

PHILIPPIANS

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 2.1-11
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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever known someone who exemplified humility? What was that person like? How did they demonstrate this characteristic?

II. Introduction to this Study

In Philippians 1.27-30 we find what is arguably the central encouragement of Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel... stand firm in one spirit... contending as one for the faith... without being frightened."

In our passage this week Paul moves from exhortation to a description of how to stand firm in their faith and unity in light of their struggling and suffering for the sake of Christ. His description centers around the quality of humility, the humility shown by Jesus.

This passage has a lot to say to us today. One powerful witness this church has to the community is our oneness of mind and mission focus. However, the threat of disunity is real and it can easily be fostered by selfish ambition and pride. Our witness to the love and gracious servant-like self-giving of Jesus can easily be lost in the darkness of in-fighting, placing our interests above that of others, and insisting on our own preferences. Such attitudes and behaviors are destructive to a church, to a marriage, to friendships, to a family, and to conducting oneself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

III. Study the Text

- a. Re-read Philippians 1.27-30. Why is being of one mind so important for followers of Jesus? How will their being of one mind enable them to endure suffering?
- b. With this context in mind, read Philippians 2.1-4. In verse 1 Paul refers to four "if" clauses as a way of encouraging them in the midst of the struggle. What four things does Paul point them to? How do these four "if's" point them to their relationship with the Triune God? How have you experienced these four things in your life?
- c. Immediately after the four "if" clauses, Paul then - verse 2 - presents a "then" clause: "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one mind and purpose." It's a plea for being in full accord or total harmony (the Greek word is "sympsychoi" from which we get "symphony"). When you think of the mission statement of Good Shepherd (below) can you say that you are like-minded... of one mind and purpose with it?

Good Shepherd exists to enable people of all ages to be disciples of Jesus Christ who Connect with God, Grow in faith, and serve in love. While we place an emphasis on reaching younger families with children we will maintain meaningful ministries for all ages in this multi-generational church.

- d. Look at Jesus' prayer in John 17.20-23. Why is oneness so important?
- e. Verses 3 and 4 present a contrast between selfish ambition/vain conceit and humility. Complete the following chart by entering the characteristics of humility that contrast to the characteristics of selfish ambition/vain conceit:

Selfish ambition/Vain Conceit

Humility

Covets and is jealous of others' success

It's all about me and what I want, think, deserve, desire

I am more important than anyone else

It's about my glory and recognition

Reflects a Satanic attitude (Isaiah 15) "I am god"

I have to get my way at any cost

It's pride and it underlies all sin

f. The Greek term "kenodoxin" is translated as selfish ambition/vain conceit/unfounded pride. Literally it means worship (the Greek term "doxin" comes from the root from which we get the word Doxology) but with "keno" added, it means worship of one's self or worship that has the wrong object at the center. For personal reflection - are you aware of any tendencies toward this kind of selfish ambition/vain conceit in yourself? As any come to mind, would you be willing to acknowledge them to God, ask for forgiveness, and allow God to transform them into an attitude of humility?

g. In contrast to selfish ambition/vain conceit Paul urges humility. The term in Greek is "tapeinophrosyne" which means to be made low, to be made small, thus, humility. In humility, others are considered "better than yourselves" (verse 3) which comes from the Greek term "hyperechontas" meaning to surpass in value or in greatness. What impact would it have in your relationships to spouse (if married), friends, co-workers, neighbors, others in the church family, classmates, and acquaintances if you 1) made yourself low and 2) deemed them to be of surpassing value or greatness? How would this help a church to be united in Christ and to be one in mind and spirit?

h. Paul's exhortation to humility and unity can find no greater example than that of Jesus. The Philippians' and our attitudes should be the same as his. Read through Philippians 2.5-11.

Verse 6: Jesus did not consider equality with God "harpagmos," that is, something to be exploited or held by force. First, do you see the statement of Jesus' deity, his equality with God, his having the very nature of God? Second, how is Jesus' "harpagmos" an example of humility? How can you follow this example?

Verse 7: Jesus "ekenosen" = emptied himself or caused himself to lose power. How does this exemplify humility? What role did his will have in doing this? Is this kind of act of humility a weak thing or does it call for even greater strength than pursuing selfish ambition? Can you imagine Jesus willingly causing himself to lose power and emptying himself this way?

Verses 7 and 8: Jesus took the very nature of a servant... humbled himself... became obedient to death - for you and for me. Here's the key to humility: having the willingness to set ourselves aside for the sake of others and being obedient to God at any cost. How does this motivate you to seek humility and to serve others?

IV. Reflect and Respond

a. I came across this statement about humility: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." What do you think about this? How can it help you develop more Christ-like humility? As you reflect on your relationships and the ways you interact with others do you see the need to demonstrate this humility more completely?

- b. How does Jesus' willingness to set aside his glory, privileges, divine power, and the form of deity and his willingness to become your servant - even in his death - motivate you to be a servant of others. How can developing humility enable you to serve?
- c. Philippians 2.9-11 describe how God exalted Jesus following his humiliating death. How well do you exalt Jesus in your life, give him the highest place, and bow at his feet?

V. Pray

Please pray:

- a. For our pastors, staff, and elders - those God has called to lead Good Shepherd - that they might be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose... doing nothing from vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves..."
- b. For one another, for our church, and the witness of the larger Church, that our attitude would be that of Jesus - humility and willingness to serve others.