

Shining Like Stars

Philippians 2:5-11

Celebrating the Real Spirit of Christmas

KSBC 12/13/09

Intro Christmas on steroids . . . that's what Philippians 2:5-11 is. It is the description of the meaning of Christmas from Jesus Christ's perspective. It is a story of self-denial, humiliation, service, obedience and sacrifice that serves as the model for how we are to approach our lives. These verses, which serve as the core of Paul's letter, present a perspective of looking on the interests of others that we are to not simply understand and admire, but conform and change our way of thinking.

The stories and sounds of our Christmas celebrations involve calculated risks, planned generosity, temporary discomfort and typical happy endings. This perspective of the Christmas story does not begin with Mary and Joseph, the angels or the shepherds. It begins in the presence of God in eternity past with an attitude. Jesus Christ made a few choices to 'exist' in a certain way, to live out the truthful and loving values of heaven for the benefit of his Father and others.

The real spirit of Christmas . . . the dominant attitude of biblical Christianity, goes beyond the superficial and nonsacrificial ways of living we have come to accept. The attitude or mindset of this season that we are called to mimic is defined by the self denial, humiliation and obedience of Jesus Christ.

The brightest lights shining this Christmas season are the lives of those who choose to 'exist' in a certain way – the way of Christ himself. Have this attitude . . . let this mind be in you . . . your approach to life should be the same as Jesus Christ's. Shining brightly . . . magnifying Christ in our lives ultimately is about the basic attitude or approach that we have toward our lives.

Philippians 1:27-2:18 is a section of scripture where we are taught to live like/as citizens of the gospel. The major appeal is to our behavior in the world that we live in. As partakers and participants in the gospel we are to 'shine like stars in the universe' (Phil.2:15). Jesus example is central to our effectiveness of living our lives in humble obedience so that the light influences those in darkness. How we live our lives makes a difference. Two clear ways we can increase or diminish the wattage of our influence for the gospel are found in our response to opposition and our reaction to selfishness. Both opposition and selfishness are real life issues that affect us year round, but are evidenced in unique ways in this holiday season.

The supreme example for our attitude is given in this description of Jesus coming to earth as a man in Philippians 2:5-11. What is the attitude that should dominate our lives? Let's look at three life defining concepts from these verses to both tear down and rebuild the dominant, life defining attitudes we now have.

Read Philippians 2:1-11

Attitude, v. 5, is a basic component that regulates or determines behavior. It is referred to as your way of thinking or mindset. It is introduced in this passage in verses 2 & 3 by appeals to 'think the same way' and 'think humbly about others.'

We are urged by these scriptures to continually adopt a regulating mindset of self denial and humble obedience in our mutual relations with one another. This mindset and practical lifestyle, lived by Christ himself, will serve to magnify the beauty and love of God just as lights do in the darkness. Thinking this way in our marriages, finances, talk, relationships, parenting, friends, dating and work is the challenge we address this morning, dependent on God's Spirit to teach and help us to change.

There are three key components of the Christ-like mindset that we must consider and conform to:

1. Jesus Christ did not grasp for himself. 2:6

The first description of Jesus' mindset is found in terms of something that Jesus resolved not to do. There was a way he could have approached life but he chose to not hold on to his privileges for his own future exploitation and profit. He chose to not consider or regard his existence as something to be used for his own advantage. The motivation and standard for our self denial is seen in the remarkable privileges that he possessed and chose to not use for his own advantage.

Consider two defining truths about Jesus and the essence of self denial . . .

a. Christ existed as God before his coming as a man. 'being in very nature God'

'being' – existed, was present

'form' – very nature essential nature and character of God

Jn. 17:5, 24

Heb. 1:3

'trueness' illus.

b. Christ was and is God in every way. 'equality with God'

'equality with God'

in essence and function . . . God

deity

Titus 2:13

John 1:1-2

Review the point . . . like Jesus, you should choose to not consider or regard your existence to be used for your own advantage.

Daily consider/think/choose to be dead to sin/self and alive to God/others. Rom. 6:11

State your personal mission statement in a 'non-grasping' way. 2Cor. 8:9

2. Jesus Christ positioned himself to serve. 2:7

The second component of our common approach to life as partners in the gospel has to do with what you are willing to become. Jesus voluntarily chose to become someone who could most effectively serve his target group, people. In a sense he 'reformed' or 'remade' himself for the sake of serving others. This unparalleled positioning was in sharp contrast – contrary to – with his existence as God. Take careful note of the key aspects of this voluntary remake that Jesus went through for your sake.

a. His 'self-emptying.' Kenosis *made himself nothing*

- the manner of emptying is seen in taking form of a slave and being found in human form
- he gave up the independent exercise of divine attributes
- he submitted to mission of redemption and Holy Spirit
- he demonstrated continuous surrender/voluntary acceptance of God's will Jn 10:17-18

b. His becoming a slave. *taking the form of a slave*

- he became, adopted the nature and characteristics of a slave
- he embraced 'existing' as a man without personal advantages or rights
- 'form of God' into the 'form of a slave'
- John 13:3-5

c. His becoming a man. *being made in human likeness*

- He became/began – came into a position or state of complete humanity
- He is truly man but not merely man
- When people looked at Jesus, they saw a man
- He shared human nature in all ways except without sin

Connect with virgin birth Gal.4:4 Luke 2:34-37

Review the point . . . like Jesus, you should choose to take on the kind of lifestyle that will help you most effectively serve others.

Remember the ongoing challenges of personal rights, desire to be served, setting aside privileges to positioning yourself to serve others. Heb.2:17-18

3. Jesus Christ gave himself up. 2:8

A third checkpoint for your attitude adjustment is now finally seen in your choices of what you do. Jesus did not live with all options open. His life was defined by his commitment to submit, obey and even die for the will of his father in heaven. Jesus lived daily with his Father and others in view. Grapple with the ways Jesus actively surrendered his life to God and for you . . . here's what he did as a man . . . these are the characteristics people saw in him . . .

a. Jesus humbled himself. bring low; abase

voluntarily and freely made himself low Galatians 2:20
no external compulsion, victimization or irresistible destiny – freely gave

b. Jesus obeyed to the point of death. extreme limits of obedience/humiliation

obey – hear under John 10:14-18

c. Jesus sacrificed his life for others. *even death on a cross*

cruel and hideous punishment reserved for criminals
death of a cross is an atoning death 2Cor. 5:21; Gal.3:13 curse

Review the point . . . like Jesus, you should voluntarily submit to obedience regardless the cost or expectation.

Matthew 20:24-28

Take Aways

1. Determine to address your attitude first by asking 'why' before 'what.'
2. Determine to embrace extensive mindset adjustments regardless of risk, cost or difficulty.
3. Repent of your self-interested commitment to life and surrender control to Christ by faith.

Study Questions

Review . . .

1. Read Philippians 1:27-2:18 as a group. What is the dominant admonition in 1:27 that is explained and amplified in these paragraphs? What does it mean to 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'?
2. Review the characteristics of opposition the Philippian church faced. What types of opposition to living in a manner worthy of the gospel do you face?
3. Share with the group a story or example of how your life influenced someone toward the gospel as you stood steadfast against opposition or chose others interests over your own.

Today's study

4. Read and reflect (share observations, impressions) on Phil.2:1-11. How does it fit into the larger context of 1:27-2:18?
5. How does a person change their mindset – change who they are? Can you think of attitudes you have changed in your life? How did it happen? Support your answers with appropriate scripture if possible.
6. What is the point of verse 6? How does it translate into an attitude or way of thinking that you can adopt? What would existing for your own advantage look like in your life and relationships?
7. Review the verses about the preexistence and deity of Christ. How do these truths help define or encourage your attitude adjustment?
8. Review the point of verse 7. What are some limits that you have set for your life as it relates to what you are willing to become or lifestyle issues? What does it mean to think about lifestyle issues for the sake of others?
9. What is the point of verse 9? How does this compare with your mindset? What are the lessons or implications of Jesus voluntarily giving himself up that should be reflected in your mindset?
10. What impact should this study/the example of Christ have on our fellowship of believers according to the context of 2:1-8? What do you want to do, use or remember from today's study?