

The Joy of Living the Jesus-Way

Philippians



PART 4: LIVING IN SYNC WITH THE JESUS-STORY

By David Fields

Philippians 2:1-11

Mind the Gap

Sin is *homo incurvatus in se*: “a human turned in on himself.” It’s ‘self-at-centre.’ It’s “me at the middle of my life” and all that turns into.

“I’m not the man I should be. Nor am I the man, with Christ’s help, I someday will be. But thank God I’m not the man I used to be.”

– often attributed to Martin Luther King Jr.

I. The Glory of the Jesus-Story: Wonder and Worship

1. Jesus’ Identity

“Christ Jesus...Who being in very nature God, did not consider **equality [isos] with God...**” – Philippians 2:6

That word “equality” is *isos* – it’s where we get “isosceles” triangle from; a triangle with two equal sides, and two equal angles.

God the Father and God the Son, that is Jesus, are distinct persons, yet they share equally the “God-ness” the same “divine” nature. To say “Jesus” is to refer to one member of the Triune God.

2. Jesus’ Humility

“Christ Jesus...*did not consider equality with God as something to be **used to his own advantage...***”

– Philippians 2:6

The one who is “in very nature God” does not use his status and power for his own advantage, for his benefit. Where Adam and Eve “grasp” for a “God-like” power in the Garden, Jesus is reversing this. He does not ‘grasp’ for self-centered gain. The opposite in fact. Jesus says of himself, in Mark 10:45: “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

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“...rather he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!” – Philippians 2:7-8

Paul is reminding us that we only become who we were made to be, and only find our truest identity when we also identify as one who serves the interests of others.

Look again at how Paul begins this letter: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 1:1

And he’ll later say: “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters...” – Philippians 3:17

The logic is clear: “Come view yourself as ‘servants’ the way we do. For the true God who came for you in love treated you this way; now learn to do the same.”

3. Jesus’ Work

Paul mentions that Jesus’ humility and service take him all the way to death, “even death on a cross.”

“he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!” – Philippians 2:8

For the Roman authorities, crucifixion was a display of Roman power over all bodies. It was a show of how Rome ‘wins.’ Rome humiliates all who come against it. From the outside, it seems Jesus is being humiliated by “Roman power.”

But in a twist of irony, Jesus is making the cross, a symbol of Roman power, into the site of God’s victory over all evil, including the pretensions of Rome’s claim to be all-powerful.

What was intended for evil – the cross – God uses for his beautiful, redemptive purposes.

And that’s why Paul is able to see the pain in his own life through this lens: that God can use painful, awful things, intended to humiliate and overpower – like a cross, or a prison cell – and make that the very site of God’s victory.

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Discussion

Open Up

Think about someone in your life who has demonstrated a genuine concern for the well-being of others. Share some of their qualities and/or the impact they had on those around them.

What would you like to emulate from their life?

Dig In - Read Philippians 2:1-4

1. What are the four “grounds” that Paul mentions for his following instructions in vv. 2-4? (List them here).
2. Why do you think Paul begins by listing these “grounds” before simply asking the church to follow his instructions in vv. 2-4?
3. How does reflecting on what Christ has already done for you help when it comes to living in a way that is not self-centered, but focused on others and seeking to meet their needs?
4. **Read Philippians 2:2-4.** In his book *Life Together*, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer supplies seven principles for eradicating selfish ambition in Christian communities. Read and discuss what you find *helpful* and *challenging* in this list.
 - *Hold their tongues*, refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother or sister
 - *Cultivate the humility* that comes from understanding that they, like Paul, are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God’s sight by his grace
 - *Listen long and “patiently”* so that they will understand their fellow Christian’s need
 - *Refuse to consider their time and calling so valuable* that they cannot be interrupted to help with unexpected needs, no matter how small or menial
 - *Bear the burden of their brothers and sisters* in the Lord, both by preserving their freedom and by forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom
 - *Declare God’s words to their fellow believers* when they need to hear it
 - *Understand that Christian authority is characterized by service* and does not call attention to the person who performs that service

Which areas do you want to see grow more in your life this week?

Prayer

Give thanks for the joy we have in Jesus. Take time to ask God for his help as we adopt the ways of Jesus in our life together. Pray for any of the needs of your group or that you know of from our broader community.