

Briarwood Presbyterian Church
“Having the Mind of Christ”
Philippians 2:1–11
Rev. Jim Alexander
March 24, 2019 • Morning Sermon

Our text is Philippians 2:1–11 says [1] *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

I've been spending a lot of time lately in the book of Philippians trying to understand it better. I really appreciate all the deep truths Paul gives us in such a short letter. Seems like every time I return to this Epistle I can get up to speed with Paul in chapter 1 as to what he is trying to cover but then I get to chapter 2 and it seems like I have to pull over and park just to process what he is saying. He starts talking about humility and that I should have the same mind in myself that Jesus Christ has. Then he tells me that the mind of Christ should be about others first more naturally than it is about myself.

When I read that I have to think deep and hard to realize if anyone actually pulled this off. I have some friends in the Lord whose lives are marked with a genuine humility but I have learned as a pastor not to use living examples because their story is still being written. So I dug a little deeper to find a person whose story had been written and whose life was marked with such humility that they used their life with such a love for the Lord. I came up across a lady named Gertrude Hobbs.

She and her husband were serving during WW1 on the African front and were taking care of the British troops. They were caring for the poor, feeding the needy and sharing the Gospel wherever they went. Gertrude had a very unique strength. She was a stenographer which means she can write down really fast anything anyone ever says. Her speed was 250 words per minute that's 4 word a second. That's how fast she could write.

She used that strength for the benefit of others. Her husband was a prolific Bible teacher and everywhere he taught or spoke his wife whom he nicknamed 'Biddy' which simply means beloved disciple, would feverishly take down his notes and record every word he said. Seven years into her marriage her husband passed away, but she kept using the gift/skill God had given her with the strength that she had for God's glory so that others would benefit. She wasn't trying to build a name for herself and she wasn't even trying to build a name for her husband. Yet many of you probably have a copy of the devotional My Utmost For His Highest because Oswald Chambers wife was Biddy, Gertrude Hobbs Chambers. She put into print everything he ever said. She made sure that what he taught would benefit others.

When I look at her life I feel like I can look at someone where now I can follow what Paul is saying in Philippians 2. This is someone who lived like I did and I can now get back on track with what Paul is saying so I that I might be able to keep up with him because she taught me something about humility. Humility isn't about pretending we're not who we are. Humility isn't denying the strengths that God has given us. Humility is taking the very strengths that God has given and then using them for someone else's benefit. I can track with that so now I'm ready to look at Paul.

I'm going to give a little more back story about Paul and this church in Philippi because we need to know how long Paul has known this church plus how much he loves them. The story goes back 12 years before Paul's writing. Acts 16 tells us more of when he wrote this as well. This church came about in the most unusual way. Paul was on a mission trip. He was convinced he was supposed to go into Bithynia but the Holy Spirit blocked him. One night Paul had a vision and sees a man from Macedonia saying to him, 'Come over here to Macedonia and help us.' Paul is obedient to this vision and makes his way to Macedonia and Eastern Europe. Getting this vision he probably thought there would be this great opportunity to speak in the synagogue and track with the best of those who already knew the Old Testament Scriptures.

Perhaps to Paul's surprise, he arrives there and there is no synagogue. To have a synagogue there has to be at least 10 male orthodox Jews in a community so now we know we're dealing with a Gentile community. There are no synagogues or men but there is a group of women. These women are praying in a place known of prayer and Paul finds Lydia. God has been working in Lydia's heart and has already been called a God-fearer, someone who is a Gentile looking for the truth about who God is. Paul arrives and proclaims Jesus Christ is God and she opens her heart to where she and her household believe. Now we have seedling or a plant of a beginning of a church.

A second person to believe in this congregation who is very unlikely is a servant girl. This wasn't just any servant girl but one who was demon possessed. As she was used and abused by her master for her gift was to be able to foretell the future, they were making great profit from her, but she starts following Paul and crying out 'These men are men of the most High God!' Would not that be a good thing to do? It was not for Paul finally annoyed turns to her and realizes you can't speak truth from a false paradigm and he cast the demon out of her.

Then what happens to Paul next is he is put in jail. Not only that but he and Silas were brutally beaten because the masters of that servant girl lost their source of income when he cast the demon out of her. They were thrown in the deepest part of the dungeon and what do Paul and Silas do? They start singing at midnight and worshiping God as they sing His praises. The prisoners are listening and they understand what they are saying. As Paul and Silas are singing an earthquake takes place, the jail cells come open, the shackles fall off and the jailer is ready to kill himself because he knows if any prisoner escapes he suffers the penalty of their fate. Paul tells the jailer not to harm himself because they were all still there. The jailer could hardly believe what he heard. He calls for light and sees Paul and says 'What must I do to be saved?' Now we have the makings of a new church plant.

It is hardly the format of what we would have our church planters to follow but it's what God chose to do in the most unlikely set of circumstances and even using adversity to become the way a church is planted. Now we have a church Paul calls 'dearly loved.' These people are Gentiles but to Paul these people are closer than his Jewish family themselves. This is the church that Paul now writes to from prison in Rome. He has been there for over two years shackled to Roman guards.

The church back in Philippi having lost contact with Paul and the ability to encourage him, has since sent one of their own, Epaphroditus, to bring a gift to Paul. He was an encouragement by showing up in person to minister to Paul. Now Paul sends a missionary letter back with Epaphroditus to encourage and strengthen the church with these words. Paul starts Philippians 2 off with the word ‘so’ and we need to understand what he is tying this back to from what he has already said to keep this in context.

Paul who loves this church dearly who is encouraging them to stand for Christ says in Philippians 1:27–30, [27] *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

This is very similar to what we have been studying in I Peter, where Peter is trying to help us wrap our minds around Christian suffering – suffering for the name of Christ, suffering simply because we are taking a stand for Christ. Peter tells us to arm ourselves for the eventual suffering we will face because we live for Christ. Here Paul is doing the exact same thing. He is helping the church to understand they must be ready for the struggles and persecution that is going to come.

So he starts out by saying to them in Philippians 2:1–2, Philippians 2:1–11 says [1] *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* You might be thinking that he is just putting out a bunch of things for us to consider. Possibly but possibly not for in the Greek it’s quite different.

In Greek, conditional clauses and sentences have different ways of being applied. Paul writes this one in a way that whether the audience actually audibly responds or whether they just think it in their minds, there is an applied positive response with every one of these phrases. Paul writes ‘*if there is any encouragement in Christ...*’ and the audience would write ‘and there is.’ If there is any comfort from the Father who sends His Son so that you might be redeemed and we know that’s true. If there is any participation or fellowship in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy by being brothers and sisters in Christ, which we are seeing played out every day, then as the audience is hearing these words they are saying ‘yes Paul, yes Paul, yes Paul’ for he has three affirmations right before he even begins.

Maybe we could translate it a little clearer in our mindset as ‘since there is’ knowing that these things are true Paul says ‘make my joy complete.’ Finally he has told us something to do. Make my joy fill up to overflowing. Paul has learned through his walk with Jesus Christ that joy is not only a fruit of the Spirit but joy is experienced. We know the presence of joy when we are living our lives for others. Paul now says you can make my joy complete by living for me, living for others. He isn’t saying this in a selfish way but in a way that makes complete sense. He is saying that nothing could give him greater joy than to look at you, this Gentile church, and see the Gospel on center stage through the love that you have for each other and through the unity that the Gospel brings.

Paul has shown us that knowing the mind of Christ is a call to the church, to Christian love and Christian unity. Paul wants us to understand, process and apply this. He wants us to be tracking with him as though we were his original audience. Now he is calling us to be of the

same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and being of one mind. Paul wants to see this unity front and center. Nothing can vindicate his call as the Apostle to the Gentiles better than a church that he can point to and say 'the Gospel took roots and this body of believers got it for they are actually living it, praise the Lord.'

Paul has given us quite a mouthful in Philippians 2:2 where he has put on two arenas in which unity is essential. When he says being of one mind, having the same mind, points us to the unity of conviction. It has often been said that doctrine divides but Paul knows the proper role that doctrine must play, because far from dividing, doctrine carefully taught and correctly applied actually promotes and protects the unity of the church, rather than tearing it apart. Wherever we agree on the essentials of the Gospel we experience unity. Even when we are struggling with a difficult passage of what God is trying to say and we find disagreement in the capital city of the church among believers, Paul simply says to stand with what you know. God Himself will bring the rest into clear focus and unity will come. So wherever we agree on the essentials of the Gospel unity is the outcome. Truth matters.

Another way to say this is from a quote from John Adams, which I love. He as the second president of the United States and when he was defending the Brits who were on trial he said 'Facts are stubborn things but facts matter. Paul knows that a solid foundation is made up only of God's truth and it's the starting point for all Christian unity. Paul also knows there is a danger. We are called to speak truth in love and if all we know is truth/doctrine we can forget the part that matters so Paul calls us to unity in one more arena and that is the arena of compassion, in full accord, having the same love.

Paul tells us that while we're studying, teaching, ministering and striving to live for Jesus, remember love. You know that brother or sister you are struggling with because they are saying something contrary to what you're thinking, love them anyway. Perhaps that relationship at home that is difficult or that workplace environment that is stretching you thin, remember compassion, remember love. We need unity of conviction but we also equally need unity of compassion/love.

With both aspects of unity clearer on the table, Paul frames some specific instructions for us in the context of a negative/positive comparison. Philippians 2:3 says [3] *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* The negative is to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. The first time Paul used that phrase selfish ambition was in Philippians 1:17 which says [17] *The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.* Only here he was talking about those who were out there talking the talk of Jesus trying to make a name for themselves and trying to make it more difficult for Paul while he is still in jail, but now he is actually speaking this phrase to the church.

He is saying that the reality can be just the same inside the church as outside the church where selfish ambition can get in the way and make us ineffective in ministry. We can be the kind of church that others look to and say 'can you share with us how you are getting it done' and if we're not careful selfish ambition can creep in and get in the way. Every time selfish ambition creeps in the Gospel gets clouded, but he gives us a positive replacement.

That positive replacement for selfish ambition is in humility to count others more significant than yourselves. I know a few things that can put life back together into proper perspective better than this. In humility we are to see the value of others as though they are more important than ourselves. We're not talking about false humility. I believe false humility is one of the more severe forms of pride. Paul is also not talking about sitting in a corner as if you're a

worm, but he is saying that our default should be to care more about others even as you use the strengths God has given you it's for their benefit, for the strengthening of the church. So Paul challenges us to elevate our view of others while still addressing ourselves accurately for who God made us to be.

Then he returns to the negative in Philippians 2:4 which say [4] *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* It is okay to take care of yourself for you are to provide for your family but when it gets to be only about you, getting your way, having your agenda be what everyone does then we have things out of order. So Paul gives us the positive replacement for this by saying to look also to the interests of others. This 'other serving, self-denying' way of living is essential to the unity of the church. Selfish ambition, having ulterior motives or championing our own personal agendas blur the Gospel and harm the body of Christ so we must be busy replacing self-centered pride with other-centered humility as we seek the mind of Christ.

Most good preachers I've heard understand that after a lot of heavy preaching you need an illustration, something that can help us zoom out for a little bit due to getting a little too close and personal, just give me a story. Paul in this passage provides the illustration himself, because now Paul turns our attention to having the mind of Christ is a call for the church to follow Christ's example. He opens the next section with an imperative.

Philippians 2:5 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.* He puts this out as if this is non-negotiable. He is saying that this is what we as Christians must do – have the mind of Christ. The one problem with that is that it is impossible to have the mind of Christ if I'm doing it in my own strength. That is why Paul is keen on using the phrase 'which is yours in Christ Jesus.' That is how you have the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ, we have to be in Christ and Christ in us. That's the foundation to having the mind of Christ. Having that in mind Paul goes on to help us understand what this looks like.

Philippians 2:6–11 is known as the Messiah hymn or the Christ hymn. It was a poem likely sung in worship by the early church or at least used as a creed or responsive reading. I would love to hear someone put this to music so we can sing it in the modern church like they did in the early church. This would be something good to put to memory because in these few verses we have the entirety of the Gospel. In these few verse we have everything we need to know about who Christ is and what He came to do. We'll start back at verse 5.

Philippians 2:5–11 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The first point made in verse 5 and 6 is that Jesus is God. He is eternal, pre-existent, He existed before anything was in the form of God. He was God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I have tried to imagine God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in perfect co-unity with each other when nothing was and I can't do it. Where was He? There was nothing. Jesus was there. John calls Him the Logos – the Word. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). This takes us all the way back to Genesis 1:1–2 which says [1] *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the*

earth. [2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And when He spoke everything came into being. Paul is showing us the eternity and pre-existence of Christ.

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. Paul is helping us see here that Jesus being God didn't consider or count this equality with God as something to be ceased and used for His own personal advantage. Unlike Adam, who having listened to the serpent in the garden tried to cease equality with God by taking of the fruit so that his eyes would be open and he would be like God knowing good and evil. The Messiah who truly was God laid aside his glory or emptied Himself of all the privileges of worship that were rightfully His as King of the Universe and He became a Jewish baby. God the uncreated Creator stooped to become Man.

God who made man in His own image took on the form of the very man who rebelled and spit in His face so that He could become the Redeemer of all who believe. There is no greater humiliation than this, no greater condescension, no greater abandoning of yourself for the good of others. Not only did Jesus humble Himself by becoming humanity but He also became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Here we see the submission of God the Son to God the Father all the way to death, even death on the cross. The Romans are not the ones who invented crucifixion but they are the ones who perfected it. It was such a cruel and demeaning way for anyone to die that a Roman Senator Cicero would say 'It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen. To scourge him is a great wickedness. To put him to death is almost parricide for the killing of your own family. So what shall I say of crucifixion?'

Paul has now helped us see the mind of Christ is a mind committed to deliberate self-denial. In very real ways it is a mind that lays aside strengths that are rightfully ours in order that we might serve others and this is what Jesus Christ did. Every strength and praise that was rightfully His, He laid aside for us, for our benefit, for our gain. That is such humility. We see this humiliation of His coming down from glory all the way to His death on a cross.

In Philippians 2:9–11 through the power of God and His grace the shame of Jesus' death was reversed or overruled. How? It was by the resurrection and His ascension. *[9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Paul has just referred to the words of Isaiah some 800 years before this ever took place and Isaiah said this in Isaiah 45:21–23, *[21] Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. [22] "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. [23] By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'* So what are Paul's points?

Why does Paul go to this passage now? He is making the point that the God known as Yahweh throughout the Old Testament has been revealed as Jesus Christ the Lord in the New Testament. Jesus is God. He is the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah, yet there were no depths of humiliation He would not go so that we could know peace with God forever but on the

flip side there are no exaltation that the Father will withhold from Him because He submitted to God's plan. He will receive the Name, the Name above all other names.

What is that name? Jesus? Yes it is Jesus for He will save His people from their sins and that was the name given to Him at birth. Is His name Christ? Of course, it is for His title is Christ the Messiah, the Anointed One but that has been His from eternity past. What is the name He receives because He denied Himself, humbled Himself and obeyed the Father's plan all the way to death on the cross for you and for me? That name is Redeemer, Savior and Lord. It is the name above every name and at that name every knee will bow on earth, in heaven and under the earth with no exceptions.

All the angels who have been faithful to do God's bidding from the instant they were created, will declare Him Lord. Every creature will declare His glory. Every human that has ever lived will declare Him Lord, even that enemy of our souls, Satan himself, will say 'Jesus Christ You are Lord' and every one of his minions with him. But only those by grace in this life have received Jesus Christ by faith will call Him Savior and Lord. No wonder it's the most exalted Name, because it came at the highest cost.

Now we see how vast the mind of Christ is and now we see the enormity of the call before us. So what do we take away from all of this? It is having the mind of Christ calls us to humility, love and unity which gives us power to share the Gospel to God's glory. We are full circle back to L.E.A.D – a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship. Knowing the mind of Christ means I want to share it. Having the mind of Christ means I want to let other know what has been freely given to me can also become theirs by faith. Having the mind of Christ compels me to want to take the Gospel to someone who does not yet know and to pray for sinners to be converted.

Having the mind of Christ means I also need discipleship because when I am trying to do my Christian life as if I can do it all on my own I will pretty soon get these blinders on and they will start zooming in until they get narrower and I don't see what I need to see. That's why I need the body of Christ and you need me. We need one another to speak into each other's hearts and lives so that we might be an encourager. Yet there are also times we need someone who loves us enough, who is bold enough and confident enough to enter into our lives and point out things that need to be addressed because we want each other to be more like Christ. The mind of Christ calls us to evangelism and discipleship.

Maybe you are thinking you haven't ever had the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ can only be ours once we are in Christ, until then we are what Paul describes in I Corinthians 2 – the natural person who doesn't accept the things of God for they seem like foolishness to us and we're not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Is your heart still darkened? As our global mission's speaker said 'are you still a dead soul walking around in a dying body?' If the Holy Spirit is stirring you this morning, believe. Receive the Lord Jesus Christ for He is who He says He is. He died for you and if you'd like help knowing peace with God through Jesus Christ please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 because we have people who would love to talk and pray with you about starting a new life in Christ.

Maybe you're saying that you did this a long time ago, walking with Him for decades off and on but maybe you don't know if you still have the mind of Christ right now. Here you need to do some spiritual workouts where you develop some spiritual muscle. It's time to avail ourselves to the spiritual disciplines and the means of grace that are at our disposal when we come to worship on Sunday for it builds the muscle. When we come we don't veg out but we interact, we think, we take notes and go home and read them again. You may even go online and

listen again to the sermon to make sure you got the point loud and clear. It is called discipleship. We pray, encourage, come alongside each other for these are spiritual disciplines and means of grace that we need so that we might have the mind of Christ. We need each other to help us do that.

Set your minds on things above in place of selfish ambition which often tips its hand when you get angry or when you find yourself trying to manipulate other people so you can get your way or when you find yourself defying God saying 'I will not do what You say, I will do it my way.' That's our selfish ambition. We can't know the mind of Christ when we are defying Him. Humble yourself, every one of your strengths in submission to Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, help us because what Paul has shared with us is difficult to do, impossible for us to do on our own yet possible as believers because Your Spirit dwells within, now with Your Spirit apply Your Word deep into our hearts. By Your Spirit enable us, equip us, strengthen us and embolden us to be witnesses to share the great Good News that Jesus Christ is the way to know God and to have peace with God. Then let us be serious about the work of discipleship in each other's lives, encouraging one another that we might be armed ourselves and ready to stand with love against even the vilest attacks and to be acting toward each other with the deepest love and compassion toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. Unify Your church and receive great praise in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

I. Knowing the mind of Christ, Paul calls the church to Christian love and unity.

II. Having the mind of Christ, Paul calls the church to follow Christ's example.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Having the mind of Christ calls us to humility, love, and unity which gives us power to share the Gospel to God's glory.