

Philippians 2:1-13

Introduction: There are few passages in all of Scripture that match this chapter for sheer beauty of expression and importance with respect of our knowledge of the majesty of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Just listen to how Paul calls on us to shape our lives in humility and care for others according to the example of Jesus:

If you have any encouragement from being united to Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

These words just about sum up what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. As if to bring out the biggest gun in support of this appeal, Paul points to the example of Christ himself; verse 5, 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus himself.'

So what is it about Jesus that makes him the supreme example of godly living?

Look where he starts from; verse 6; 'who being in the very nature God ...', that is to say that the one born a babe in Bethlehem was, before that, God himself, and all that that entails.

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As John's gospel says about him, 'he was with God and he was God.' And as Hebrew 1:3 says of him; 'he upholds the universe by his word of power.'

You can't be any higher than that. Yet it was from this unimaginable lofty place that, verse 7, he 'made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...'

That is the example of love and humility that Paul wants us to follow.

He did much more than become one of us, with all the limitations and hardships that that involves, but, verse 8, 'he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.'

There is much more to his death than someone dying in excruciating agony; after all two other men died like that on that dark day. What was unique about the death of Jesus was that it involved for him taking the punishment for all our sins so that we might not have to.

Isaiah 53:10, 'Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; ... the LORD makes his soul an offering for sin.' Jesus himself said that he would give his life as a ransom for many and Paul, in Romans 3:25, said, 'God [the Father] presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.'

The Apostle John makes the very same point in 1 John 4: 10-11, 'God ... sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.'

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If the example of Jesus stopped there we would miss the point of all this. Verse 9 of our passage today goes on, 'Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name ...'

In other words, having offered himself in our place and accepted the punishment for our sins, God showed his acceptance of this by, Romans 1:4, declaring 'him with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.'

As the Apostle' Creed says, 'On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.'

The passage before us is one of those which forms the basis of this statement in our creed, verse 9-11:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

We can begin to see what is meant by saying that Paul brings out the 'big gun' as *the* example for us to follow as we seek to live humbly and lovingly before others.

If the God of all the universe, in the person of the eternal Son, was prepared to go through all that he did for us, we should at least seek to imitate him in how we behave towards others.

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Just in case we haven't made the connection, Paul says in verse 12, 'Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed ... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.'

In other words, just as you have received salvation through the generous love of God in Christ and have attempted to live your lives following his example, do so more and more. Don't be discouraged when you find this hard because God is with you to help you to do his good will.

In this part of our lives, as in every other part, we derive the greatest strength when we, 'turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face.' Or as Hebrews 12:2 says on the same subject, 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.'

In this great challenge to shape our lives after the example of Jesus, we should pray every day for his grace and help. Also, and so that we will know what kind of life we are to lead, we would do well to read the Scriptures regularly. This will not only be food to our souls but work like a road map in setting out what we must do.