

“Why Should We Listen to Jesus, Part II?”

Philippians 2:1-11

Last Sunday we looked at Matt. 17:1-9 and studied God’s words spoken to Peter, James and John when Jesus temporarily appeared in His glory, ‘This is my Son with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!’ God commands us to listen to Jesus because He is the Son of God. Doing what Jesus says will also result in living a life that pleases God. This morning I want to look at a familiar passage in Philippians 2:1-11 and show us some more reasons why we should listen to what Jesus says in the Bible.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the believers in Philippi, Paul was in a Roman jail under what they called house arrest. He was arrested because the message of Jesus that he was preaching opposed the message of Rome. Namely, that the emperor while human, was also considered a god so you must worship him and obey his laws.

While sharing the gospel in Philippi itself, Paul was beaten and thrown in jail (Acts 16:20). This was the charge laid against him and Silas:

“These men are Jews and throwing our city into an uproar by 21 advocating customs not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

But when the magistrates learned Paul was a Roman citizen they told the jailer just to quietly release them, ³⁷ *But Paul said to them, “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”* ³⁸ *The officers reported this to magistrates and when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens they were alarmed.* ³⁹ *They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.*

But Paul continued to preach the gospel of Jesus wherever he went which bothered the Romans and eventually resulted in Paul’s death. The real reason? Telling people that Jesus was fully human and fully God and as such alone deserved the title Lord and Saviour – not the Emperor.

So Paul writes to the Philippians to hang in there and keep preaching Jesus is Lord knowing they could and would suffer for it. Paul knew the consequences of preaching the message of Jesus in a culture that rejects Jesus. He finished Ch. 1 by saying,

²⁷ *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. 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, contending as one for the faith of the gospel* ²⁸ *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—and that by God.* ²⁹ *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,* ³⁰ *since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

So this is the immediate context of 2:1-11. Paul encourages suffering believers through a deeper theology of who Jesus is. Why should we listen to Jesus if it causes us to suffer? Why should we listen to Jesus when our government or family or friends don’t believe He is Saviour and Lord?

The irony of Philippians is Paul writes from jail to Christians who might also get thrown in jail to know the joy of the Lord!

Here are more reasons why we need to listen to Jesus: We need to listen to Jesus . . .

If We Want to Experience Eternal Joy Now **(2:1-4)**

Paul wanted to encourage these Jesus followers don't cave in; hang in there. Why? Because true joy is found in a relationship with Jesus regardless of circumstances. This joy that Paul writes about is

Only available through Christ (v.1)

When Paul says "If you have . . ." [4x] in v.1, it's a stylistic Greek construction that is rhetorical with the appropriate response being 'Yes you do'. *"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, [and of course you do], if any comfort from his love, [of course you do], if any common sharing in the Spirit, [of course you have] if any tenderness and compassion, [yes, yes and yes] . . .* then make my joy complete . . .

What Paul is stressing is there are greater privileges from being a citizen of heaven through Jesus Christ than being a Roman citizen. If we are persecuted for the gospel we are encouraged because we are united in Christ. The word for "united" means He's beside us. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He went through a greater persecution and He's in glory – that's our privilege as well.

We have experienced the comfort of His love – agape love. Selfless, sacrificial, He'll-do-anything-for-us love. He's there when we need Him. He loves us. We have koinonia/-fellowship with His Spirit. The Spirit dwells in us. We share this bond together in Christ.

Christ's love for us is deep. The word 'tenderness' is the word 'splanchna' which means comes from the guts/within and compassion means mercy. We have a merciful Saviour who doesn't treat us as we deserve but is graciously for us always. These are the benefits of being in Christ. For a Roman, status was everything. Paul says, if we speak the message of Jesus that goes against the message of the culture we have greater status in heaven. Take joy and comfort from your position in Christ when you are being persecuted for your faith or for your faith.

Paul's main command is "make my joy complete" in v.2. He listed 4 reasons why we can stand secure and have joy in Christ, now he encourages them to fill him with joy by listening to Christ. And if this filled Paul up with joy then it will also fill us with joy. If we want to experience eternal joy now it's only available through a relationship by faith with Jesus and

Yet it increases as we serve one another (vv.2-4)

When we are struggling in our faith or for our faith we have a tendency to isolate ourselves and not fellowship which Paul says is the exact opposite of what we need. This is the tool of Satan to keep us focused on ourselves and not on others. The more we focus on ourselves the less joy we have. Paul says make my joy complete by staying close together. How? *"by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."* When we're struggling we often have the tendency to withdraw instead of reach out and serve. We'll serve more

By focusing on God's purposes (v.2)

Like-minded and one in purpose refers to keeping our focus Biblical or God-centered. Our personal struggles can cause us to lose God's focus. God's purpose is always to conform us into Christ and glorify Himself. If that's not central to our thinking we won't experience His joy, simple as that.

The key to our joy is counter-cultural. The world says you'll be happy if you do what you want and acquire what you want. God says the exact opposite. ³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of the others.*

We experience God's joy when we focus on God's purposes. . .

To meet others' needs (vv.3-4)

Paul gave an example of selfish ambition in 1:16 when he said some Christians were preaching Christ out of "selfish ambition", by making Paul look bad hoping that they would look good. Never works that way. I like how Paul gives us the opposite of selfish ambition and vain conceit (which is all about yourself), in humility consider others better than yourselves, looking out for their interests as well as your own.

But the problem we have is we don't "consider" others enough. Paul's not saying don't consider your own interests but consider others **as much** if not more than your own. The root of the word consider actually means to 'lead others'. If you're leading others you have to think about them, about their abilities and their needs. We value others by showing we care about their interests and needs.

That means we have to notice or ask what their interests are. This means we have to ask or pay more attention to others. If you are the kind of person that never knows how to talk to others ask them about their family, their work, their interests and their concerns. If you're praying through the church directory stop and consider them for a moment: what do I know about that person? What concerns might they have right now that I need to pray about? Is there anything I can do to meet their needs? How can I show I am interested in what they are interested in. Which isn't easy because we're not interested in the same things. That's where thinking about others as more important than ourselves comes in.

How often has this happened for you: There's a church activity or family event or social activity that you're kids/spouse want to go to. You'd rather not because it doesn't interest you (or, if we're really honest we're being selfish and we just don't want to be bothered). But you go because you realize you need to go. And surprise, surprise you enjoyed it and connected with people. Why? Because you put others ahead of yourself and you encouraged them by your presence. And you experienced God's joy as a result. This is how God wired us, to connect with each other. And all the more so if we have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

In humility consider others better than yourselves (because they are better at something than we are so we can always learn from them) and look out for their interests and concerns. When we do that we experience the joy that comes through oneness in fellowship with each other in Christ. This is why we need to listen to Jesus. So serving others is for our own good. And this of course is what Jesus did and why we need to listen to Jesus . . .

If We Want to Reflect Jesus to the Lost Around us **(2:5-8)**

In v.5 Paul commands us *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”* Jesus lived sacrificially to serve others. How did He do that?

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [or used to his own advantage]; ⁷but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and become obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Jesus was so anti-Roman in His approach to living as a human. Romans lived selfishly, always pursuing the next rung in the social ladder of success. Everything was about status and honour. Slaves were nothing, citizens were everything. A Roman citizen was respected. They had access to recreational events, tax breaks and legal protection. Paul was a Roman citizen but he didn't use his rights for selfish pursuits.

Jesus became a slave. He didn't use His deity to elevate Himself. He never stopped any mistreatment He received by saying 'Excuse me, I am the Son of God you know.' Even on the cross when He was directly challenged *'Save yourself! Come down from the cross if You are the Son of God.'* But He didn't because of you and me. So to have the same attitude of Jesus is to live counter cultural and

Resist the temptation to honour yourself (vv.5-7)

Jesus didn't say to God when God suggested the incarnation plan to save us, 'What? You want me, the Son of God to become one of them? How humiliating!' Instead He made Himself nothing – or emptied Himself. That doesn't mean He left His deity in heaven, it means He disguised His deity with humanity and set aside His desire to use His deity to honour Himself. He left that to God.

Jesus took the very nature of a slave, not a political leader. Jesus was just another Jewish man who lived under the thumb of Roman rule. He challenged the rule of the day not by overthrowing the government but by living selflessly; a very unRoman like thing to do. To the point where He allowed Himself to be humiliated and tortured so that we might believe in Him and be forgiven of our sins. Jesus' purpose in life was *“It's not about me”* even though one day it will be. He put aside His rights and interests for our needs.

He submitted to God's plan to save others (v.8)

Which is what the Scriptures tells us to do too. You see when we accept Christ as our Saviour we automatically receive eternal life. We'll get to spend eternity with God but at the present we receive the Spirit who helps us taste glimpses of eternity now. So for now we need to live humbly like Jesus for the purpose of saving others. I think we forget that's why we're here; to reflect Jesus to a lost world. To live a counter-cultural life, not seeking our own honour but God's honour by pointing people to Him through Jesus.

Jesus allowed God to lead His life even in suffering so that we and others would get the chance to hear the gospel and some of us respond to it. That's why Jesus did what He did, for others. It wasn't about His honour and exaltation – that will come one day (vv.9-11), it was about our salvation. Our purpose in life isn't our job or to have a nice retirement or even to raise good kids. Our

purpose is to reflect Jesus to a lost world starting with our kids and at work and even after we retire. That never changes. We can get caught up in our families, our jobs and our retirement as if they're the goal in life if we're not careful because that's how the world lives. But God gives us all that so we can reflect Jesus, pointing our children, grandchildren, co-workers, classmates, teammates and friends to Jesus. Because the real life is yet to come and we want to take as many as we can with us for that.

The reason why Jesus could submit then is because He knew what the future would hold – and now we do to. And so like Jesus, we need to listen to Him . . .

To Be Able to Patiently Wait for our Eternal Rewards **(2:9-11)**

One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus has always known this but He didn't demand to be worshipped when He was on earth. He's patiently waiting for God to exalt Him in God's timing.

If we're looking to be exalted on this earth we don't have Jesus' attitude. God does exalt us at times by putting us in positions of influence and responsibility. Every one of us has that at some level whether as a parent over seeing children or as a worker overseeing other workers. The example of Jesus is lead with humility and a servant spirit because people respond better to humility than they do to arrogance. Think about your favourite boss or teacher or coach? Why did you like them? Because they weren't arrogant right? Because they were humble enough to show they were real and you respected them and as a result learned from them.

The vast majority of people don't act like that but God's people are to act like that. We're to follow the example of Jesus by having His attitude. And humility doesn't mean putting yourself down. Jesus never put Himself down. He knew exactly who He was and who He was to God. He entrusted Himself to God, humbled Himself to be one of us, came to show He was more interested in us than Himself and died for the entire world knowing many would never accept Him. And He did this for the joy of seeing us join Him in eternity. In Heb. 12:2-3 we read,

Let us ² fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith who for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Consider Jesus. Think about His example for us. Listen to what He did for us in the Word; pay attention to what He said for us to do. Here Paul tells us to listen to Jesus by examining how he lived. How He gave up His rights for others (us) with the desire to save some. This implies He was thinking about us, thinking about how to serve us and meet our needs.

The letter to the Philippians exudes with joy, even though Paul was in jail when he wrote it, the Philippians were suffering for the gospel and the church was experiencing dissension within (ch.4). We can have that joy too if we keep listening to Jesus, follow His example of serving others, seeking to reflect Him to the lost around us and humbly waiting for exaltation day when Jesus returns. The world will take notice when we listen to Jesus because so few do. Yet it will attract them because they're tired of trying to impress others, achieve temporal status and empty success and wealth. They lack purpose and hope. And we have it through Jesus. Are you ready to serve others to meet their real needs in Jesus?

* * * * *
If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
at olivet@rideau.net