

11th October, 2020

Attitude

Philippians 2:1-13

Next Sunday 18th October we celebrate our 143rd Church Anniversary. Unfortunately, we cannot get together to worship, and enjoy a meal together. But we can remember God's faithfulness and provision through all the generations. Trust you have received our Anniversary card, if not it is on its way! May we take time to reflect on what God has done in and through this fellowship and give Him the Glory for the great things He has done! In our reflection may we give thanks for the faithfulness of God's people who have been committed to making God's name famous in this community.

Our anniversary card highlights our Thanksgiving Day projects, which include heating/cooling for the chapel, and carpet tiles for the fellowship room. If you would like to contribute on line, please nominate the No 2 account for your gift, or speak to Jeff Parsons.

As we praise God for past, present and future members let us remember, that our future, and our growth, depends upon us being filled with God's Spirit, being submissive to God's Word, being yielded to God's sovereign rule and being committed to God's purpose. May we have a very happy 143rd Anniversary.

In the middle of the first century A.D., the Apostle Paul planted a small church in Philippi. It was one of his strongest young churches, a congregation that shared in Paul's ministry from its very beginning. Some years later, Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians, partly to thank them for their financial support (4:15-20) and partly to deal with problems in the church. One of these issues involved two prominent church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, who were not getting along (4:2-3). These two leading women, and perhaps others in the congregation who were taking sides with one or the other, needed **an attitude adjustment!**

Charles Swindoll, wrote about Attitudes in this small summary that has been an inspiration to many. Put it on your desk or on your fridge to remind you; He wrote:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

And so, it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes".

The Attitude of Christ

Paul calls the Philippian believers to think and feel in a new way: *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ."* (2:5). The Greek verb translated as "let the same mind be in you" has to do not just with intellectual activity, but also with one's feelings or disposition. So, several contemporary translations speak not of thinking, but of attitude:

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had” (NLT, 2nd ed.)

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (1984 NIV).

What is this attitude of Christ? Paul answers this question not so much with logical description as with poetic narration. For nearly a century chapter 2:6-11 has been known as an early hymn. Obviously, the passage matters to Paul, he issues a masterful and evocative contrast between the pattern of life, and Jesus’ humility in verses 5-8.

- *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, v5*
- *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, v6*
- *but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, v7*
- *He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. v8*

Jesus, though *“in the form of God,”* or as the NIV puts it, *“in very nature God,”* did not hang onto his divine prerogatives v6. Rather, he *“emptied himself”* and became human, even assuming *“the form of a slave”* v 7. The use of *“slave/servant”* emphasizes the lowliness of Jesus’ life and his sacrificial servanthood throughout his earthly life.

Though he was God in human flesh, Jesus did not hobnob with the rich and famous. Rather, he lived among and loved the poor, the sick, and the needy.

The humility of Jesus didn’t end with his incarnation, however. Rather, he humbled himself still further *“and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross”* v8. Crucifixion, one of the cruellest means of capital punishment ever devised, was reserved for the lowest of the low in the Roman Empire. The cross of Jesus represented the ultimate in humiliation.

Imitating the Attitude of Christ

Paul calls the Philippians who were puffed up with their own ideas and self-importance to have the attitude of Christ, an attitude of humility, self-sacrifice, and servanthood. What Jesus exemplified in his incarnation and crucifixion; the Philippians are to imitate in their daily lives.

Just as Jesus gave up his privileges, so should they.

Just as Jesus served, so should they.

Just as Jesus sacrificed, so should they.

And so, should we. The call of Scripture to have the attitude of Christ speaks to us just as pointedly as it once spoke to the Philippians. We too live in a time when people get so caught up in themselves that they neglect the concerns of others. Our workplaces are often filled with strife as colleagues try to out-position each other for raises and promotions.

It can seem as if the self-promoting folk get all the rewards, whereas the servants are largely taken for granted. You can work faithfully in a company for decades, only to lose the promotion you had expected to some brash, young outsider. How tempting it is to neglect that attitude of Christ and take on an attitude of greed and self-promotion!

When we embrace servanthood in imitation of Christ, then we can be set free to live in a completely different way. We’ll find new joy in helping others. What we might have experienced as inconvenient distractions can become chances to live like Christ.

A few hundred years ago, there were a few men and they were digging out this huge stump from the ground. They couldn’t move it. A man came by on a horse and asked the

corporal, who was standing there next to his soldiers, what they were doing. He told the man they were trying to dig out this big stump from the ground. The guy on the horse asked the corporal, “Why aren’t you helping?” The corporal looks at him and says, “I’m the corporal. I give the orders.” At that point, George Washington got off of his horse, took up a shovel and started to dig it out with these soldiers. They got it moving. He got back on his horse and said to the corporal, “If you ever need any help, just ask for the commander-in-chief. I’d be happy to come help.”

So, if we see our whole life, including our workplace, as a context for servanthood. This service might come in the actual functioning of our job, as we do what we’re being paid to do. It might come, instead, as we care for the people around us, using free moments to encourage them, thank them, or listen to their concerns.

Such servanthood sometimes brings earthly rewards on the job. Our colleagues might appreciate our efforts and tell us so. The boss might even recognize us and reward us. But, all too often, servanthood goes unnoticed or unappreciated. The executive who graciously sets up chairs for the meeting gets overshadowed by her colleague who grandstands before the boss. So, other than pure obedience to God’s Word, what might motivate us to imitate the servant attitude of Jesus?

The End of the Story

We left v8 with the humiliating death of Jesus. If this were the end of the story, Jesus would have been long forgotten and would scarcely provide a model of the kind of attitude we should have in our life and work. But the crucifixion of Jesus was not the end. Rather, because of Jesus’ self-sacrifice:

- *Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name v9*
- *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth v10*
- *and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. V11*

Jesus receives the greatest honour that could be bestowed on anyone: the very name of God and the worship that belongs to God alone. This passage looks forward to a time when all beings will bow before the authority of Jesus. If we’re living to serve the Lord in every part of our life, then we can be confident that our servanthood will be rewarded by him, even if it is ignored by our co-workers and superiors. When we embody the attitude of Christ, we know that God is pleased with our efforts. Moreover, we believe that God will one day reward us when we stand before His throne of grace.

So, we choose the servant attitude of Christ, partly because it’s the right, God-honouring thing to do, and partly because of the rewards that lay ahead for us. We are able to serve the people around us even if our efforts are ignored or even scorned. We serve others for the sake and pleasure of our heavenly master.

The verses that follow only affirm further Paul’s encouraging of obedience v12, and constructive public witness v14-16. The language “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” v12 is troublesome for some Protestants, who fear it implies a form of “works righteousness.” But Paul’s focus in Philippians 2:1-13 has nothing to do with salvation (how one is saved). Instead, Paul is concerned here with how “saved” (believing) people *live out* their salvation *here and now in the world*. And these are

matters of obedience, humility, unity, and public witness -- *“for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure”* v13.

Having the mind of Christ / the same attitude as Christ changes everything

When we properly understand the Gospel, it is precisely because of what Jesus did that Christians have any claim to a right relationship with God or the world. We have no right to boast. We are recipients of God’s love and forgiveness. It is that grace that calls us to be together in the world. Secure in that relationship, we are able to let Jesus guide our behaviour on a daily basis.

Having the mind of Christ means that I cannot think of myself better than anyone. We are called to love others just as Jesus has loved us. This means that the immigrant, the refugee, and the victim of sexual assault are just as important in God’s eyes as the rich, the powerful, and the native born.

This is the divine reality that Paul was reminding his readers of. Christian unity is not based on similarity, location, shared politics or a sense of general affection. It is based on self-giving love of Jesus Christ.

Even his favourite church, the one that had given him so much joy, was tempted to forget that from time to time. If they need a reminder, so do we. Let us always remember what Christ has done for us, and let that knowledge cause us to empty ourselves in compassion for the world.

Meditation & Prayer:

In the stillness consider, because you have been encouraged by His love, because you have participated in his Spirit, because the affection of the Father flows over your life, and because He looks upon you with sympathy....because that’s all true, would you lay down your pride and receive the humility he’s calling you to walk in?

In light of that, “Lord, please help us be people who see other people. Help us be people who serve other people. Help us be the type of people who sacrifice in the way that you’ve sacrificed for us. Help us live in your way with your heart. In the name of Jesus, Amen”.