

Chapel Devotions for January 13, 2021

Living for Others - Philippians 2:1-11

One could hardly think of Paul as pastor Paul. We view him more as a church planter, traveling from one province and city to another.

St. Luke in Acts 20 gives us a portrayal of Paul that is very pastoral. In this farewell address to the Ephesian elders, one will discover a number of principles for pastoral leadership, one of which is the principle of humility (Acts 20:19). "Serving the Lord with all humility and tears and with trials ..."

His correspondence with the churches also gives us a window into his pastoral heart and his love for the church. One such letter was sent to the Church at Philippi, most likely his favorite congregation. At least sixteen times the words joy, rejoice or rejoicing are mentioned in those four brief chapters. He appreciated their partnership in the gospel when he arrived on European soil, as well as his deep gratitude for their love gift to him while in prison.

Two areas of pastoral concern seem to surface, the first is the agitation posed by false teachers addressed in the first three chapters and some conflict by two women leaders addressed in chapter four. Chapter 2 verses 1-4 carries the theme of living for others in the fellowship of the Spirit, cultivating a submissive mind infused with love and compassion for each other, and promoting unity instead of uniformity well illustrated in verses 5 to 11.

I would like to highlight four things that are characteristic of those who live for others.

1. They think of others, vv. 5-6:

Jesus is the model of selfless living. "Who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." The idea of having the "form" of God is not a physical caricature of God, rather it is an outward expression of an inward nature. He had all the attributes of God, he was equal with God, yet Paul said, he did not regard his equality with God something to be held selfishly. His attitude mentioned in verse 5, which we are to emulate was that of unselfish concern for others. Luther described the sinful life as a self-enclosed life. (Unknown source). Jesus had all the privileges and glories of heaven, yet for the sake of others he would lay them down. We would expect unsaved people to be selfish, but not followers of Jesus. We are so privileged by receiving so much of the love of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit, that our response should only be an unselfish response.

2. They think of service to others, v.7:

"But emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." Again, the outward expression of an inward nature - He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk.10:45). Jesus thought of others and became a servant. Jesus was truly a servant, not an actor playing the part of a servant. He was the servant of Yahweh described by Isaiah, especially in chapter 53 of this great prophecy. John, chapter 13, is a testimonial to his servant leadership. He took the towel and basin and washed the feet of his disciples as an example of humility for us all.

Princess Diana and Mother Teresa died just days apart in the late summer of 1997. One was royalty and lived with all the trappings of a princess. The other was plain and simple and changed the lives of the poorest of the poor. On the streets of Kolkata (formally Calcutta), she spent a lifetime caring for the poorest of the poor. Here is a quote from her: "Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier." (Mother Teresa). Like Jesus, Mother Teresa lived with so much joy, because they both lived to serve others.

3. They live a life of sacrifice, v. 8:

"Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Sacrifice is more than an inconvenience of our schedule. Some people lose interest when there is a price to be paid. It is said of a fellow who set out to climb Mt. Everest, he lost interest after the first day. The lines of a hymn said, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No there is a cross for everyone, and there is a cross for me." (Nazarene Hymnal) Jesus was not dying as a martyr, but as the savior of the whole world. He offered his life as a sin offering. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John1:29).

4. They glorify God, vv. 9-11:

At the very heart of the Christian gospel is the glory of God. In John 17:1 we read, "Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, "Father the hour has come, glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you." The whole purpose of Christ's

humiliation was to glorify God. The whole purpose of the incarnation, his prophetic ministry, his death, resurrection and exaltation, was to glorify God. The climax of this great and sublime passage is indeed the glory of God the Father. Living for others, serving others, sacrificing for others has one end in mind – the glory of God.

This passage in Philippians is not telling us how to get saved. Paul does that elsewhere, especially chapter 1. Paul is writing to a group of people who are already saved. This passage is about loving others. It is about unity through humility. It is about thinking as people who live in the fellowship of the Spirit. It is about growing in grace and in the love for God and others.

Recent events have revealed how divided we are in this country. The selfish desires and actions of some leaders are snuffing away the lives, dreams and hopes of the very people they are sworn to protect. As the people of God, we are called upon to present an alternative to uniformity; in Christ we are offered unity through humility. In Christ we share in his joy by living for others, thinking of others, serving others, sacrificing for others all for the glory of God.

The pandemic has struck a blow of isolation, fear, and a hunger for community, the one built in the fellowship of the Spirit. I pray that the NBC family will be encouraged in Christ Jesus. If there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look

out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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