

**The Rock: 03-21-2021****Philippians: The letter of Joy**

**First reading:** John 12:28-32

**Title:** A servant's heart

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:1-11 (Part 1)

**Theme:**

The life of a Christian should be a reflection of the life of Jesus. The Church in the world should not seek to engage the culture by being like the culture.

The Church is attractive only when she is different.

**Introduction:**

As we get closer to Easter, as well as the end of this pandemic, I am trying to be reflective at the same time looking forward.

What have we learned this past year about the church and ourselves that we can grow in, have grown in, and need to continue growing in?

I want us to look back five, ten years from now and be able to benchmark things

that were key in our growth and engagement with our culture.

I've learned a lot about God's timing. About His providential care and sovereignty. I've always said that His providence is a soft pillow upon which I can rest my head.

I know what that really means, at least to the extent that I need to, and I pray that we all need to. Many of us have confronted and are still confronting very tough things, and the fellowship and community of God's people is essential.

One of the things I am finding as the Church "finds herself" here in America is that of the challenge of who we actually are.

A really silly thing to say given that the Bible is very clear about that. Yet part of what has shaken the Church, has been our focus and understanding of who Jesus is and how we are to live that type of life now.

### **The Story:**

Paul, for the last part of chapter one has shared some weird things, especially in this letter of joy. He talked about living and dying, and how each one has its purpose, but that ultimately if he

had the choice, he'd rather pass on and be with Jesus.

Weird and strange because far too many people fear death, or have a false outlook on what Heaven will be like, or even worse feel as though this life is all there is, and can't get their minds around anything other than this life now.

Paul then talked about suffering for the sake of Jesus. Again, in a letter of joy that can be quite the downer. I thought accepting Jesus meant that my life would be all fixed and full of joy.

You are right. It is. and it should be. That's just what Paul was trying to teach us all, and it is a concept that has gone into total collapse over the last couple decades, and especially in the last five years in America.

That concept, or understanding of suffering, has been to a great extent, a foreign concept for the church in America.

The ethics of Jesus appeal to pretty much everyone. That's why even an atheist, if they will admit that Jesus was a real person on history's timeline, will tell you they believe He was a good man, who taught good things on how we can be good people.

The problem is that the ethics of Jesus didn't die on a tree. The ethics of Jesus don't save, they are simply an outworking of a life that has been captured by Jesus, and then sent into the world to live such lives as to make this gospel attractive.

To function and to live in a way that is counter-cultural as well as self-denying. That is not how the Church has functioned for a long time, especially in America.

Sadly, under the pressure of a pandemic, many of these cracks have become obvious. She has argued over power, politics, position and what makes the best church service.

All the while, in the background of all the confusion and in-fighting, genuine rights to actually continue to speak about this story, The Gospel, are being challenges by a cultural subversion.

At one point it was the best thing for you to go to church. Then it became a whatever is good for you. I've talked about this already, but this is important.

Because we are now in a time where it is actually seen in a wide part of our culture and country as a bad thing to not

just go to Church, but to hold the line with the preaching of the true gospel.

Not just the ethical teachings of Jesus, be a good person, don't steal, don't cheat on your taxes and don't kill.

Even those lines of Biblical ethics are blurred now with a re-definition of what actually IS a human along the abortion question and end of life question.

The true Gospel -what Paul talks about here in chapter two of Philippians, in what I think is one of the most beautiful pieces of writing ever put on paper.

Paul comes out of that to live is Christ and to die is gain, and for Christ's sake suffer for the cause, right into:

"So 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 ESV**

Disunity in the church, since the very beginning is the first step down the wrong road. That road leads to confusion and incorrect focus.

This is why Paul talks right away about how to behave as a church community. He is talking about your relationships with one another.

There are certain ways we are supposed to do things, and doing them for a particular reason and purpose.

In it all, our lives are to reflect Jesus's life. Think this way about yourself:

"Do nothing from selfish ambition 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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."

**-Philippians 2:3-5 ESV**

The Church is not my personal self-help spa and lecture hall. We are to build one another up and encourage one another, both in what we say and in what we do.

In the culture of me first, my feelings are supreme, and if it's too hard or too "sacrificial" I ain't doing it, these words of Paul are painfully tough. This is the life of Jesus, not just the ethics.

The scary things about ethics and ideas is that we can sit and debate them all day long and get nowhere, but still feel real impressed with ourselves.

What scares the world, the culture, about the Church is when she recognizes that it is the life of Jesus, not just His words that actually changes and makes an impact.

That life was one of sacrifice, not just in theory, but in actual fact. What the world is offended by, and I have also discovered what many in the Church are actually offended by is The Cross.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth, when looked at in a genuine way shows us that selfish ambition and vain conceit are roads filled with people who are paying no attention to those around them, most especially if they do not think act and serve MY needs and desires.

Do nothing out of these things. Why? Because they breed division, selfish behavior, and do not ever put us in a place which reflects on our one example. Jesus.

Listen, we can never live up to the standards God has set. He knew that, He still knows that. That is why Jesus came

into this world. Jesus's goal in life was death.

In order that we can live as God wants us to. That shouldn't confuse anyone. Because at some level we can all understand this.

I can imagine that Jesus was looking at His creation with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and then looking at the glory around Him, and the separation between the two.

I can imagine Him saying the Father: "They are our creation, whom we love and made for fellowship with us and each other. The enemy divided us and this is all nothing if we don't bring them home.

I'll leave this and become like them, so that they can come home and enjoy all we have made for them."

That is love, that is grace, that is mercy.

If you are a husband or a father yourself, ask yourself: What wouldn't I do for my wife, my kids and my family to keep them safe, provide for them and insure they are growing in a way that will carry on the family name?

Magnify that exponentially, and that is how God in Heaven thinks, it's how Jesus thinks and why He came.

Mom's, you as well. Think on this. What wouldn't you do to protect and provide for your people? Brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, all of you understand.

This doesn't come from nowhere. God has wired us with His DNA and thinking, our problem is do we focus it and channel it in the right way.

Philippians two. This is the right way, operate in humility making sure others are more important than yourself.

This is one of the most counter-cultural statements you will ever find. One would fully expect the world to ignore this, because it makes no sense. It really doesn't.

Growing forward as a church, part of my vision is that we grow away from this kind of individualism (not a bad thing actually -when it doesn't drive the Church) and into Christian unity.

Jesus was God, that is what Paul turns to as he is making clear how the Church is to look and where she is to find her example. Continuing into verse 6:

"...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

**-Philippians 2:6-8 ESV**

Now, if Jesus was God, and He was, but He didn't hold tightly onto that fact. In other words, He was ok in letting go of His rightful, comfortable and Lordly position -to become one of us, we need to think this through, and get it into our hearts.

Because, not only one of us, but one of a lowly position -a servant. A servant-KING. Yes, the one who created the universe, and made the stars to hang where they are and all of the beauty that we see, never even owned a home.

He didn't have a car, a retirement plan. No, in the very world He created He was nothing more than a vagabond wanderer. An alien and stranger in the very world He created.

He traveled from place-to-place ministering to all the needs of people,

all the while preaching about forgiveness and repentance.

That is the power of this poem Paul gives us here. He is saying in essence: "You want to know how to live in my world, how to be my people -I'll show you."

Examine the life of the King. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit", is given with the focus and reference point of Jesus -God the Son, in the flesh, having emptied Himself and humbling Himself.

For you, for me and for anyone who would come to Him. You see, the work we do in this place and in this world is not what saves us.

But the work we do is a reflection of our hearts, and who owns us. Do I want to sacrifice myself, my time, my efforts, at the cost of other things so that others will benefit?

This is the difference between the ethics of Jesus and Jesus Himself. One can be and is tossed aside at our convenience, while the other is actually who we are.

Being a Christian isn't just me saying I am one. What Paul is saying here is that your life ought to be making that statement for you by what you do and how you behave.

This is why Paul makes the statement right off in verse one. If there is any encouragement, any love any common sharing of the spirit as the NIV says -

Make me happy by doing these things. Why? Because that is The Church in the world. Anybody can say they believe. That is simple.

We are challenged to go beyond that, way beyond that. Along with the Philippian church, we are being challenged to put into action the very life of Jesus.

If you follow Him, do what he did. Act like He acted. He created this universe, and yet, He also stripped down to his loin cloth and washed feet.

He did nothing wrong ever in His life, yet He was beaten and scourged and hung on a tree, so we could have our sin removed and be right with our Father in Heaven.

There is a two-fold strength that comes with acknowledging this. One is that we learn that serving others blesses us. That strengthens our community because, when one of us hurts and struggles, we all struggle.

Our help and prayer should be what supports each other and build a place of

trust and encouragement, even in the hard stuff.

Two, it frames out how we see and engage with the culture and world around us. In genuine Christian love and engagement that sometimes costs. Being Christ-like in a world that is anti-Christian costs.

We must learn to be dynamically engaged and uniquely different. What makes the gospel attractive is NOT it's desire to be non-offensive and appealing.

But rather that it is so counter-cultural in all of its aspects, yet in its genuine love for all humanity, people are attracted to it. Rather TO HIM.

Jesus said so himself:

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

**-John 12:32 ESV**

In the beauty of this chapter and poem, which we will finish looking at after Palm Sunday and Easter, takes us from the ugliness of the cross to the Glory given to Jesus.

The brutality of what happened to Him was what the world will always do to its creator, because His creation is in rebellion.

The world took all it had, well Satan did, through people, and threw it at Jesus. They did everything they wanted to do to Him. Mocked him, beat him, hung him on a tree and then let Joseph and Nicodemus bury Him.

Where is the joy in that? Well, God's sovereignty and His providential care, remember were overseeing these events.

Jesus emptied himself and died the death we deserved, so we could live the life He left. That tomb, no matter how secure Pilate wanted it made -probably one of the funniest and foolish things ever said.

"Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can."

**-Matthew 27:65 ESV**

How did that work out for ya? It didn't, because this Jesus, who is our example of how we are to live life -unselfishly, humbly and always with a servant's heart, seeking the good and benefit of others, walked out of that tomb.

Palm Sunday is next week and then Easter. We'll look at these events and then finish this poem as we see Jesus glorified and interceding for us always.

