



Kingdom Living: with the attitude of Jesus

Isaiah 45:20-25; Philippians 2:1-11

A striking feature of the letters of Paul is the connection he often makes between the things God has done for us and how we ought to live. One example is the letter to Romans, where the first 11 chapters see Paul describe the way in which God in Jesus has fulfilled all his promises. Then in 12:1, he moves on to lifestyle, writing, 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy...' Ephesians 1-3 is another masterpiece of theological insight from Paul, followed by 4:1 when he urges the early believers to 'live a life worthy of the calling you have received.'

Philippians is no exception to this rule. Chapter 1 ends with Paul encouraging the Philippians to 'stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel' (1:28). In this week's reading, we find the Apostle going on to explain what this oneness looks like in practice, a way of relating to each other which is rooted in our understanding of how God, in Christ Jesus, has related to us. 'Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ...'

Daniel Migliore observes that, 'Paul's exhortations here and elsewhere in the letter show that he wants to nurture a particular kind of life together in Christ. Mutual encouragement, mutual consolation, mutual sharing, compassion, and joy in the midst of suffering are markers of this new life together under the lordship of Christ... these virtues of the Christian life have their ultimate source and continuing power from the living Christ who by the Holy Spirit creates and sustains the community and its members.'¹

In Philippians 2:5-11 we read one of the most famous and memorable passages of Paul's writing, the 'Christ hymn' which describes how Jesus has both emptied himself and also been exalted. This is a remarkable passage where Paul offers a glimpse of his understanding of the Jesus who has always been, long before the incarnation. Although Jesus was 'in very nature God,' he did not hold on to that equality or use it to his own advantage. A number of scholars have suggested that Paul is here making an implicit comparison between Jesus and Adam: 'Adam, who, "being in God's image," considered his "equality with God" as something to be seized. Christ, on the contrary, disdained such "grasping" and did the opposite; as Adam tried to become "like God," Christ, as God, in fact became man.'²

Paul goes on to describe the incredible extent to which Christ has given up all the privileges of heaven, not just becoming human but taking the nature of a servant, not just dying but suffering the agony and shame of crucifixion.

¹ Daniel Migliore, *Belief: Philippians and Philemon*, 2014, 76

² Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 1995, 209

In verses 9-11, we read of the honour which now belongs to Christ. The early Christians are reminded that the crucified one who they worship is now the one exalted to the highest place. Paul borrows from the language of Isaiah 45 as he describes the way in which, one day, every person will come to acknowledge the kingship of Jesus.

Once again, it's worth reminding ourselves that in this memorable passage Paul is not just 'doing theology.' He is writing to a small group of believers, asking them to be the best they can be in their relationships with each other. 'In Paul's judgement what the church needs is not a scolding but a reminder of the event that created and defined their life together. In your relationships with each other, think this way, let this be the governing attitude of the group, for, says Paul, that which makes the church the church is the "in Christ Jesus" mind.'³

For discussion

1. Can you think of a time when you saw others in church genuinely lay aside their own interests and preferences and value others above themselves? What did this look like in practice? What lessons did you learn from that time?
2. In Philippians 2:1-4, Paul makes a very direct link between our understanding of what God has done for us and how we then relate to each other day-to-day. Can you think of practical ways in which we could strengthen this link in our life together in SBC?
3. As we discovered on Sunday, commentators have a variety of perspectives on how to interpret Philippians 2:6-7. Some suggest that the verses should be understood as, 'Although Jesus was in very nature God... he made himself nothing...' In other words, Jesus' incarnation and death are going against what it means to be God. But others think the verses should be interpreted as, 'Because Jesus was in very nature God... he made himself nothing...' That is to say, Jesus' incarnation and death were the ultimate expression of God's love which causes him to give of himself. Is there one of these interpretations which resonates with you more than others?
4. How does the attitude of Christ in this passage compare with the typical attitude of worldly leaders?⁴
5. During Sunday's sermon, it was suggested that we have lost sight of how shameful the cross was in Roman times, how counter-cultural it was to believe in Jesus who was crucified? Do you agree? If we could recover this idea of believing in a Saviour who was so humiliated by the world, how might it change our priorities?
6. This famous 'Christ hymn' of Philippians 2 describes not just the incarnation and death of Jesus, but also his exaltation and a future moment when his kingship will be recognised by all. What difference would it have made to the Philippian Christians to think of all people giving praise to Jesus? What difference does it make to you?

³ Fred Craddock, *Interpretation: Philippians*, 1985, 42-43

⁴ Question taken from Tom Wright, *For Everyone Bible Study Guides: Philippians*, 2010, 30