests, not just our own. Now he says Christ is our example, so we should not exploit whatever rights or

authority we might have to help ourselves, instead we should be willing to sacrifice and suffer for others as part of the gospel mission, following Christ to multiply true disciples.

- Thus we give up our leisure, our pride, our comfort, our money to invest in relationships with the spiritually lost and to model God's love, grace, and righteousness before them; and we sacrifice more time and pride and comfort and money to teach, mentor, serve, love, and all the other "one another" commands with each other inside the church.

† **[17: follow]** In 1.27, Paul said we should live worthy of the gospel, live up to the righteousness we have been given in our salvation. Now he says Christ is our example, so – just as Christ humbly obeyed God as his slave – we should humbly obey as God's slave, to fulfill God's plans for us.

- We should sacrifice time, effort, leisure, lusts and desires, our own attitudes and priorities, and whatever else it takes, to fully obey God, so as to reflect his character, represent him in life situations, rule as his stewards over the earth and our personal resources, and reproduce his image through making more disciples, by raising up children to know him and by pursuing the gospel mission.

† **[18. example]** As the divine Son of God in the flesh, Jesus has the character of God and is human as God designed us to be. He is our example. He has absolute purity which results in absolute humility.

- He was humble enough to obey as God the Father's slave; he was humble enough to give up everything – privilege, power, comfort, his human life – to help others by fulfilling the gospel mission.
- By showing us this, Paul is making his point that we should aspire to live purely and thus humbly. If we spend some time contemplating the person of Christ, we will become more like him. He will lead us by example, he will reveal the character of God, he will inspire us to become what God intends us to be.
- We once were unwilling slaves to sin and evil; Christ redeemed us from that, he set us free and gave us new spiritual life; now we can be willing slaves to God, as we seek to live for Christ instead of ourselves. The question is, will we heed this calling, will we accept this mission, will we choose to submit and live by faith and obedience, instead of by our own fleshly ways?
- Let's pray . . .