

Servant

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- [0 : 0 0] Good evening. Hello. Good. Good. You're listening. All right. Let me start by praying.
- Father God, thank you that we can gather as your people here tonight. Well, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the example that he is for us.
- And more than that, thank you that because of his humility, because he was a humble servant, that we could come into relationship with you.
- Thank you that through him you've saved us and you've called us to be your people. And I pray that tonight as we're gathered here as your people, that you'll convict us, encourage us and challenge us to live more and more for you in the weeks, months and years ahead.
- In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, here we go. One last time. Now, I don't know about you, but I had a friend at school and basically I was only friends with him because he was big.
- [1 : 2 1] He'd like gone through puberty early or something. And I was little and he could protect me. That was the sort of basis for our friendship. But actually our friendship wasn't really that great because he wasn't really that nice.
- He was kind of selfish. He sort of, you know, I was being selfish with the friendship as well, wasn't I? Using him for size protection.
- But he, yeah, he just wasn't a very nice bloke. And if it wasn't for his size and his protection, I doubt either of us would have ever been friends.
- He had someone he could feel better than and I had someone who would protect me. I don't know if you've ever tried to be friends with someone who is really kind of selfish or perhaps a little bit arrogant.
- And whenever you talk to them, they're always talking about them and never you. They're always, you know, you come to them and you say, you know, I'm really struggling with this.
- [2 : 3 4] I find this really hard. And they say, and I am really good at those things, sir. I can help you, but you never get anything back.
- It's difficult, isn't it, to be friends with someone like that. Someone who's selfish, who's always centered on themselves. You're not really ever going to feel really united with them, are you?
- Obviously, one of the most uniting friendships a person can have is ultimately their marriage. But I don't know if you've ever gone, maybe you've gone out with someone, the pre-marriage stage, and they were a bit selfish.
- You only ever did what they wanted to do. You only ever did what they liked. Hung out at their favorite places. Hopefully, you weren't that desperate and that's not who you're now married to.
- But a relationship like that certainly wouldn't progress very far. A selfish relationship where one person takes and never gives.

[3 : 46] Certainly, a marriage wouldn't remain united for long unless there are two people willing to give and take.

Philippians 2, tonight's passage, is about three things, I think. Unity, humility, and then the bit after what we read, I think is about evangelism.

And so, in Youth at 10, which is a Bible study we have in the mornings, we started writing haikus to try and sum up the passage.

And I didn't write a haiku because that was too poetically challenging for me. But I did try and write some sort of little statement to try and capture what I'm going to try and show you this passage is saying tonight.

So, here we go. Banjo Patterson, eat your heart out. Unity flows as the community grows and the gospel goes.

[4 : 55] That's genius.

Day of life that is only possible through basing our lives on the life of our great servant and saviour, Jesus Christ.

So, what I'm going to do is try and run us through the passage so that you can see where I've pulled these three stanzas from, three verses, three lines. Unity flows, the community grows, and the gospel goes.

And hopefully then we'll start a process of reflecting on how this works for us as a church. So, let's start digging into the passage.

It really is a beautiful passage tonight, a favourite of many in the Bible. A passage about Jesus Christ, this humble servant.

[6 : 13] But it's actually about a lot more than that. If anything, the story of Jesus the humble servant is but a sideshow.

An illustration. Because this is a passage that tells us how to live like Christ. How to live as people who follow Jesus.

It's a guide to being Christ-like. And if you look at the opening verses of chapter 2, you see Paul's main concern.

It's a concern of his throughout the letter of Philippians. And it's a concern for unity. Look at verse 2. Be of the same mind, same love, full accord, one mind.

Paul wants unity. And if you look into the previous chapter, in chapter 1, you'll see in verse 29 that the church has been suffering.

[7 : 18] That things haven't been going so well for them. And that his concern for them is to not fold under the pressure of this suffering. But to stay together, united.

To stay trusting in Christ. You see, suffering is hard work. Suffering, at worst, could pull the church apart. And suffering could lead to a divided church.

Suffering could lead to a place where church is not somewhere. You want to come to. After you face suffering from the world.

So, even though humility is a really big theme in this passage, it's secondary. It's primarily unity that Paul is concerned with.

But the road to that unity is through humility. Look at verse 3. So, straight after the call for unity in verse 2, we get this verse 3.

[8 : 23] This call for humility. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. In humility, regard others as better than yourselves. And then it continues.

Verse 4. Look not to your own interests, but the interests of others. Don't be selfish. Be humble. And then verse 5, he gives the reason.

Why? Because you are in Christ. You need to be Christ-like. You need to be like Jesus. And then he gives this beautiful piece of poetry, really.

A hymn, some suggest. One of the first. About what Jesus was like. It's in two parts. Verses 6 to 8. And then 9 to 11.

What was Jesus like? He was God. Verse 6. But he chose not to use his rights. He chose not to exploit that position he had. But rather, verse 7, he emptied himself and he became a human.

[9 : 30] Now, I think this is sort of like the Governor-General. So, I studied public policy, which was a bit boring. But it did give me a helpful analogy.

It's finally come in use, my Bachelor of Arts tonight. The Governor-General, I learnt, has all the power in our system of government.

She, I think we've got a she, Governor-General at the moment. She can, in theory, according to our constitution, basically do whatever she wants. She can stop whatever law she wants.

She can send the army wherever she wants. She has all the power. But we've built up this system of conventions and democracy over time that means she actually doesn't have it.

But ignore that part. And just pretend that really she does have all the power. It's kind of like that. The Governor-General has all the power, but doesn't use it so that we can live in this democracy that we live in.

[10 : 37] Now, well, Jesus had all the power and privilege of God, but chose, rather than staying there and keeping that, to become a man.

But not only that, in verse 8, not only did he become a man, not only did he deny the rights that he had, but he humbled himself even further.

He didn't become the best of men, but he became the lowest of men and died the worst of deaths. That's humility.

The Undercover Boss analogy will work for you. This one was helpfully suggested to me by Matt Sheffer this week. It's kind of like the show Undercover Boss.

Who's seen Undercover Boss? About four people. Maybe it's not that helpful. All right. Well, in Undercover Boss, right, they go to these big companies and they get the CEO to shave his head, stick on a fake moustache, and go into the sort of bottom rung of his business and see what is going on.

[12 : 21] So the one I watched, we had this CEO of a university, chancellor or whatever he was called, and he sort of came and he had to give a lecture and he went on a tour with the tour guide people and he did all these things to see how his university was functioning.

But as he was doing that, as he was masquerading as one of these people, he still had all the power of the chancellor. He could have fired the people he was with.

He could have changed everything. He could have ripped his mask off and said, ha, I'm the chancellor. But he didn't. He humbled himself in order, in that case, to learn.

Well, Jesus humbled himself not to learn, not to see what it was like, though he did see what it was like to be a human. But he humbled himself to the point of death for us.

And then verses 9 to 11, they give us the result of his humility. He was exalted.

[13 : 28] He was above everything. He's so high and exalted that all will worship him. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

The humble servant becomes the king of the world. So here's what we have so far.

We are told in verse 5 that we need to be humble because Jesus was humble. And then 6 to 11 unpacks the nature of Christ's humility.

And then before that, in verses 2 to 4, we get told that we need to be humble so that we can be united. If you jump down into the next section from verses 12 to about verse 18 there, you see this one more thing, particularly in verses 14 and 15.

He wants us to be humble, to not murmur and argue, which requires humility, so that we can shine as stars in the world.

[14 : 41] So the world throws persecution and suffering at us.

And Jesus suffered in this world. And he's our model.

He was humble. He was humble. And as we face suffering, as the Philippians face suffering, then they needed to and we need to respond in humility.

Denying our rights. Sticking together. Being united. And as we do those things, we'll shine like stars to this world.

See, Paul is pleading here for a unity that comes via humility and leads to us shining as stars in this dark world.

[15 : 47] And this is where my poem comes in. Unity flows as the community grows via humility and the gospel goes.

It goes out into the world because we're living this humble life as a church, as Christians, and we shine like stars in it.

And we tell of the reason for our humility. So if we want to live out the Christ-centered life, if we want to be united as a church, then we need to be humble.

Which is a simple idea, but very difficult to work out in practice. What does humility look like?

I think Paul gives us four things, and I want to unpack these and see how these things might... Give my suggestions for how some of these things might work out in our life together.

[16 : 51] So the first one there is in verse 14. I'm going to go from bottom back to the top because the first... I didn't want to end on a negative, basically.

And I wanted to keep some structure. So, verse 14. No murmuring or arguing. I don't know about you, but I've read this passage.

You might not have read this passage much as I have this week. But when I read this passage, again and again and again this week, every time I read that bit, it got... It just smacked me over the head.

I am a murmurer and an arguer by nature. I've been trained to be a critical thinker. And on one level, that's a good thing.

But on another level, that's a bad thing. Because I can take my critical mind into just about any place I want. I can critique anyone I want. And I can be arrogant.

[17 : 52] Selfish. I judge and I murmur and I argue. And I always want my own way. And I feel like I'm not alone in that.

I feel like I hear a lot of murmuring. Perhaps a little less arguing. But a lot of murmuring and a reasonable amount of arguing.

And it shouldn't be the case. Paul here is painting a picture of a church that is different. He's saying, don't do it.

And I think it's a sad thing, isn't it? That for most people, if they were to walk in off the streets, they might see little difference in terms of murmuring and arguing in a church as they would in their local footy club or at their job or wherever it might be.

Factions, gossip, arguing, murmuring. Selfishness and lack of humility. And it should not be. And it will never be perfect.

[19 : 10] But I think it can be better. I don't think Paul would have told us not to do it if it wasn't possible to achieve it. It can be different.

And it can be different because we're in Christ. And we are to have the same attitude that he had. He was the humble servant. And so we should be humble servants of each other too.

Not murmuring or arguing, but denying our rights. Seeking the good of others. And that leads us on to what we should do. Verse 4.

We should put the interests of others before ourselves. And this can work out in all sorts of ways. There's all sorts of ways you can put the interests of others before your own.

But one great example from this church was earlier in the year when I did something horrible to my foot and couldn't walk and was bounding around on crutches a bit like Matt is today.

[20 : 16] One of the ladies from the morning services took pity on me, put the interests of her savings and whatever else, and bought me an expensive piece of footwear so that I didn't need crutches anymore.

And I walked around with this moon boot for about a month. That was putting my interests before hers. There was no reason for her to buy the moon boot for her.

She didn't get anything out of it. Unless she liked to watch me walk without crutches, I suppose. But that's a bit awkward. So there was nothing in it for her.

So all there was was a generous act of selfless putting the interests of others before her own. It doesn't have to be financial.

There's all sorts of ways. Basically, doing anything that has no benefit for you but has benefit for others. What about treating others better than yourselves in verse 3?

[21 : 32] Sorry, not treating, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Well, this is tough because that's not how we think, is it? That's not how I think.

I mean, I'm leaving soon so I can be really honest, can't I? I'm basically the best preacher this church has had in 25 years.

And I can't work out why I haven't been up here more often. Yeah, that's sort of how we're trying to think. We're not going to do anything or serve in any way unless we're the best we can be.

We won't sing. We won't because we've seen better singers. Or we constantly think, oh, I could do that better. I could be better than that. I think I'm a bit better than him.

I'll come to this church. And there's a few people who are a bit more socially awkward than me. So I can fit in here. I'll make some friends. Or there's people that aren't quite like this or like that. Or they're fatter than me or skinnier than me.

[22 : 33] Or whatever it is. We're constantly comparing ourselves to others and then trying to find places where we think people will think we're pretty good.

But it's not actually about that, is it? It's not about trying to work out who you're better than. It's about thinking everyone else, thinking of others as better than yourself.

It's not about comparing yourself. But of thinking of others as more deserving. Of rejoicing in their successes.

Of not hoping for something bad to happen to that person who you just can't quite figure out how you're better than them. It's hard. But we can do it.

We can do it first by remembering Jesus, who's way better than us. But who still chose to humbly take a low position and die a horrible death.

[23 : 39] And take the punishment that we deserved for us. He thought of, really in one sense, of us as being better than himself.

See, if he just thought of himself, he wouldn't have done it. But he thought of others as better than himself. Of deserving of his grace. We need to swallow our pride and celebrate those who are better than us.

And then be glad that they're better. Celebrate those people who you're most jealous of.

And see that as the antidote to this problem of thinking you're the best. Everyone else is the best.

Verse 3. Nothing should be done from selfish ambition or conceit. I mean, this is also a struggle for many people.

[24 : 44] For me. We live in a selfish world and it trains us to be selfish people. And we can do good things for selfish reasons.

This doesn't say... I just found it really interesting that he didn't say, don't do anything bad from selfish ambition, but it's okay if you do some good things. Nothing should be done from selfish ambition or conceit.

Think of a sermon. A very good thing. But I can put hours and hours of work into a sermon. I can think hard and hard and hard about what I want to say so that you guys will say nice things about me when I leave.

Or so that Andrew will give me a pat on the back when he reviews the sermon later in the week. Or for a whole myriad of selfish reasons.

Not because I want the word of God to be carefully handled and faithfully preached. No. Sorry.

[25 : 59] That's what I should be doing. But I can very easily turn a good thing like preaching and preparing a sermon into something that really I shouldn't be doing at all if I do it for selfish reasons.

And if I have to watch myself and guard myself against that for something like a sermon, well then I imagine we need to do likewise for anything that we do.

Be it helping someone. Be it. Be it. Making coffee. Reading the Bible up the front. Praying. Being a nice person.

Can all be done for selfish or conceited reasons. But they actually need to be done because we're humbly serving each other as Christ humbly served us.

Unity flows as we remember who we are. We're the people of God. We're in Christ. We're to have the mind of Christ. And as we live in humility, our community grows.

[27 : 10] We're centered on Christ. We're Christ-like. The humility that we should have because Jesus humbled himself will overflow into a community that grows.

And the gospel will go because we will shine to outsiders. A Christ-centered, other-person-focused community makes us shine as stars to the world.

A humble people looking always to the interests of others is a beautiful thing, a rare thing. And as we go and preach the gospel, we need to make sure that we back it up, not just with words, but with the power of a community transformed by Jesus, a humble community that shines like a star.

And can you imagine, just for a second, if the world saw the people of God, if the world saw Christians, not as I think it often does, some sort of uptight, moral, kind of whinging, people who care only about themselves and their rights and no one else's, but imagine if they saw a church that was humble, that loved each other, that put each other first, who loved their neighbours as themselves, even though perhaps their neighbours voted against their rights, moved against their rights, took away their rights for free speech or whatever it might be.

Imagine if they saw people who were punched and kicked, either literally or metaphorically, over and over again, but they remained together, united, humble, serving each other, loving each other, and loving those who did it to them.

[29 : 11] Now, that would be something. That would be something that shone brightly, like a star in the night. That would be something different, something supernatural.

That would be the people of God, living like Jesus, humbly putting the needs of others first, striving to be like Him.

See, Jesus was God, and He chose to become a man. And He chose not only to be a man, He chose to be a poor, homeless man, who died a horrible death.

And the world really judged Him a failure, but we know He wasn't a failure. His death has achieved our salvation. His death, as we see in this chapter, achieved His glorification.

He is the one whom all will bow down and worship as Lord. And so, we should be of the same mind as Jesus.

[30 : 24] Unity flows as the community grows, through humility, and the gospel goes. If we're going to change this world, which I believe we can do, then we need to start, first, with our own hearts.

Are we humble? Do we think of others as better than us? Do we put the needs of others before our own? Are we striving to be united as a people of God?

And then we need to look at our relationships with other Christians, other people who aren't yet Christians.

How do we relate to them? Are we humble? Do we put their needs first? Do we seek to serve them? I think we can often get it wrong, perhaps corporately more so than individually, but we seem to try and be on this journey to legislate the gospel or to legislate morality.

And we try all sorts of fancy tricks to grow our church or to get people to come and darken the doors of a church to fix up their lives.

[31 : 39] But I believe, really, we have here a simple method. We simply need to be a united community of humble people who put others first.

And that becomes an uncoverable, an unable to be covered, bright light for all to see. We won't need to do much more if we live as humble people, Christ, centred on Christ.

We won't need to do much more than simply explain why this community we have is so good, why it's so united, why we love it so much.

So let's be a humble, united church who shine as stars in this dark world for the glory of Jesus.

Amen.