

January 27, 2019
Lesson 9: Devote All to Christ
Scripture: Philippians 2: 1-11

Context:

Our lesson on love continues with a return to Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. While last week mostly focused on Paul giving an update on his experience in prison, this week gives the church more instruction on how they are to live. There is to be a reset for how the early Christians are to view the world in which they live and how they interact with one another.

What follows in the letter is a form of encouragement for the people in their journey. Instead of scolding the people for whatever issues are facing them, Paul instead calls the people to advocate for one another and share compassion and empathy with each other. We deduce that there is something going on within the congregation, as Paul calls for unity and for people to have a stronger foundation to hold onto.¹ There is a need for a change in conduct and relationships.

Paul is skillful in critiquing the Philippians as he provides with them a new mindset to life, to others, and to self for all those who are in Christ Jesus.² Paul's explanation comes in the form of a hymn. The scripture passage in verses six through eleven are known as the Christ hymn and probably date from the earliest church creeds with tweaks from Paul.³ The words describe who Jesus is and how he fits into the cosmology of the Philippians' world. The language is poetic as Jesus is described as emptying himself for others and then being elevated to the highest heavens and being declared as Lord of all.

Since we know from historical research that the church was not in a Christological debate, we are to deduce that Paul had other reasons for including it in the letter.⁴ Perhaps the most logical is that Paul had heard of the self-seeking behavior that had drifted into the life of the church and he wanted the early followers to think about humility and how to govern with integrity. Even in what might have seemed like petty behavior scattered throughout the church, Paul quoting and using a hymn would have helped the theoretical with the practical parts of life. Jesus is Lord of all who emptied himself and loved others. What should stop the every day Philippians from following suit and serving others? At stake is the future of a church that holds so much potential for the Kingdom of God.

Application

Paul's writing to the Philippians is a case study for how to instruct a community

¹ Fred Craddock, "Philippians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1985), 37.

² Ibid., 38

³ Ibid., 40.

⁴ Ibid., 42.

in turmoil. It would have been very easy for Paul to launch into a diatribe for how the Philippians were getting things wrong. Occasionally Paul did as much in his letters as evident in writings to Galatia and Corinth. However, here Paul uses flowing language and allusions to make a point. It is beautifully done and one can imagine this being read to a congregation and everyone connecting the dots without anyone being publicly shamed.

How relevant is the Christ hymn for today? We are given an image of Jesus, a beloved teacher who gave of himself to all those he met. But he never saw his status as that which made him better than others. No, he saw that he was meant to do good, serving those around him. He was obedient even to the point of dying on a cross. He was the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, yet his life was about serving others.

I think the point here is for us to look at how we order our lives with others. I use the word order because there is a certain flow that comes with relationships. If we enter into a relationship thinking that we know all the answers or that the person we speak to is either “higher” or “lower” than us, then we cannot be genuine. Just like the Philippians, we can choose to have all the answers and know everything, or we can open ourselves up to the fact that people may have things to teach or share with us. Every type of relationships entails a certain amount of humility and vulnerability.

This passage also reminds us to look at the motives that are operating in our relationships. The older I have become, the more intentional I am about in whom I trust and consider a friend. Does a person enjoy being my friend all the time or does their interest perk up when they need something? Do I feel more drained after being with someone or more invigorated when I see them? Does this person appear to be honest and genuine? I try to even think how the person may experience my relationship with them. The saying that you should be the friend that you would want to have constantly rings true in my head.

In the church we are reminded that our relationships with each other are to be marked by humility and a desire to be in genuine community with others. We are to strive for authenticity and sincerity. We are to build each other up and hold each other accountable. We are to follow Jesus who modeled a life of humility that gave so much life to others. We are to confess that Christ is Lord not just with our tongues, but with our lives.

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