

Humble & Exalted

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[0 : 0 0] We used to, we've now kind of fallen out of the habit. One of our regular things that we would do before dinner on a weekday evening is we would like to watch Pointless together.

And I always find it interesting, Alexander Armstrong, the host, when he's meeting the contestants, he says to them, tell me all about yourself. Now I wonder, how would you answer if someone said to you, tell me all about yourself?

And you've got probably about the 20 seconds that you're meant to have so that the show can continue on to the interesting bit when you're answering questions. It's really interesting, I find, the answers to it.

People talk about what they do. People talk about their hobbies or what they're hoping to do in the future. It seems like nobody's got any family that they're willing to tell them about.

Though I'm sure if you had to tell us everything about you, surely your family would be central to it or friends that you have. And this is a slightly silly way of looking at it, I'm sure the producers say, talk about something interesting, your family is not that.

[1 : 1 0] But there's a broader trend in the world that we live in. We live in what is known as the West. And one of the markers of living in the West is we live in a highly individualized culture.

Well, you might call it this, that we live in a me world. You see, when we think about defining who we are, rather than pointing to the networks, the associations we have, most of us define ourselves by our ambitions or our achievements.

We don't think about how we fit into a broader story, but we think about how we are the center of our story. Now, one of the things that we are going to be looking at today is how the me is transformed when the gospel penetrates and permeates the life of a believer and the life of a local church.

And actually what we're thinking is that when the gospel lands and transforms our life, it changes us from me people into we people, when our great concern is for others.

And that's what Paul is working at today, is he's trying to help the church to become a we people. And maybe even more than that, it's a you people, where we take our eyes off ourselves, where we take ourselves out of the center of the story, and we look for the goods and the benefits and the flourishing of others, and we look for the glory of Christ in all that we do.

[2 : 5 7] And we're looking at a large portion today of scripture. Normally people, we're looking at verse 1, verse 27 through to 2, verse 30. And normally people take this passage in about three or four sermons.

So you can see that we're looking at a lot today. But sometimes there's a benefit looking at a broader part of scripture and seeing how the different parts work together. So there's going to be a lot that I'm not going to say this evening.

If there's questions that you still have, please come and talk to me afterwards. But what we've got is four points that I'd love for us to consider. So if you're a note taker, there's four points.

They are these. The church is called to humility. Humility. We are to see the humility of the king. Humility shines brightly.

And finally, emulate the model humility. I'll say those again if you weren't able to take them all down as we were working through them there. But first we see this. We are called, the church is called to humility.

[4 : 0 0] So 1 verse 27. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And verse 27, this is like the hinge of the letter.

This is where Paul gets into the main body of the letter. So 1 verse 27 through to 4 verse 1, 4 verse 3. This is the main body of the letter. It's bracketed by these words here of citizenship and of

standing firm.

And so this is the main body of the letter. This is where it turns. And this is where Paul is really getting in. Last week we saw how Paul's life was shaped by the gospel. How it shaped his partnership.

How it shaped his concern for proclamation. How it shaped his priorities. And now he's saying the gospel must shape how you live. Turning you from a me people into a we people.

Turning your concern away from yourself and onto others. And so he begins here. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[5 : 06] That word conduct. It's literally live as a citizen. Live as a citizen. As a citizen, the flag that you have as a Christian.

If you are a believer and you are here today, your highest allegiance is not to the Scottish flag. It's not to the British flag. It's not even for me to the Irish flag.

It's to the gospel. I remember when I was in school. And there was a group of people in my year who, after school, had gone out and got in trouble.

The school day had ended. And they got in trouble. I think they'd been caught by the police and brought back to their parents. But not just getting in trouble with the police and their parents.

The principal punished them as well and sent them to detention. Now, many of us thought, how unfair is that? They were outside of school. There was nothing. The school has nothing to do with them.

[6 : 07] We brought our complaints as those righteous young teenagers that we were. And one of the teachers said, those students were still wearing their school uniform. They were still representing their school to the city.

And they brought disrepute on the name of the school. You see, that's the idea that is pictured here. Is we are to be citizens who live worthy of the gospel.

The good news that Jesus died for our sins and is risen from the dead. And he's going to fill out what this means as we work our way through this chapter.

And ultimately, it's a call to unity amongst God's people. Now, this church here in Philippi, it is a healthy church in the main.

But cracks are just starting to appear. Look at verse 28 with me. Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

[7 : 17] They're starting to feel some friction. Some opposition. Maybe even affliction. Because of their commitments to Jesus.

And it's always in those moments, those pressure moments, where cracks that were previously hidden by a good paint job start to appear.

You'll see it later in this letter. There's an issue between two of the women in the church. Euodia and Syntyche. And here we get this picture that it is this opposition from outside that is starting to cause abyss of frisian.

And so what Paul then is saying, verse 27. Have a look with me. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.

Or have a look with me at verse 2. Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

[8 : 27] Paul's great concern for them is they work together for the faith of the gospel to make Jesus known and famous in their city, to make him known and famous throughout the world.

And he wants them to be a people who are working together in harmony. There was a Cambridge professor, a guy called Ian Cross, who's been doing research on harmony within conversations between people.

He is a music professor. But one thing he noticed is how people can show their harmony through the way that they speak. One of the ways that he showed that is when two people are found to agree, they match each other in pitch.

So one person might end the sentence with a high pitch, and the next person will take it on speaking in the exact same pitch. So when people are in agreement, they are literally in harmony musically, speaking in the same pitch.

And that is what Paul wants here. Paul wants the people to be together in gospel harmony.

[9 : 40] Paul calls the church into a gospel harmony, which then can only be achieved by a gospel-shaped humility.

Chapter 2, verse 3 is key. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.

This concern is rooted in the benefits of the gospel you see there in verse 1. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, these are all the benefits of the gospel.

If you've known these, if you are a Christian, then you are called to be in harmony with one another, to be united with one another, pursuing humility.

This is shifting us from our me mindset and shifting the church into a we culture. And here's the thing about humility.

[10 : 56] Humble people don't think about humility. Humble people think about others. The moment you get caught into humility, you start thinking about yourself.

But Paul's saying, in humility, value others above yourself. Verse 4, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

You see there, he talks about selfish ambition and vain conceit. That is a mindset which is fixed on the world as it is, fixed on how we might benefit.

Some theologians of the early and the Reformation church used to speak about sin.

They would describe it as this, as being curved in on yourself. The idea is, instead of being open up to God and to neighbor, sin is looking in on yourself, looking away from where God calls us to, where we are called to serve, and bending in upon ourselves.

[12 : 08] That is what Paul is seeking to work against here. And that's what he's going to do as we see the humility of the king. But first, I don't know if you noticed this, and I want to point this out for us.

Have a look with me at verse 29. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

What he's saying here is, it is Jesus' gift to the church that we suffer. And I think many of us might be thinking, well, thanks God, that's a great gift, but that might be one of those gifts that's just going to be kept under the stairs, you know, in that little closet, right at the back, right in the darkest place, the place that no one ever remembers and no one's ever going to look.

Let's just keep it back there. But if we do that, if we hide away from this gift to suffer for the name of Christ, we miss how God works.

Because this is our salvation. To suffer for the name of God, this is our salvation. Verse 27. Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you, this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved.

[13 : 45] And we see this in the humility of the King. We see this in the humility of the King. And this is what we're looking at in verses 5 to 11 of chapter 2.

In describing the work of Christ, what Jesus came to do, what he did on the cross and in his resurrection, in his ascension, the catechism, the shorter catechism that we as the free church take as our own, it describes Christ's work in two ways.

It talks about the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. Now, for many of us, humiliation, what we think of that is like that's another word to be embarrassed.

But that's not exactly what they meant when they talked about humiliation when the catechism was written. Humiliation means to be brought low. And exaltation is to be lifted up.

That's the way they describe the work of Jesus. But there's another more recent author who says that what we see in this passage, what we see here described about what Jesus does in verses 6 to 11, he calls this the J curve.

[15 : 04] That's what he calls what happens here, the J curve. This is where we see the movement of Jesus right down all the way to the point of death, coming from heaven down to death, and then exalted higher up.

He calls this the J curve. And that's what we're going to see as we look through, as we dig into these most wonderful verses here, verses 6 to 11. And first, what we see here is we see the downward curve.

You'll have heard it said, what goes up must come down. But see, here's the thing. In the kingdom of God, what goes down will be lifted up.

This is essential for us as we grasp what Jesus has done, but also for the Christian life. What goes down will be lifted up.

And we see here in the downwards curve of Jesus, verse 6, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage.

[16:13] The language that we see here, we see that language there, he, consider, we look at the language there, verse 7, himself. This is putting flesh on what you see there in verse 3, where you see there, rather in humility, value others, value is the same word, consider.

You talk about this, the language of putting yourself, putting others above yourself. And here, we're putting flesh on this, where Jesus takes on the flesh of humanity to save his people.

And there's two key verbs here. There's so much that we could look at here. We could spend the whole evening just looking at these few verses, but there's two key verbs for us to look at. Have a look there.

Did not, he made himself nothing, verse 7. And then verse 8, he humbled himself. He made himself nothing.

He emptied himself out. Now, those of you who might be aware, there is a lot of battles over what this means. And if you're one of those people, come chat to me afterwards.

[17:26] But here's the key thing. This is what Paul is saying here. The big picture is that Jesus, who had, was in glory, worshipped by the angels in the throne room of heaven, who was in the form of God, took on the form of a servant.

That's the picture here. The one who should rightly be exalted came down to the lowest of positions. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

And then it goes further down. It's not just coming from heaven and coming to earth. He goes underneath the earth, down into the grave.

Verse 8, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. So his descent was not just from heaven to earth, but all the way to the grave.

More than that, he bore the shame of the cross. He was rejected by the world. He was afflicted by those he came to save.

[18:37] He was mocked and scorned, spat upon, beaten, considering others of more value than himself. He gave up his life, emptied himself so that we might be filled up.

Now remember, he's writing here to a church who are starting to feel affliction. What an encouragement for them to remember that they serve a God who was afflicted for them. This is what he is doing.

He's pointing us back to this, that Jesus is the one who went all the way down on this downward curve and then he was lifted up.

Verse 9, therefore God exalted him to the highest place. God exalts the one who humbles himself. God exalts the one who suffers for others, who is afflicted, for others, who is rejected by those he came to serve. The servant is the one who will be celebrated.

[19:44] The servant is the one who is now celebrated in heaven. He is the one who is given the name that is above every name. He is the one that every knee bows down to as the true king in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

And everyone confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And so we're called to see Jesus who went down and to lift our eyes to the one who is now exalted.

But this is also meant to be deeply practical for the church. Look at verse 5. In your relationships with one another, how you deal with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Here, Jesus has established the blueprint for humble service. I don't know about you, but I'm always thinking of caveats or loopholes to something like this.

but look at the extent, look at the descent of Jesus here. The one who is worth more honor and glory than any of us, yet was nailed to a Roman cross for us, in service for us.

[21:12] This is the picture, this is the blueprint, this is the paradigm and the pattern for what the true Christian service looks like.

And this is also meant to inspire our ongoing humility. Just flick forward with me to Philippians chapter 3. If you can flick forward, Philippians chapter 3, this is Paul saying here, Paul the apostle who wrote this letter, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection, and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection of the dead.

Here is the irony, we press downward into suffering, into death with Jesus to go up. We suffer for the name of Christ so that we might be exalted with Christ.

We might be raised with him. This J curve that I spoke about is the same J curve that we are called to. Think of what Jesus said to his disciples when they first recognized that he is the Christ, the Messiah, the one God sent, and what Jesus said to them is if you want to be my disciple, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

Whoever loves the world will lose it, whoever loses the world for my sake will gain it. For what can it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?

[22 : 52] This is what Jesus says is that all those who follow him to the cross will be exalted with him in the heavens. That is the promise.

We are all called into this J curve with him. We are called to descend because that is our salvation. Because that is our salvation. And this is what then Paul goes on to say in verse 12. And we see in our third points this evening, humility, true humility like Jesus, following in this pattern, humility like Jesus, shines bright.

I read an article a few months ago about this woman. and she was talking about how she had come to faith. She talked about how she was brought up in a loving Christian home.

But she talked about how her mom had not. Let me read it for you. She didn't grow up in the church at all. But one day in school, in high school, as a group of girls, was gossiping in the hall, one of her friends walked away.

[24 : 09] So my mom followed her, asked her if she was okay, and my mom's friend replies, I'm good. You see, I just love Jesus, and I don't think it's very loving to talk about others behind their back.

But I knew that I'd just join in if I stayed there, and I don't want to preach to anybody, so I just thought it was best if I walked away. My mom had two responses. Firstly, who is Jesus? I'd never heard anyone talk about him like this. And two, will you be my best friend because you are amazing. As my mom hung out with her friend and her friend's amazing family, she ended up encountering the living God.

The picture here is that a true Christian life, which seeks to use itself to bless and serve others, will be distinctive in this world.

A true Christian life that seeks to serve and love others, to give itself in self-sacrifice to bless others, will be distinctive, will shine brightly in the darkness of this world.

[25 : 17] And this is what Jesus is saying here. He says, verse 12, therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed. Look back at verse 8, Jesus is the one who became obedient to death.

And this is what Paul is saying, Jesus, who is obedient to the point of death. You, church in Philippi, you have been obedient and remain obedient. Remain obedient and continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Now let me just pause there for a moment. This is a verse that causes a lot of debates when you come to this, maybe in a Bible study during a weekday evening and people are like, how does this work? Surely it's Jesus who wins our salvation for us.

How do we work out our salvation? We'll look to the next verse and then you see there that it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fill his good purpose.

And you think, oh, that's all right, it's still God that's at work. But if we do that, if we get caught in that discussion, we miss what Paul is saying here. The other place where he's talked about being saved, remember verse 28 of chapter 1.

[26 : 30] This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved. You see, what Paul is saying here is you work out your salvation, your salvation happens as you suffer for the name of Jesus, as you give your life in service.

You see, we tend to think of salvation as a one-time moment, but actually in the Bible it talks about salvation as this lifelong thing which culminates at the time when Jesus Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead and to bring his people home.

And so to work out your salvation, fear and trembling, is to continue in this downward path, this downward curve, walking away from this inward curve that we've talked about, this downward curve as we seek to serve and love others.

And so God aids and empowers us as we seek to live out that life. And then what Paul is saying here is, remember the issue we were saying, as there's opposition it starts to cause friction.

And what Paul is saying here is he wants to call the church away from a partisan attitude and back to partnership. Remember we saw that partnership was a really big theme in this letter back in chapter 1 verse 5.

[27 : 53] 5. And here he's calling them back to partnership with one another. Verse 14, do everything without grumbling or arguing. Because you see, here's the issue.

We live in a warped, distorted world. We live in an individualistic world where we always put ourselves as number one and put others' concerns below ours.

And this is what Paul is saying. When you put aside that grumbling, when you put aside that greasing about not getting what you desire, he says this, then you will shine among them like stars. See, listen to what Paul is saying here. Selfless lives that don't seek the spotlight are the ones that shine brightest. brightest. Selfless lives which don't seek the spotlight are the ones that shine brightest in this world.

So as the moon reflects the light of sun at night, so we are called to reflect the selfless love of the Son of God in this world.

[29 : 08] And we do that by, you see there, verse 16, as you hold firmly to the word of life, as we hold on to the gospel, as we keep it in front of our eyes and remember who Jesus is and what he has done for us, as we hold fast to that as our only hope, then we shine brightly as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

And Paul says that is what will make everything worth this. Look at there where he says this, it might sound strange to you as we read through this, but even, verse 17, but even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

What Paul is saying here is by giving himself up in service of the church, by giving himself up in service of Jesus, it is worth it if these people stay the course.

That's his great desire, even though he is in prison, even though he has lost the respect of many, it does not matter because his great concern is for others.

And he thinks it's worth it, not just that it's worth it, but he is glad and he rejoices in it. And Paul calls them to rejoice. And maybe this might just be a particular word for some of the more mature saints who are in the congregation here, some who have given up so much of their lives for the Christian faith.

[30 : 40] And sometimes you might just be thinking to yourself, is it really worth it? All these years I've given is this. And think like Paul, those people you've invested in who stayed the course, if they have, if you have given your life for them, if you have suffered for them in prayer, in love, in practical deeds, what Paul is saying is it is worth it.

And that we should be glad and rejoice because our great desire is to see people rooted and built up in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then finally what Paul does for us here, talking about this humility that shines brightly in the darkness, he points us to two case studies, two examples of that. And it's our final point this evening, is we are called to emulate model humility. Model humility that we see here in the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Now time gets away from us here, but we'll just look very briefly at these two men and how they give us an idea of what true gospel humility, true gospel harmony looks like.

Have a look at me at verse 21. Paul here writes to the church, he says, for everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 12] He says, this is the natural heart disposition of the world, apart from Christ. But here's two exceptions to this. Look at these two men and here's an idea of what it might look like for you.

Have a look at Timothy there. We'll look at him more briefly and spend a bit more time with Epaphroditus. Look at Timothy, verse 22. You know that Timothy has proved himself because as a son of his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Look at that, how similar is that language to what we saw way back at the beginning of verse 27, chapter 1, verse 27. Striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.

Here is Timothy, you know him, you have seen his life. Here is an example of one who has set aside his own concerns to make the gospel known in his community or wherever he has been sent by us.

But then Epaphroditus. Timothy is the one that they've known from afar, but Epaphroditus is one of their own. So in the story of this church here, Epaphroditus, remember last week, those of you who

were with us last week, we talked about how Paul had been given support by the church in Philippi. [33 : 28] He is in jail in Rome and the church in Philippi had sent him support and it was Epaphroditus who was the one who came to him. And what Paul is saying here is that Epaphroditus is like Christ in his service for them because he pushed his service for Paul, for one of his partners, his co-workers, to the point of death.

Have a look with me at verse 27. Indeed, he was ill and almost died. Verse 30, because he almost dies.

Like Jesus who went all the way to death, Epaphroditus went to the very point of death in service of one of his partners. And so look at the way that Paul describes him.

He says he is a brother, a co-worker, and a fellow soldier. As one person writes about this, this means that Epaphroditus is the same family, has the same goals, and has been through the same trials with him.

Paul is saying that Epaphroditus has modelled the self-sacrificial love of Jesus in his service to Paul and to the church.

[34 : 49] And so ultimately then, what Paul wants us to do is to emulate these men, to follow these men. Let's have a look with me, jump over to chapter 3, verse 17.

He says, join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. And so what Paul is saying is, be like these men.

These men have given you an idea of what it looks like to embody this J-curve as we are united to Jesus in his death and his sufferings, and we are united with him in his resurrection and exaltation. But more than that, where we finish this is verse 29. So then, welcome him in the Lord's with great joy and honour people like him.

Honour people like him. So often when we're thinking those who deserve honour, we think of those who've had great academic achievements or great financial gain, but here it's someone who gives their lives in humble service.

[35 : 56] Literally the word there, to honour him, means to treat him as precious, as valuable. And so here it is, the final point for us this evening is, where are those people in this congregation who give themselves in selfless love for others?

seek them out and honour them. Value them. Treat them as precious. They don't do it for the truly humble one, does not do it for applause.

But Paul says that when we see it, we are to honour those people. Earlier this year we were in a congregation and there was a couple who were leaving. The husband was an elder and was well known, but the wife, she was largely under the radar.

But it was finally that Sunday when we were saying goodbye to them that the minister of the church was able to say, do you know that this woman, none of you will know and she will never tell you, but week by week she goes to meet the most vulnerable in this congregation.

She sits with them at their bedsides. She speaks words of comfort and consolation. she encourages them, giving herself in service to them.

[37 : 19] There was a beautiful picture of what Paul is saying here. Honor those who embody the self-sacrificial service of Jesus. Because true gospel harmony, true gospel unity comes as we embody and follow the humility of Jesus.

Jesus who gave his life so that we might have new life in him. Let's pray together. God our Father, we praise you for the Lord Jesus, the one who took on the form of a servant whose great service to us, the church, was to bear our sin on the cross, to take our punishment and the wrath of God so that we might be restored into relationship with you.

We thank you and praise you for him. And this evening, we ask that you would empower us by your spirit as we seek to work out our salvation, as we seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following him.

And this evening, we want to honor those who have given their lives in this emptying love of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. verse as we said, amen. But I want to tosize the side of