

Philippians 2:5-11
Be Church by Confessing Jesus

Main idea: Jesus is the center of the church's life.

If you've talked to my son Cory lately, you may have noticed that he's been talking about coding on the computer a lot, so you can tell that he's passionate about coding. If you've talked to Ed lately, you'd know that he loves bowling. And I'm sure you've noticed that I talk about ice cream a lot, and therefore you know that I love ice cream.

You may or may not know this, but even when we're not gathered here, I talk about you all just about all the time. I brag on you, about how you're a great church, and how I really couldn't have been blessed with a better church family. And even when we've gone through a few rough times over the years together, I've always been reminded how even despite my faults, you've loved me and shown me grace. So I've got to confess that sometimes I talk about you behind your backs, because I love you.

But I've also got to confess that sometimes I talk in private with Abby or other pastors about my frustrations. Maybe a business meeting didn't go the way I wanted, or I wish more people would serve in various ways. And even if it might not seem like it at first, this is also because I love you, because I have very high hopes for what we can be as a church.

You see, what we talk about and how we talk about it shows what we value, and shows what is at the center of our lives.¹

So what's at the center of your life? When you can talk about anything, what do you talk about? Do you mostly talk about yourself, and your desires? Or do you talk about your kids, and their accomplishments? And do you ever, outside of church, confess Jesus?

Philippians 2:5-11.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Father, I pray that we would give You glory by confessing Jesus and bowing before You. And I thank You that even when I don't do so perfectly now, there will come a day when everyone will give you perfect praise. Help us to long for that, and pursue that, so that even now, we might humbly serve You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

As I mentioned last week when we looked at the birth of the church of Philippi,² for the next few weeks, we're going to be studying the book of Philippians, which is really a letter written by Paul to the church there.

¹ Matthew 10:32

² Acts 16:11-15

Philippians is a deeply personal letter. Paul wrote Philippians from a jail cell for preaching the gospel.³ It would be like if police officers stormed in right now and arrested me, just for doing what I'm doing right now. Paul went to prison just for preaching the gospel. So much of the book of Philippians is simply Paul telling his own story, not in terms of what happened to him, but in terms of looking back and explaining why things happened the way they did.

And we should read Philippians the same way. We read Philippians to understand not only what we should do, but why we should do what we do as Christians. This was a letter to the whole church, but also to every member in the church. Paul wrote in another place:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

So Jesus is the center of the Christian's life and of the church's life. So as we study Philippians, think about what it means for you personally, and for us as a church.

Normally, when we begin to study a particular book of the Bible, I start at the beginning of the book, and systematically work from the beginning to the end of the book, because that makes the most sense. But I wanted to start this week in the middle of chapter 2, because this is where we find the central theological passage in the letter to the Philippians, and all of the rest of the book describes how we ought to live in light of this amazing truth.

Our passage this morning describes how Jesus is God, and has always been God, and yet in the course of time, Jesus was born on the earth, humbled Himself, and died on the cross for our sins. We often point out how this is the central event of all of history. And we see this quite literally by how we mark the years, and how all of the world observes time based on the coming of Jesus.

You know, we just started a new year because the earth has successfully completed one full orbit around the sun. And just as the earth revolves around the sun, our lives ought to revolve around Jesus, the Son of God.⁴

So it is now 2019 AD. The AD is the abbreviation of the latin phrase *anno domini*, which means "the year of our Lord," referring to the year that Jesus was born. So, of course, what we mean is that it is 2019 years since the birth of our Lord. So quite literally, all of time revolves around Jesus.⁵

But I think we're only scratching the surface by saying that the coming of Jesus is the central event of history. Because Jesus Himself is the central being through which everyone else even has life. When preaching in Athens, Paul quoted a poet that they would have been familiar with, and said:

In him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

Paul was saying that this can only refer to Jesus. In Jesus alone do we have any life at all. And from our passage this morning, Paul is saying that confessing Jesus leads to following Jesus not only in having life, but in living the same kind of life that glorifies God that Jesus Himself lived. We see that from verse 5.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)

³ Philippians 1:7

⁴ Colossians 1:18

⁵ Galatians 4:4

So it's a command — have this mind — but it's also a reality — which is already yours in Christ Jesus. It would be like if I told all of you right now to breathe. Yes, you can consciously control your breathing, but it was also a reality before I even mentioned it, because God had given you the gift of breath.

So in other words, the attitude of humility that we're to put on as we follow Christ is given to us by God Himself as a gift, and yet it's also something that we need to actively pursue.⁶ In fact, if you look at many of the commands in the Bible to humble yourself, the verb is often in the passive voice,⁷ which means that it's something that's done for us rather than something that we ourselves do for ourselves. You see, the Bible doesn't always directly command us to humble ourselves, but rather often to be humbled under the mighty hand of God.⁸

And yet, Paul writes “have this mind” “which is yours in Christ Jesus.” So it is a command, based on the reality that it's already yours. So let's see how that is. Verse 6.

[Christ Jesus] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
(Philippians 2:6-7)

Now, in my opinion, this is some of the most mind-boggling stuff in all of the Bible. A lot of times, when we read these verses, we get fixated on the language about Jesus's form and likeness, and we think about it in physical terms. But when Paul says that Jesus was in the form of God, he's not just contrasting Jesus's pre-incarnate form with His human form that Jesus received upon being born on the earth. Paul is talking about how Jesus was in every way of the same substance as God the Father.⁹ Jesus was omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and so on, and He was in no way less than God the Father.

And here's where it gets really crazy. Paul writes that Jesus, even in that state, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. In other words, Jesus, the Son of God, looked at His Father, while Jesus was still in the form of God, and said, “I'm going to set aside my right to sit on the throne, and I'm going to give my life to serve You.” That's humility.

I can't find any proof that he actually said it, but C.S. Lewis is often attributed as saying:

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.” - (maybe) C.S. Lewis

And regardless of whether or not he actually said it, I think that's true, and I think we often get that all mixed up. We often think that humility is thinking less of yourself, like you have to think you're worthless or something. But thinking less of yourself can lead to depression. Thinking less of yourself can lead to constantly worrying about how you might have said something stupid. It can lead to feeling too insecure to do what God has called you to do. So if you're staying awake worrying about if you worded something wrong and putting yourself down over and over again in your head, that's not humility. And if you look around the room and think everyone else

⁶ Ephesians 2:8-10

⁷ ταπεινωθητε (Aorist Passive Imperative)

⁸ 1 Peter 5:6 (see Young's Literal Translation, the Rotherham Bible, the Modern King James Version, the Douay-Rheims Bible, and God's Word translation, among others)

⁹ John 1:1-2

is more put together than you are and your life is a bigger mess than everyone else's, that's not humility, and that's also not reality. The reality is that we're all in need of God's grace.¹⁰

On the other hand, thinking of yourself less can lead to humility. Thinking of yourself less is the only way you can get down on the floor and play with preschoolers. Thinking of yourself less means that even if you're having a bad hair day, and you might normally feel a little self-conscious, you still greet the new person at church and try to make sure they feel loved. Humility leads not to negative thoughts about yourself, but to loving actions towards God and others.¹¹

Humility comes not when you think less of yourself, but when you think much of God, and therefore you become secure in who you are as God's child. Not worthless, but loved.¹² And when you're secure in who you are in relation to God, you aren't looking to impress men anymore.¹³ You don't care about how they see you. You are just looking to serve God and all the lost and lonely people God has placed around you.

And when Jesus humbled Himself, He wasn't thinking less of Himself, He was thinking of Himself less. He was setting aside His right to be worshipped, and He emptied Himself of the form of God, and became a servant.

If we're going to be a Christ-exalting church, and if you're going to be a person who glorifies God, we need to humble ourselves as Jesus humbled Himself. It's saying, "I'm going to put aside my own desires, and be a servant." In the life of our church, it's going the extra mile to love others, even if you don't see eye to eye with them, because in humility you count others as more significant than yourself.¹⁴

Some of you might be thinking, "Yeah, but how far should I take this? Should I sacrifice my day off to help people in and outside of our church? Should I step into a role of service at church, when all I really feel like doing is coming and getting fed? Should I just give my life to others, even if they don't deserve it, and even if they're not grateful for all that I do for them? How far should I take being a humble servant?"

Well, Jesus took it pretty far. Verse 8.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

I think one of the most overlooked ways that we should confess Jesus is by following Him in His humility.

You know, it was pretty remarkable for Jesus to come to the earth and serve us at all.¹⁵ He got down on our level, He healed people of diseases, He fed the hungry, and He even washed the feet of His disciples. And if that's all that Jesus did, because He's God, we'd still say, "Wow, that's pretty humble!"

But after Jesus lived out a life of complete servanthood toward us, He then died on a cross for our sin.

¹⁰ Romans 3:23

¹¹ Matthew 25:34-40

¹² Zephaniah 3:17

¹³ Galatians 1:10

¹⁴ Philippians 2:3

¹⁵ Mark 10:45

How far are you willing to go in your humility before God? Are you willing to obey Him, even when it hurts? Even when you'll look like a fool before others? Even when it means swallowing your pride when you just know you're right, because it's even more important to love than to win an argument?

Are you even willing to die? That's what Jesus calls us to do, at least figuratively, if not literally. We're to take up our cross, and deny ourselves, and follow Jesus.¹⁶

Can we even do that? Maybe that seems impossible, but there's also a great promise for us if we do. Verse 9. Because Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.
(Philippians 2:9)

Because Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself, God the Father has highly exalted Him. We're given the same promise in James 4:10.

Humble yourselves [or rather, be humbled] before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:10)

You know, we usually picture heaven as being a time when we will exalt God forever, and that's true, but it'll also be a time when God exalts us forever. I think in heaven, Jesus will continually say to the Father, and to all the angels, "Look how good my Bride is! Isn't she great? She's perfect in every way! Spotless! Blameless! Beautiful!" And church, you are the Bride of Christ.¹⁷

But, of course, this doesn't come through our own righteousness, but through the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus humbled Himself, died for your sin, and rose from the grave victorious over sin. And therefore, He is highly exalted! His name is above every name! And, so that, verse 10:

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10-11)

This is what Jesus is worthy of. Jesus is worthy every knee bowing, and every tongue confessing that He is Lord. And Jesus gets what He's worthy of. It's incredibly clear. All people everywhere, whether in heaven, or on the earth, or even under the earth, that's everywhere. Everyone will bow before Jesus and confess that He is Lord.

Now, we all know what heaven and earth are. But it's interesting that Paul also includes that phrase, "under the earth." Every commentary that I read agrees that this can only refer to hell. You see, even in hell, there can be no denying that Jesus is Lord.

David wrote in Psalm 139:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (Psalms 139:7-8)

¹⁶ Matthew 16:24

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:25-27

The King James Version translates that word “Sheol” as hell. In the end, no matter where you find yourself, there’s no denying who’s in charge.

So the question you need to ask yourself right now is simply this: when will you confess Jesus as your Lord?

Confessing Jesus as your Savior and Lord is how you become a Christian. You’re not a Christian by being born in a Christian family, or by being born in America. You become a Christian by confessing Jesus.

And confessing Jesus is also what makes us a church. We’re not a church because we come together, and sing some songs, and hear a message. The church is built upon the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.¹⁸

You see, Jesus is the center of everything. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end.¹⁹ Through Him all things were made,²⁰ and in Him all things hold together,²¹ and all things will be in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all.²²

So be humbled by God, and humble yourself, so that you stop putting yourself first, but put Jesus first in everything, confessing Him as Lord.

Did you know that not everyone considers it to be the year 2019 AD? In countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia, it’s now the year 2562, because they don’t measure the years from Christ’s birth, but from when Buddha supposedly achieved nirvana. And in Pakistan and some other predominantly Muslim countries, it’s the year 1440, because they count from when Muhammad emigrated to Medina. Most of these countries also recognize that it’s 2019 AD according to most of the world, and yet they try to reject that system because it acknowledges that life is all about Jesus.

And so there’s also a push by many non-religious people to stop using the designations AD and BC to describe the years, but instead to use CE and BCE, which stands for Common Era and Before Common Era, in an attempt to take the religious language out of how we talk about time. And yet the ironic thing is that even according to that model, it would still be the year 2019. Time would still revolve around Jesus.

So here’s my question. What does your world revolve around? Does it revolve around your career, or your kids, or does it revolve around Jesus?

Maybe you realize this morning that you’ve been making your life all about you, or even all about your family. Family is a good thing! But your family makes for a horrible Lord and Savior. Don’t treat them like they are. Only one Person deserves that role in your life. Jesus truly needs to be the center of the Christian’s life, the center of the church’s life, and ultimately the center of all things.

God deserves all the glory. The purpose of everything is to glorify God,²³ and we do that by confessing Jesus.

¹⁸ Matthew 16:16-18

¹⁹ Revelation 22:13

²⁰ John 1:3

²¹ Colossians 1:17

²² 1 Corinthians 15:28

²³ 1 Corinthians 10:31

And I have high hopes that we as a church will do that. That we wouldn't just have church, but that we would be the church. That we would glorify God by confessing Jesus through our words and service to the world. And since the church is made up of individuals, this can only happen when each one of us is humbled by the mighty power and grace of God.

So this morning, I invite you to make a commitment. Before our service this morning, I gave each of you a picture of you or your family. I invite you to come and tack your picture to this church cutout. By doing that, you're saying, "I don't just want to go to church, and I want to be the church." But even more important, you're saying, "I confess Jesus as my Savior." And maybe you don't always treat Jesus as the center of your life, but do you want Him to be?