

October 11, 2009

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Have This Mind*

Philippians 2:1 – 11

In chapter 2, Paul starts by drawing some conclusions from what he has just penned. At the end of chapter one, which Pastor Roger finished last Sunday, Paul said this: *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* Philippians 1:27-30

He calls the saints to a life that proves itself worthy of the gospel of Christ. And he defines that as a life spent standing firm together in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. In Greek, the word '**only**' is much more emphatic and it means '**above all else**', '**whatever may happen**', '**at all costs**'. The most important thing is that our lives would in the end prove worthy of the gospel of Christ. That is, the way we live would demonstrate the power and glory, the grace and the mercy, the love and compassion that is inherent in the gospel. If it is true that for you to live is Christ and to die is gain – model that by the way you live – the decisions you take – the career choices you make.

**A manner of life worthy of the gospel is one that manifests a perseverance in unity of spirit and unity of mind that a local body of believers will demonstrate when they have fully given themselves to Christ for the sake of the gospel.** It is a oneness that is wholly given over to the purpose of God in the world. It is a oneness of vision and purpose that puts a higher priority on the call and plan of God than on our own selfish desires. It is a oneness in a local body of believers who are sold out for the gospel. Believers, Paul says, who are *striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*.

And Paul is not talking about working on your individual faith, but the energy and work that is poured into spreading the fame of Christ's name in the earth. The word for 'striving' here is **sunathleo** – and you can hear the root word for athlete in it – **athleo**. I believe Paul is trying to convey the idea that it takes the effort and discipline and zeal of an athlete to stand firm in one spirit, with one mind – for the sake of the gospel. I believe Paul has in view the goal of God in calling out a people from every people and tribe and nation and tongue through the gospel. And he says that is what we need to work hard at – that is a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. **A life that says, in view of the glories of His grace, in view of the surpassing rewards He extends to those who believe, in view of the utter delight and joy of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, no trial is too great, no cost too high, no service too hard, no loss too dear for any to bear.**

'So', Paul says, '**therefore**' *if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* Philippians 2:1-2 What is apparent from this appeal is that the Philippians were having issues with unity. Paul had just reminded them exactly why they were there and just what they ought to be about – *striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*, but there was a problem. We know from chapter four that there was strife and disunity because Paul gave us the names of two women who were at the center of it. That should be a caution for you – you never know who's going to write something about you and I would sure hate to be remembered as a problem child. My uncle always told me that my life could either serve as a warning or an example and I would much rather be remembered as an example.

So Paul was bringing them back to the goal - *striving side by side for the faith of the gospel* – and the necessary attitude for that to happen. Essentially he says, 'If it is true that there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort shared in His love, any fellowship and participation among you in the Spirit. **If it is true that as believers you have affection and sympathy for one another – then live that way.**' I think in a very real sense Paul is calling the Philippians and us to the reality of life in the gospel. '**Make my joy full**' he says, by demonstrating that the power of the gospel is real in your lives by being of one mind, having the same love, being absolutely one in the way you conduct yourselves – the way you live together – the way you work together for the sake of the gospel.

**And that looks like a life shot through with humility:** *Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* Philippians 2:3-4 Of all the Christian virtues, humility is the most abhorrent to our natural minds. In fact this word was never used in classical Greek – apparently the Greeks never found it necessary to mention this kind of humility. It only shows up in secular writings, centuries after Paul penned it in the New Testament, and then it had a negative connotation describing something weak, poor, groveling or submissive. But God doesn't see humility like that. To God, humility is one of the paramount virtues of the life of Christ. The essence of this walk is found in Micah chapter 6: *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* Micah 6:8 The defining portrait of Moses, the man of God was this: *Now Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.* Numbers 12:3

**The outstanding characteristic of someone who has embraced gospel truth not only in their head but their hearts is humility.** It is a attitude born out of the staggering revelation of the wretched state from which they were delivered. It is a continued consciousness that without Christ they are lost. **Humility is the accurate estimation of yourself in the face of Christ.** It is correctly understanding who you really are and who God really is. John Ruskin, 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian artist, thinker, poet said, *“I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility, doubt of his own power, or hesitation in speaking his opinion. But really great men have a ... feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them; that they could not do or be anything else than God made them.”* Humility is thinking more about God than about you. It is a sense that any goodness or greatness is **not inherent in us** rather it is **through us** in Christ.

George Washington Carver, the scientist who developed hundreds of useful products from the peanut said: *“When I was young, I said to God, ‘God, tell me the mystery of the universe.’ But God answered, ‘That knowledge is reserved for me alone.’ So I said, ‘God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.’ Then God said, ‘Well, George, that’s more nearly your size.’ And He told me.”*

**I believe that the more you grow in grace, the greater the sense of humility.** It is interesting to note the progression of Paul's consideration of himself as you read through his letters. In 1 Corinthians, written around 59 AD Paul writes, *I am the least of the apostles.* In Ephesians written around 63 AD he says, *I am the very least of all the saints.* And finally in 1 Timothy written near the end of his life he writes, *I am the foremost of sinners.* I think this is the result of really knowing God. John Flavel said, *“They that know God will be humble and they that know themselves cannot be proud.”*

Paul says: *but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* Or as the King James version reads: *Let each esteem others better than themselves. This does not mean that we put ourselves down but rather that we lift one another up.* That is, **humility is other-centered**, looking to serve others instead of serving ourselves. We are to mind our own interests – Paul says to not **only** look to our own interests – indicating that we have a legitimate concern with what concerns us. But the emphasis is in the second half – *but also to the interests of others.* Just as you care for what concerns you – be that caring about what concerns others.

**Walking in humility is the exact opposite of the mindset of today – entitlement, or 'You owe me'.** Politicians and special interest groups are discovering more and more things that are owed them all the time. We have become a society that demands its rights – and we find more to demand all the time. We have a sense as a society that we are somehow **owed** stuff. Humility is the opposite of 'You owe me'. Those whose lives have been impacted and changed by the gospel walk through this world, not with a sense of 'You owe me' but with a humble sense that we owe others. **That is the only explanation for lives spent for the sake of the gospel.** It is a sense of being overwhelmed by the goodness of God and the bounty of His grace in our lives – it is the staggering realization that Christ loved us and died for us, forgave us and accepted us, justified and lavished His grace on us when we were not worthy and didn't deserve even a passing consideration by Him. This is the crucial relationship standard and mindset we need to have.

And that is what Paul says: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* Philippians 2:5-7 When you struggle with an attitude of humility, when other's interests intrude on your time and space, when you are inconvenienced by the issues others present – come to Philippians chapter 2 again to be refreshed and renewed in your mind. Christ is the example of the point Paul is making and it is He we are to imitate.

Paul says *have this mind – or let this mind be in you*. Make this thinking your thinking. Christ, who is God, sharing all the vast dimensions of Godhood – *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*. This verse is somewhat difficult to understand if we did not understand what led up to it. What Paul is not saying is that Christ was somehow grasping at something He had no right to – but that even though Christ is eternally co-existent and equal in every way with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit – He did not cling or hang on to that God-equality but resolved not to in view of His own glory and purpose in coming to earth to save His people. He came to serve – not to be served. As God Almighty He was due all the service and worship and adoration His creation could give. But as Jesus Christ, the God-man He considered not only His own interests but the interests of His people. We needed a Savior – we needed a go-between – we needed someone who would die in our place.

And so He *made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. Literally the Scripture says: *He emptied Himself*. He didn't empty Himself of the nature or attributes of deity, but of those prerogatives that belonged to Him as God. **He emptied Himself of the expression of deity not the possession of deity**. He was fully God – and fully man. The God-man. This is not something we like to do – make ourselves nothing. We all want to be something – but Christ's thought was that to accomplish redemption, He had to empty Himself, make Himself nothing.

What does that kind of life look like? **It looks like being a servant**. He *made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. **The mind of Christ is a servant-mind**. That is why humility is essential. Proud people don't make good servants because to them, life is all about what they want, what they need, what they like, what pleases them. A servant is all about what others want, or need or what pleases them. A servant-mind is an other-centered mind.

**The gospel is intensely other-centered**. William Law made a lasting impact upon 18th century England with his book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. In it, Law urges Christians that every day should be viewed as a day of humility. And how does he suggest that we do this? By learning to serve others. Law understood that it is with the discipline of service that one gains humility. If we want humility, he urges us to, *“be alive to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-man, cover their frailties, love their excellences, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, be compassionate in their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and agree to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind.”*

One Sunday evening, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was walking in London with his son, Bramwell, who was then 12 or 13 years old. The father surprised the son by taking him into a saloon! The place was crowded with men and women, many of them bearing on their faces the marks of vice and crime; some were drunk. The fumes of alcohol and tobacco were poisonous. **“Willie,” Booth said to his son, “These are our people; these are the people I want you to live for and bring to Christ.”** Years later, Bramwell Booth wrote, **“The impression never left me.”**

This is why missions exist. The gospel has so impacted our minds and hearts and lives that the outpouring and overflow of God's love and mercy toward us must necessarily spill out on others. I would say that those whose hearts are full of His love cannot help but be other-centered, because that is the nature of Christ's love for us. Spurgeon put it this way: *“Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that.... The saving of souls, if a man has once gained love to perishing sinners and his blessed Master, will be... an all-absorbing passion to him. It will so carry him away, that he will almost forget himself in the saving of others..... If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”*

**This life of Christ is also a cross-centered life**. *And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*. Philippians 2:8 **The cross is the ultimate death-blow to every vestige of self: self-interest, self-absorption, self-pity, self-glory, self-seeking**. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”*

**The gospel is not only intensely other-centered – it is unswervingly cross-centered.** The way of the Christian is the way of the cross. And nothing speaks humility more than this. Proud people don't choose the cross – proud people don't think that to deny themselves and take up the cross is a very dignified way to live. But God has this to say about the way of the cross – the way of humility that Jesus took: *Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Philippians 2:9-11

**When we identify with Christ in taking this other-centered, cross-centered life, we are actively engaged in bringing about the exaltation and worship of Christ among all the nations, to the glory of God the Father.** When we display a manner of life worthy of the gospel – when we say no trial is too great, no cost too high, no service too hard, no loss too dear for us to bear for the sake of the gospel, when we live lives shot through with humility and allow the cross of Christ to work in our lives – we participate and partner in the great plan of God that culminates in every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In 1839, God called a man named John Williams to go to the South Pacific Island of Erromongo to preach the gospel. John, and his friend Mr. Harris, set sail one day to take the gospel to a cannibalistic tribe that had never heard about Jesus Christ. Within minutes of landing, both were killed and later eaten by that tribe. They were followed in later years by George and Ellen Gordon from the same church, who went to the same island and met the same fate. A single man, named James McNair, was the next from that church to answer the call of God. Before darkness of the day of his arrival, he saw seven men accept Jesus as Savior before he was killed also. When word of George and Ellen Gordon's deaths reached the home church, James Gordon, the brother of George Gordon, took up the challenge and died like the rest. When news of her second son's death reached Mrs. Gordon, she was found praying and weeping at the altar. She told those that gathered around her: **"I am not weeping for my sons who have died, although I feel much sorrow for their loss, but I am weeping that I do not have another son to give."** But today, the island of Erromongo and the surrounding islands have been won to Christ and knees are bowing and tongues confessing that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

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

*Our gracious God and Merciful Father,*

*Grant that we would have this mind – that our thinking would be renewed to that which You say is already ours in Christ. Let humility define our lives and characterize our service. Let our lives bear the marks of Your cross. Deliver us from thinking that we are owed anything but that we owe You everything and fill us with a God-sized passion to see Your name and Your fame spread throughout this earth. May we not consider any trial too great, any cost too high, any service too hard, any loss too dear for us to bear in view of the utter delight and joy of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. May our lives prove to be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ and may we live to spread Your joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.*