

Unity through humility

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Date: 26 May 2024

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[0 : 00] One of the biggest, or the biggest thing, the biggest hindrance to the church having unity is selfishness or self-centeredness, we might say. The reason it's so hard as well is because that's the biggest hindrance is, is because actually if you look at our world, the world tells us that being selfish is actually a good thing.

I don't know if you've noticed, you might see these things come up on Instagram or Facebook, they're just kind of out there. And I've mentioned this before, it's like the kind of common life coaching slogans that people say, which is how you should live.

Things like, look after number one, live your best life now, you do you, heard that one, you do you. Or this is another one that's actually, it's actually taking the Bible and changing it.

You need to know how to love yourself first. These common slogans, which is, and it's played out to us that what you should do is adopt these mantras and that this is how we should live.

Look after number one, live your best life now, you do you. You need to know how to love yourself first. That's what the world wants us to think is the right way to live. And it is toxic for a church.

[1 : 17] And it's actually toxic for any group, really. Because if everyone's aim is to look after number one, or you do you, it breeds disunity.

It breeds disunity because if every person is looking out for themselves, it doesn't bring togetherness, but it brings separation because everyone actually wants different things. If you only look out for yourself, what you do, what you then do is that if someone gets in your way, you either get what you want or you either walk over them to get what you want.

And if you don't get what you want, you feel bitter and full of resentment. If you're the one who gets walked on, you feel that people become passive aggressive and discontent because they haven't got what their number one agenda was.

Now, you might see that in the workplace. It's pretty common for that to happen. But the church is not to be like that. The church is not to be like that.

The church is to have unity, to have togetherness, and to be side by side for the gospel. It's actually why we have community, not only in the name of our church, but as part of our vision.

[2 : 28] We are in Christ as community. That word community, it splits into two words. It's what common unity. It's what we have unity around something that we have in common.

A common unity, something shared. And the one thing that we have in common that we share is Jesus Christ. Which means that he is the one that we are gathered around.

The one that we have unity with. And so this morning, that's what we're going to be thinking about, is unity within the church. Think about why we have unity, how we strengthen that unity, and why we actually anticipate what that will mean for our future.

When we read this letter, we know it's written to the Philippian church in Philippi. And I think, as you read through it, I think we do pick up that either the Philippian church is going through some suffering already, or it's about to.

Suffering has the potential to create two things. It either creates greater unity as it draws people together, togetherness, or it can go the other way and create separation.

[3 : 42] There's no doubt about it, the Philippian church is a healthy church, but perhaps there have been signs to Paul of dissension, of disruption. And that's the reason he writes what he does.

And over everything that we are looking at this moment, you might remember the verse that stuck out from last week. It's that verse, chapter 1, verse 27. If you just look back, conduct yourselves in a manner that is worthy of the gospel.

Living a life worthy of the gospel. And one thing that he's saying off the back of that is that living a life worthy of the gospel is a life where the church has unity.

Where they're together, side by side. And we're going to see why that's the case. Unity within the church. It is something to be desired, it's something that we want, but it is actually more than that.

It's actually more than that, because it's actually an objective fact. It's a reality, because the unity that we desire, it actually stems from the fact that every believer is united to Jesus.

[4 : 49] It's the thing that we have in common as a community of believers. We share in Jesus Christ. That is the thing we have in common. Just look with me in verse 1. There are five things that Paul expects Christians to have received.

Why? Because they're united to Jesus. With encouragement from being united with Jesus. Comfort from his love. A common sharing in the spirit.

Tenderness and compassion. Paul is not asking them. He is passionately pleading with them. Knowing full well that if the church is a church of believers, that actually this is the true experience of any Christian.

That they will have been encouraged. That they will have received comfort. That they will have shared in the spirit and known the tenderness and compassion of Christ. Jesus is what Christians have in common.

They will all experience that. And what flows from that is those things. Encouragement, comfort, sharing, tenderness and compassion. And the point here to each one of us and to the church at the time that has called on Christ is to know that as a reality.

[6 : 03] To know it to be true but also to feel and experience it to be true. If that is your experience of being a Christian, the point he's making is if you've experienced that, you've known that from Jesus, then have that mindset to one another.

If you're united to Jesus, if you're connected to one another, if you want to know that that church unity is real, that we have a spiritual connection that will never dissolve, if we share a common salvation, if we have one heavenly father, if we have the same spirit living inside each one of us that gives us new life, and we share the same saviour, it means we're brothers and sisters in the faith.

It means that the unity is real. It completes Paul's joy because it means that when they respond with that true sense of togetherness, it means that God isn't working.

That's what it means. You know that saying people say blood is thicker than water. When people say that, what it means is that family relationships and loyalties should be the strongest and most important ones that we have.

And there's something right about that, of course, that we, it matters, doesn't it? Particularly that what it means is for our biological family. And yet, the bond to our spiritual family is stronger.

[7 : 33] The bond to your spiritual family is stronger than blood. Because it is not blood that connects us, but it is Christ and being united to him.

Jesus sets the agenda. We're united to him, which is why we have one gospel mindset that we share. It's an objective reality.

On a fundamental level, on the very basic of levels, we are connected to one another. And we should act like that is true. As I say that, I can almost, I know the stirrings in our minds.

If that is true, why do we see so much division in the church? If that is true, why do we see so much arguments and infighting? You might see that in local churches, but also on a national level or bigger.

Churches often don't, they experience those moments of infighting and difficulty. It is not a given. It is not a given that a church, even though they are united, will live as if that is true.

[8 : 37] Christians don't always live that common connection to Jesus at the forefront of their minds. And we know, don't we?

I mean, there's so many places why that could happen. There's differences and preferences. And some, we might think, are sort of superficial. But they do have the potential to cause infighting.

You just think of the differences that we might have. Tastes. It might be worship, the type of music that we have. Or preaching style, theological differences. It could be differences in families that come together.

There might be, you know, there's lots of families here that we meet together. There could be differences in how we parent our children as we raise them differently.

It could be differences in income or social status or background. Expectations of what you're going to get when you arrive on a Sunday morning. The list is endless of what differences there is.

[9 : 40] And that's not a bad thing. We want there to be differences. And yet, whilst we want that, each difference has the potential to cause friction and division, despite the fact that we all share Jesus.

It has the potential to do that. Which is actually going to bring me to my second point. I'm going to cut its unit.

It's going to be what do we do to strengthen unity? If unity is real and it's an objective fact, what do we do to make sure that our experience of that represents what it truly is?

Lots of differences exist. That's normal. It's a fact. And it's good. We want diversity. It's actually diversity. It's actually a reflection of what heaven will be like.

Because it will be full of people from every culture and race and background and whatever differences there is. So how do we make our actual unity a lived out reality? How do we strengthen it to be as unified as we can?

[10 : 46] The key to it, the real key to it, is what we see in these verses. The key is humility. Just look with me. Verse 3. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vacancy.

Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

The true obstacle to togetherness is not differences, but self-centeredness. The challenge, really, is to shift our attention from ourselves and to think of others.

If we do that, the more we do it. The chance for division and dissension and disruption because of differences, it goes down because we're not being self-centered, but thinking of others' needs.

And the model for this way of living is if we look to Jesus Christ. If we're thinking, what does this humble-mindedness, we might call it, this humble-mindedness look like?

[11 : 57] We have this model of what it means, what it meant for Jesus Christ's life. The mindset of the Saviour comes in verse 5. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

This is the mindset of our Saviour. It's a huge descent, isn't it? It's what I was talking to the kids about. And we see that it comes in two stages. Firstly, he comes from heaven to earth, takes on a human frame, verse 6, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Verse 7, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. Jesus, with his human frame, didn't use the fact that he's God for an advantage.

But he goes through the suffering and the pain that every other human does, and more. What that means is that everything, the suffering that you would go through, in some capacity, Jesus has gone through it as well.

It means he experienced anxiety. It means when training as a carpenter would have hit his finger with a hammer. It means when he was growing up, he got the common cold in the winter months.

[13 : 21] It means he was nursed by his mum. She would have changed his nappy. He had to learn to grow up. Human, in every sense, didn't use the fact that he's God as an advantage in his life.

He experienced emotional trauma. The pain and grief of knowing a friend that died when Lazarus passed away. Coming down from the throne room of heaven to earth was humbling for him.

He humbled himself down and took on a human frame. But that wasn't the end of the descent, was it? That was one stage of the descent down, but he would go further still.

Verse 8. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by coming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Descent from heaven to earth, yet low still from the highest position to the lowest.

It is the biggest act of humility that has ever and will ever be seen and known. There is no act of lowering yourself that will ever match this. And he did this for each of us.

[14 : 27] He was thinking of you as more important than his own life. He valued each of us as more important than his own life.

He was looking out for your interests. For your eternal interests rather than his own. Humility is love seen in sacrifice.

There's another way of defining it. Humility is love seen in sacrifice. It means looking at ourselves, looking at our time, our talents and our treasures. Three Ts.

Time, talents and treasures. Looking at those things and giving them up just like Jesus gave them up. Gave up his life for us. Giving them up because you value and consider someone else is more important.

That is humility. Love seen through sacrifice. There is nothing that is beneath us. There's no person beneath you. We're all equal at the foot of the cross. Because at the head of our faith, Jesus Christ went to his death.

[15 : 28] There is nothing that can't be asked of you by Jesus. There is no amount that you can be asked to go lower. Because Jesus has gone lower.

More than any other person has in history. This is actually, what we're talking about here is actually the centre of what it means to follow Jesus. Because there's loads of ways that this works out.

When you give up time to pray for someone else, you're valuing them as more important than your time. Even when you come here on a Sunday morning, you're valuing Jesus and worshipping him.

You're valuing the community of believers as more important than other things you could do with your time right now. On a Sunday morning, it is a sacrifice of your time. It is the question worth asking.

How much do you value other people in your relationships? What can you do to bless them because Christ has blessed you?

[16 : 31] So it's not you do you. But you do Christ. It's not look after number one. But look after others. It's not live your best life now.

But live like Christ now. And the more we do that humble obedience, we will not just have that objective unity. The fact that we're united to one another.

But we'll have that real lived out experience of what it really means and looks like. And divisions and dissensions that come from the differences will never get a foot hold.

If we humbly like Christ, value each other more important than ourselves. So we've looked at our objective unity because we're connected to Jesus.

We've thought about how that unity is strengthened so we have a real experience of it by being humble. The final thing that strengthens the idea of unity is to anticipate what that unity will look like.

[17 : 31] The word, the important word you see, is it's describing Jesus sort of coming down and then coming back up. Is that word you see in verse 9 is critical.

It's therefore. See that in verse 9? Therefore. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That word therefore. It means that. That word means it's really important. Because it means that Jesus being lifted up, being raised to new life.

What we sometimes describe as his exaltation. Jesus being raised up was actually conditional on what happened before. In other words, Jesus was exalted.

He was magnified and raised up by his Father because he went to the cross. Because he was obedient to do that. You could look at it from another way.

[18 : 33] If he hadn't have gone to the cross. If he'd have sacked it off. He'd have said, oh, can't be bothered with this. If he'd have just, you know, it says Jesus could have called on legions of angels and rescued him right there and then.

If he'd have just said, oh, just take that road. Verse 9 to 11 don't happen. Which means he wouldn't have been given the name above every name. He wouldn't have had every knee bowing to him and acknowledging his Lord.

It's because of the humble obedience to the cross that he's lifted up. He's given the crown because he lowers himself and thinks of others more important than his own life. That's why he's raised up. And here's where the beautiful thing comes in.

I don't know if you've ever, I've never actually done this. I don't know if you've ever fired a gun. I've never fired a gun. I'd quite like to, just to see what it's like. But if you fire a gun and you see the trajectory of the bullet and where it lands, if I want to hit the exact same place with the gun, the gun needs to sit in exactly the same place when I press the trigger.

And the bullet, if I manage to do that, I'm guessing it's pretty near impossible. But if you manage to do that, when you pull the trigger, the bullet will take the same trajectory and it will land in the same place.

[19 : 47] Now Jesus has gone before us. He's kind of fired out the gun first. His trajectory is that the trajectory is down, humble to the earth, and then he's raised up like a V.

His trajectory is down and then up. And you see, this is the beautiful thing that if we're united to Jesus, if we live the life that imitates his humility, they're going down. If our trajectory copies his trajectory, lower ourselves like he did, and we do that to bless others more important than ourselves, then what it means is that his final trajectory is also ours.

It means we lower ourselves, we're the, we lower ourselves, but then we're raised up to new life. The trajectory of Jesus and the Christian is the same.

It is a peculiar glory where you don't experience glory by aiming for the top, like is what the world tells you, that's how you get success.

But you get success in the Christian life by being united to Jesus who has had success because he's gone before you and his victory becomes your victory.

[21 : 03] When you are called to him, you're united to him and you imitate his life by making yourselves less. And it is therefore, because you've done that, that you've gone the same trajectory up.

Considering that as a reality brings unity, because it means that everyone in the church who does that is also on the same trajectory as you are.

We're all exalted and finished the race in the same place. We're all fired out of the gun the same. And this is what awaits the church of Jesus Christ.

We have that forever future together, which means as a church, we should live in light of what we will be like in the future. Which is a body of people bowing down to the king.

One united church with the same action. Bowing, not under compulsion, but bowing willingly. We have a real unity now because you have a real unity in the future.

[22 : 08] Consider that. Consider that we're all one, all Christians, followers of Jesus. That is the road we're headed on. And we'll all be there together as one body in the future, bowing the knee together, side by side, arm in arm, praising our saviour.

And so, the church needs to have unity. It has a real unity. We're all connected as brothers and sisters in Christ because God is our father. And when we call on Jesus, he brings us into the family of God.

It is real. But not all families get on, do they? So what does it, we need to strengthen that family unity. And the way that we do that is by humility.

It's the key. By looking out for each other's interests more than our own. But we're on a trajectory. We're humbling ourselves so that in obedience, from obedience, we will be exalted because we follow the trajectory of Christ.

And as we anticipate what that will be on that final day, it binds us together. Because we know that we'll be stood arm in arm with the multitudes of heaven, every tribe to the nation, worshipping the Lord Jesus on that final day.

[23 : 20] Let me pray. Almighty God. We do pray and thank you so much that you have called each one of us.

We thank you that you've called us from death to life. We thank you that you've called us to be members of the church. The church, local church, but on a bigger scale, the church.

The multitudes of heaven. And we know we have that real unity, togetherness with one another. That family relationship. When we call you our Father, Lord God.

And so we pray that you'd help us to live knowing that's true. That you'd help us to serve one another, to bless one another. Out of the fact that we know that you've blessed us. That you humbled yourself to death on the cross.

You went down, lowered yourself. Help us to see each other in that light. And humble ourselves to think of others more important than ourselves. Because you did that for us.

[24 : 20] And help us to keep going. Knowing that our trajectory is yours. Knowing that we will be raised to new life. Following the same path that you did. Having gone before us.

So we commit ourselves in chance. Bless as we pray. Have mercy upon us we ask. In Jesus name. Amen.