

Philippians 1:27...

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...

They are the words of the Apostle Paul. Written to the church in Philippi some two thousand years ago. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, written to us today. Chapter 2 of Philippians asks the question ‘What does this conduct look like?’ It answers the question in three distinct but related ways. We are to consider:

- (1) Our behaviour to one another;**
- (2) Jesus’ behaviour before his Heavenly Father;**
- (3) Our behaviour in the world.**

OUR BEHAVIOUR TO ONE ANOTHER

Conduct worthy of the gospel: in our behaviour to one another. If you are a guest here this morning then you will have picked up that some fuss is being made that this is the last Sunday for my wife Annie and me, at Trinity. I am quite aware that you did not come here for a farewell. More likely, for a welcome.

So welcome. If you are looking for a church home, I can highly recommend this one. If you decide to stay, you will find, as Annie and I have, v 1, encouragement in Christ, comfort in his love, fellowship with his Spirit, and a tenderness and compassion that reflects God’s own character.

But before we get carried away, I have to tell you it is an imperfect church. It’s like Philippi. The shortest but most commonly used word in v 1 is ‘if’. It suggests some chance that vv1-2 are not always the experience you’ll find among God’s people. But it is meant to be their character and culture, as, by God’s grace, it has been here.

Vv 1-4 are two sides of a coin. Vv 1-2 are in the positive. Encouragement. Comfort. Fellowship. Tenderness and compassion. All these reveal our unity in the Body of Christ.

Vv 3-4 are the other side of the coin in the negative. Do nothing out of selfish ambition. Don’t look only to your own interests. These things break down unity in the Body of Christ. It’s plural throughout. A reminder that there’s no such thing as a private Christian. Only one who is giving to the Body of Christ, and as our passage urges, to the world.

Should we focus on the positive, or the negative? Paul gives his answer in v 2:

then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

‘Make my joy complete’ is the main clause in the sentence. How is ‘joy completed among the people of God?

As I wrote this message I caught sight of two photos attached to our fridge by magnets. Your fridge photos usually displays reminders of those who have a special significance in your life. Except perhaps the magnets with details of the local plumber or electrician.

The photos were wedding shots of our two daughters with their husbands. These were days when you could say, for our family, our joy was made complete. They were joyous times for many reasons, but what completed our joy was the reality that Christ was at the centre of their marriages.

Joy is completed together. This is the tie I wore to Maddie's wedding. With apologies to Liv. It would have been a little weird wearing two ties. Thankfully, you don't need to dress up like we all did on that day. You just need to turn up. Sunday Gathering. Home Group. Small Group. Reading the bible with another. *Building up* through unity in Christ. *Comforting* through the love of Christ. *Partnering* in the gospel by the work of the Spirit. You can't be tender and compassionate on your own. Look to the interests of others.

The deeper our unity in Christ, the more the joy of the gospel is made complete. And, it must be said, joy does not depend on joyous occasions. We empty joy of its true focus – unity in Christ - if we think you have to be happy when you come to church, or home, or small group, when the week, or month, or year that you've had just sucks.

Lost your job. Lost your health. Lost a loved one. Lost your temper with the kids. Or your spouse. Or your friend. Or your co-worker. Lost your way in life. Nothing more irritating than when you're carrying a trouble and someone says to you 'Forget about that, we've come to praise the Lord!' You'd feel like punching them in the nose, only you're in a church, so you probably shouldn't do that!

Note what joy looks like in v 2:

Having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose...

It means that when it comes to God's people there is a unity in Christ that embraces where we are up to in our lives - joy or sorrow - and says to us, Jesus has made a serious investment in our lives. He is in it for the long haul, so you keep pressing on in him. God-willing, you'll sit next to a brother or sister in Christ who'll say to you 'I can do that with you.'

We are not the same. We are of the same mind. Same love. One in spirit and purpose. Complete each other's joy. Remember what you can give to God's people. V 3:

In humility consider others better than yourselves.

Humility in Greek culture was seen as a weakness. In Christ it becomes a strength. Throughout the pages of scripture God consistently brings down the proud and exalts the lowly. He has to. After all, he's dealing with human beings.

But our unity in Christ reminds us considering others better than yourselves is not a competition for being self-effacing. Paul explains in Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Two things this verse tells us. Firstly, we are naturally inclined to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Secondly, God has rescued us from ourselves.

When you make that sober judgment, you remember that there is nothing you can give to God. This unity you've been given, is a gift from him. After he humbled you, and brought you into his Kingdom through Christ, he gifted you, to serve and build up the unity of God's people.

No one can humble you like God has. And no-one can give you a more certain identity than the one you have been given in Christ. Be at home with that. That's where humility begins and ends. According to Philippians 1:6, it is God's work:

'he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'

JESUS' BEHAVIOUR BEFORE HIS HEAVENLY FATHER

That's why we are to look to Jesus' behaviour before his heavenly father. Humble and servant-hearted. Note Jesus' conduct of v 6:

'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!

Made himself nothing. Humbled himself.

You have all been very kind to us in recent times. It has been humbling. But this humility we witness in the Lord Jesus is something else altogether. It is a unique humility. All of us had to be humbled against our will to bring us into God's Kingdom. No one can claim a humility like Jesus Christ.

He was no less the eternal Son of God, in eternal fellowship with his Father in the Spirit. Yet, v 7, 'he made himself nothing'. The English language struggles to adequately explain what took place here. And so it ought. May we all struggle to comprehend the decision that Jesus' made, until the last day, when we see the Lamb upon the throne.

If it was not enough that the Son came to earth and took on humanity. He then, in obedience to his Heavenly Father, allowed humanity to take his life. Made himself nothing. Humbled himself.

Eternal humility. Perfect humility. The cornerstone of our unity in Christ is a humility that you had no part in. His humility must always humble us before the saving work of the cross. You can do no more than this. You must do no less. For only then will you see what took place, by God's grace. V 9:

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If Jesus' humility was unique. Consider his exaltation. It is like none other. To a place no one else could hold. He is exalted as Lord of all.

Jesus' humble obedience was driven by the sole motive of pleasing his heavenly father. It was the means that brought us into his Kingdom. It is the model by which we live for his Kingdom.

Hear the logic of the gospel. Everyone who exalts themselves before God will be humbled by the cross. Everyone who humbles themselves before God will be exalted through the cross.

V 10. Every knee will bow. V 11. Every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. It's all a question of timing. Be humbled now. Be exalted in Christ, seated with him in the heavenly places. Exalt yourself now. Be humbled on the last day when Jesus' lordship is not only universally established. It will be universally accepted.

OUR BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORLD

Paul applies Jesus' humbling and exalting to our lives. Our last point. It changes our behaviour in the world. Three conclusions that tell us the difference the death and exaltation of Christ make to our behaviour.

Firstly, because of the cross, we now know what intends for us. V 12:

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

God is at work in you according to his good purposes. Romans 8:

God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Like Jesus, find your satisfaction in obedience to his will.

Secondly, we know what the world is like. V 14:

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation,

The human condition has not altered much since Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. We just find new ways of taking the good gifts God has given us and using them in a crooked and depraved way. This may sober us, but it does not deter us.

Do not fear atheism. Or secularism. Or humanism. Or any ism. The only fear spoken of in this passage is the fear and trembling of v 13, which reminds us we should never take for granted the saving work of God in our lives. God may have become your Father in Christ, but he will always be revered and honoured for who he has made us. This will always give us a right perspective on the world.

Which leads us to the third application of Jesus Lordship. More conduct worthy of the gospel. In v 13, we are not to be complaining or arguing, but, v 16, to hold out the word of life.

It's just too easy to be cynical. It's a lazy option simply to complain about how you wish things were better if people thought or behaved a little bit more like they did in your day. They were sinful then. They are sinful now. They needed the gospel then. They need it now.

Consider why Paul says you ought to hold out the word of life. Because you can't do that without holding on to the word of life. This is conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ. And its goal is in v 16. That you might be there on the day of Christ. Philippians 3:12

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

There is no greater goal than knowing Christ Jesus your Lord. He has taken hold of you. Take hold of him. Conduct worthy of the gospel is being found in him. Now, and on the last day.

Perhaps you've seen that there is little difference between our conduct within the Body of Christ, than to those beyond it. I think the order of this passage is deliberate. The more we understand our unity in Christ, that it depended on Jesus' unity with his heavenly Father, the more effective we will be towards the world.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Whether before one another, or before the world, conduct worthy of the gospel begins and ends with the humble obedience of Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation as Lord.

It was always about him. It will always be about him. So brothers and sisters, be united in him.

And may our behaviour always be, as v 11 concludes, to the glory of God the Father.

