

Taking the Form of a Servant  
Philippians 2:1-11  
February 5, 2023  
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CenterPoint Church

Read Philippians 2:1-11

*"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed (rather) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'"* (Luke 11:28)

## **Introduction**

Since the Eagles are going back to the Super Bowl next week, I figured that I'd revisit the last time they were there. As every true Philly fan knows, they drafted quarterback Nick Foles in 2012 and he became the starter halfway through his rookie season and stayed the starter for two more years; he played well, even went to the Pro Bowl and was voted the MVP there. But injuries and a sense that he wasn't good enough to be the franchise quarterback led to his trade to the St. Louis Rams. He started in St. Louis for a while until the coach decided to replace him with the backup. He was actually ready to retire from football the next year but through a combination of factors went to play for his old coach in Kansas City. After a year there, he was offered the chance to return to Philadelphia in a backup role to the new franchise QB, Carson Wentz.

Football fans know those facts, but what they might not know is that Nick embraced his backup role by not only mentoring and helping Carson Wentz, but also in his decision that he would make coffee every morning when the quarterbacks and their coaches met in the QB room. In his autobiography, *Believe It*, he says that "it was a daily reminder to me that the best way to lead is to serve. One of my favorite Bible verses is Mark 10:45: 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others.' ... The act of making coffee every morning was a daily reminder to me of who I am, who I'm here to serve, and the kind of person I want to be."<sup>1</sup> And, of course, most of you know the end of the story that year: Wentz, the starting QB went down with an ACL injury and Nick Foles ended up leading the Eagles through the playoffs and on to winning the Super Bowl where he was awarded the Most Valuable Player.

Maybe there's something to this idea that if we disregard our egos and sacrifice our own preferences and desires in humility and in service to others, then we will be rewarded. As we'll see in our text this morning, the Apostle Paul certainly believed that a core value for every Christian to embrace was humility, and the way that humility is lived out is through sacrifice and thinking of what other people want and need first. And, of course, Paul was not coming up with novel theological ideas, he was passing on what He learned and saw in the life of his Master and Savior. Our first four verses are very practical, as Paul exhorts that

### **I. Every Believer Should Sacrifice in Humility (vv. 1-4)**

*<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Before Paul gives the instructions for how we should be living and loving in verses 2-4, he first reminds them of all the blessings and privileges they've enjoyed: being united to Christ is a great

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Foles, *Believe It: My Journey of Success, Failure, and Overcoming the Odds* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2018).

encouragement, being loved and forgiven by a holy God should joyfully comfort our hearts, the Spirit's work in us should transform our lives. A changed life that has been regenerated by the Lord will naturally bear fruit. The fact that we are unconditionally loved by God should prompt us to love others and honor Him. Paul doesn't put the cart before the horse and reverse the order: he doesn't say that you should start acting like Jesus and being kind, humble, and submissive, and then God will see that you're good enough to be saved. No, we receive new life, God makes us new creations in Christ, and then we start to exhibit those new behaviors, we start to live it out. We have the strength and the motivation we need to be giving and kind to those around us.

Paul asks that they "*complete my joy*" in verse 2 by being unified and loving. Now as a pastor, alarm bells go off in my head when I read that because I know that it's dangerous to base my joy on other people's godliness and good choices. If my mood and my mental health is dependent on the way that other Christians act, life is going to be a roller-coaster. Not to mention that Paul hasn't been with these people in ten years, and he had planted many other churches, so the potential was for him to always be depressed because someone was acting out and messing up in one of his churches. But I think that it's similar to what John said in 3 John verse 4: "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*" That the fruit of ministry is sweet when we see others respond to the Lord and live it out in their lives. Yes, it's painful to hear when some have walked away from the faith or when churches you love have conflict. But I think that Paul was emotionally invested in their success. It beats the alternative of a pastor who just preaches and teaches the truth and says, "Good luck, hope you work it out. Don't bug me, I'll be in my office." Paul lived out the admonition to "*rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep*" (Romans 12:15).

I think that underlying all of these verses of encouragement for the Philippians to be selfless, humble, and likeminded is that Paul knows that it not only benefits the people in the church, but out of the church. A church that is "on mission together," as the church in Philippi no doubt understood themselves to be and as our vision statement here at CenterPoint says that we are, can do so much more in the world when we are not fighting amongst ourselves. When we see one another as partners in ministry and not enemies, we can be productive for the kingdom in ways that we can't when we're arguing and trying to manipulate things to get our way. That's not to say that there should never be disagreements; there are certainly proverbial "hills to die on" when vital theological issues are at stake, or when the mission and vision of the church looks to be compromised. But too often we fight over carpet colors, what got served at the potluck, and why brother Ted decided he didn't like us singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve anymore. Romans 12:10 - "*Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*"

Now you might come away from these verses and be thinking, "OK, I get it, I need to always be thinking about others, doing what's best for them. But what about self-care? What about being healthy and taking care of my needs so that I'm able to be of use to others?" It's like when the airplane safety briefing tells you that if the plane is going down, put the oxygen mask over your face first, then you can help your child or those around you. Isn't that what we need to do in life? Yes, there's a lot of truth in that. Verse 4 says you "*not only look to your own interests,*" which means that, yes, you need to look after yourself and your loved ones and do what you need to do. Of course you need to work and save and plan ahead, raise a family, eat healthy, bathe regularly, those kinds of things. But your life needs to include concern for others, taking others' needs into account.

It's the mark of a true Christian to sacrifice things in their life because it's the mark of the Savior that He laid down His own life. Paul turns to the life of Jesus to give the ultimate motivation for our being as selfless and others focused as we can be. The next four verses show that

## II. Our Savior Sacrificed in Humility (vv. 5-8)

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Verse 5 says that our Christian attitudes and behaviors are rooted in Jesus' example. Think about what Jesus gave up when He came to earth. For all of eternity He had lived as one of the members of the Trinity, the three-in-one God. He was surrounded by angels worshipping Him. He never got tired or hurt, He only experienced the pure joy and love that is found in heaven. And He left all of that for this imperfect, broken world. He took a human body that would experience pain, hunger, exhaustion, temptation, and many other things that He had never experienced before. He didn't come as an honored king, He came as a baby born to a peasant couple in a cave, entirely dependent on two of His created beings to keep Him alive. If we think we have sacrificed anything in this life, it pales in comparison to what He sacrificed in emptying Himself and taking on human form.

The word "form" is used three times here: Jesus was "*in the form of God*" in verse 6, then took "*the form of a servant*" in verse 7, then He was "*found in human form.*" There are two different Greek words there, but I'm not going to go into them. What it's teaching here is a fancy theological term called the "hypostatic union," which is very simply the merging of the two natures within Jesus – the human and the divine. Jesus was fully 100% God while being fully 100% man. We have to get this right because church history has seen multiple heresies that arose because people misunderstood how Jesus' divine and human natures co-existed and interacted. (*This is extra-credit, free of charge*)

- Ebionism denied that Jesus was God at all
- Arianism denied that Jesus had the same nature as God the Father
- Docetism denied His humanity, said His body just seemed real
- Apollinarianism denied His full humanity
- Nestorianism denied the unity of two natures in one person<sup>2</sup>

In other words, just about every way you could mess up the understanding that Jesus is fully God and fully man has already been messed up! If you're talking to someone and they say, "Well, I think that Jesus only appeared to have a human body," or "Jesus couldn't have been both God and man at the same time, He must have laid aside His divinity while He was on earth," you can tell them, "Hey, that's already been considered and rejected." The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) set out the right wording (it's called the Chalcedon Formula) by saying that divinity and humanity existed in Jesus without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation.

Verses 6 – "*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.*" Even though Jesus was equal to God the Father, He embraced submission to the Father's will for His life. It's the opposite of Adam and Eve, who should have been content to be obedient and submissive to God but wanted to grasp equality with God. Satan tempted them to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by saying, "*when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5). So there is a compelling contrast between the first Adam, who brought untold pain and misery to humanity because of his pride with the second Adam, Jesus, who brought redemption and salvation to humanity by laying down His rights and giving up His life in obedience to the Father's plan. Jesus became a servant, serving people by loving them, by healing them, by feeding them, by teaching them God's ways, even by washing their feet. But His ultimate act of servanthood was submitting to death on the cross where He took our punishment for us. In dying

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida & Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Nashville: Holman, 2016), p. 95.

as a sinless substitute, God took out His wrath on His Son that each one of us deserves. God punished His Son, but then He rewarded Him, as we see in the last three verses, that

### **III. God the Father Honors Sacrifice in Humility (vv. 9-11)**

*<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus that *“for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* Jesus knew that the cross and the grave would not be the end for Him. He knew that God would raise Him from death and then exalt Him in glory, and He knew that He was rescuing and redeeming His people. Jesus said several times to His disciples, *“He who humbles himself will be exalted.”* It was not only good advice, a prescription for how they could be blessed, but it was a description of how He was living and how He would ultimately be treated. After Jesus had humbled Himself and been debased as far as He could go into the grave, God reversed everything, bringing Him back to life and then bestowing on Him the highest name and receiving Him into the heavens in glory. Now, in case there’s any confusion that we haven’t already cleared up: Jesus was always fully God and was not being honored in a way that He didn’t already possess or deserve. But after fulfilling His divine mission, God honored Him again. After the submission and sacrifice of His earthly life, He was rightfully restored to His throne.

Everyone will eventually bow their knee and acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord of everything. That’s not just those who are living when He returns. It includes those who are in heaven, all the angels and the believers who have already died; it includes all those under the earth, those who are already in hell and the demonic spirits. The redeemed will be acknowledging Jesus’ lordship with gratitude and joyful hearts while the condemned will say it through clenched teeth with resentful spirits; but all will be forced to acknowledge the great truth. So the question is: do you want to start doing that now and be blessed for eternity? Or are you going to resist acknowledging that and end up being forced to admit it when judgment day comes, knowing that you will not be blessed, but cursed for eternity? I beg you to be right with God through faith in Jesus. Today is the day of salvation. If you are not sure of your standing before God, please talk to me or one of the elders.

### **Conclusion**

I read something recently about false modesty by David Brooks: ‘If you’ve spent any time on social media, and especially if you’re around the high-status world of the ‘achievatrons,’ you are probably familiar with the basic rules of the form,’ he writes. ‘The first rule is that you must never tweet about any event that could actually lead to humility. Never tweet: ‘I’m humbled that I went to a party, and nobody noticed me.’ Never tweet: ‘I’m humbled that I got fired for incompetence.’ The whole point of humility display is to signal that you are humbled by your own magnificent accomplishments. We can all be humbled by an awesome mountain or the infinitude of the night sky, but to be humbled by being in the presence of yourself—that is a sign of truly great humility.’”<sup>3</sup>

That’s a little cynical, but pretty insightful. We have a very hard time truly embracing humility. That’s why we look to Jesus, who is the embodiment of true humility. We can never humble ourselves too much. We will never surpass the level of humility that Jesus demonstrated because no one ever gave up as much as he did. It is impossible for anyone else to start as high as He did and then descend as low as He did. I did not know this, but Steven Lawson says that, “The Greeks... did not even have a word for humility, because it was considered of such a low value. The concept was

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<sup>3</sup> The Morning Dispatch email written by Declan Garvey and Esther Eaton, July 5, 2022.

entirely foreign to the Greeks and utterly abhorrent to the Romans. The word for humility was coined when the church was birthed. Some speculate that the word was even invented by Paul himself in writing these verses.”<sup>4</sup> Paul’s point is that Jesus was the very definition of humility, the highest exalted God who chose to lower and debase Himself as far as it’s possible. What right do we have to refuse and cling to pride when our Savior, who had every right, did not? We must lower ourselves to get into the kingdom, we have to die to ourselves. Seeing Jesus’ example and receiving salvation because of His redemptive acts, the only proper response we can have is to humble ourselves and look to serve others. And God sees and rewards those who humble themselves. Whether or not other people see and reward our humility does not matter, because our Father in heaven sees in secret and will reward us (Matthew 6:4).<sup>5</sup>

Another way to ask this is: What rights are you willing to give up in the way that Jesus gave up His right to be equal with God while He was here on earth? What are you willing to give up for the kingdom? Are you willing to give up your right to keep to yourself, to always be private and not bothered by other people? Are you willing to give up your right to make as much money as you can if it conflicts with your family and your ability to be involved in ministry? Your right to have your way in your marriage, in your family, in your business, in the church? This church will thrive when we each look beyond what’s comfortable for us and become deeply concerned and proactive about other’s lives. I’m not laying a guilt trip and young moms are exhausted, there are seasons for these things. And we do a great job on the whole, there are so many ways that this congregation cares for one another. But this passage challenges us to press further: Have I prayed for my brothers and sisters in Christ? Have I tried to figure out how to serve my unchurched friends and neighbors? Have I left my comfort zone and greeted the new people, or gotten crazy and invited them out for a meal? Am I willing to be wronged or allow others’ preferences to win out, and count that a gospel victory? I can’t suggest all of the ways that you could put sacrifice and humility into action, but let’s pray that the Holy Spirit brings specific ideas to our minds and helps us work them out.

➔ Transition to Communion.

What is another reason that we need to be unified as a church? I’ll let Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 guide us; he’s talking about when the early church took the Lord’s Supper together:

*“<sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.<sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part,<sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.”*

We don’t have time to work through this passage, but the short version is that even in the ultimate act of unity and submission to Jesus (eating the Lord’s Supper), Paul had to rebuke selfish Christians who were putting their own interests first. There was no unity, no concern for one another...

Benediction - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 – *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Philippians For You* (India: The Good Book Co, 2017), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Lawson, p. 99.