

The sermon

Intro

Who is Jesus? If you looked to Time magazine or an encyclopedia or liberal scholars of the 20th century you might find answers like a good moral teacher or a Jewish philosopher/wise man or a Jewish humanitarian who cared deeply for the needs of the downtrodden or a Jewish miracle worker or a Jewish anarchist trying to subvert the Roman Empire or an unstable madman fixated on the apocalypse or an unfortunate victim of Roman brutality.

Who is Jesus? This morning we get one of the deepest glimpses into the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son from all eternity. Along with Colossians 1:15-20, this is one of the most descriptive passages on Jesus' backstory and destiny.

READ PASSAGE (2:1-11)

Body

Passage Focus

Paul's elaborating on ideas like *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."*

He's using Jesus' history, from eternity past to the 2nd coming, to illustrate for us what our mindset ought to be. We'll get to the resurrection and beyond on Easter.

This morning we'll interpret the passage. Then we'll have three points of application. Jesus' history is our illustration. Jesus' actions illustrate what counting *"others more significant than yourselves"* and looking *"to the interests of others"* looks like.

Jesus' mindset

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, – 2:5

Mind is the same word we find twice in 2:2. Meaning the way we think. Our frame of mind. Our attitude. The things we value. Paul's encouraging us to think like Jesus did. Maybe we should get some What Did Jesus Think bracelets?

The ESV translation indicates that we already have Jesus' mindset. This is true in part because Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20) if we've been born again. But, at the same time, we have remnants of a sinful nature that pulls us towards selfish ambition and conceit (2:3).

I don't think Jesus indwelling us is the idea here. The ESV notes an alternate translation: *"which was also in Christ Jesus."* This is better because the Greek literally reads *"Think this in you which [was] also in Christ Jesus."* The idea is think the way Jesus did in eternity past.

Eternity past

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, – 2:6

There was a time in eternity past, before the foundation of the world, that Jesus existed in the form of God.

Form meaning both outward appearance and divine nature. In eternity past Jesus radiated with the divine glory. That's the bright, shining radiance, the manifestation of overpowering light we find in the Old Testament when the glory of the Lord appeared (Exod 40:34).

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. – John 17:5

Jesus, praying to the Father as he's about to go to the cross, speaks of the glory that emanated from him in eternity past but wasn't emanating from him while on earth.

In the new Jerusalem (= eternal state) Jesus will shine such that there's no need for the sun because he's the city's lamp (Rev 21:23). The veiling of the divine glory was temporary.

In eternity past Jesus possessed the full divine nature because he's always been God the Son. Even though Jesus shined with divine radiance and possessed the divine nature, he *"did not count equality with a God a thing to be grasped."*

Meaning Jesus didn't hold tightly to what belonged to him as God. Being God, Jesus didn't cling to the visible manifestation of divine glory, he didn't cling to his heavenly abode, he didn't cling to his role as judge (he let men judge him), he didn't cling to the dignity he deserves as God (the one who deserves only honor and submission allowed his creatures to subject him to the ultimate disgrace!).

Jesus held loosely to his divine rights.

Incarnation

but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. – 2:7

Jesus "emptied himself" by taking on human flesh. That's emptying by addition, not emptying by subtraction. At the incarnation, God the Son took on a human nature.

That meant taking on the limitations of a human body. Exhaustion, hunger, thirst, sickness, pain, death. Experiencing the things we experience. Taking on a human body also meant veiling the divine radiance for a time.

Being born of a virgin who conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34-35), Jesus wasn't like us in every way. Jesus was born into the world without a sin nature. God can't sin. So Jesus can't sin.

The cross

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. – 2:8

Why the incarnation?

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. – Hebrews 2:14-17

In order to satisfy God's wrath against our sins (propitiation), Jesus had to become a man. A man had to die in the place of men. A sinless man had to die in the place of men. In this way, the God who hates sin can remain just while he forgives sinners. Jesus, the sinless, unblemished Lamb of God is a worthy substitute to take the wrath we deserve.

In the incarnation and the cross, Jesus willingly humbled himself. Who did Jesus obey on the cross? The Father.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. – John 6:38

On Sunday evenings we've been looking at the Trinity. The Father sending the Son points to ordered relationships within the Godhead.

Jesus endured much **humiliation** on the cross:

- 1) God the Son was unjustly indicted as a blasphemer.
- 2) God the Son was mocked verbally.
- 3) God the Son was spit on.
- 4) God the Son was slapped in the face.
- 5) God the Son was struck with blows from human fists.
- 6) God the Son was publicly rejected by the Jews in favor of a man who committed insurrection and murder.
- 7) God the Son was publicly stripped.
- 8) God the Son was scourged.

That's being tied to a post or laying on the ground with your back exposed while someone whipped your back with a whip composed sharp pieces of bone and metal. The effect was ripping of the flesh, deep lacerations, extreme pain, and loss of blood.

- 9) The Son of God was tortured by a crown of thorns.
- 10) The Son of God was struck on the head with a reed (a heavy piece of plant stalk, maybe bamboo?).
- 11) The Son of God was crucified.

David Turner writes:

“The Romans used it in the case of slaves, notorious criminals, and insurrectionists to make a political statement. Crucifixion asserted the dominion of Rome over conquered peoples by making a gruesome example of anyone who dared to upset the pax Romana... Long nails were frequently driven through the victim's ankles into the vertical post of the cross and through the victim's outstretched hands or wrists into the horizontal beam. The medical cause(s) of death by crucifixion would be asphyxia, loss of blood, dehydration, and/or shock. Victims would suffer an agonizingly slow death, since no vital organs were directly injured. Eventually they would have difficulty supporting their own weight with their legs. Breathing would become increasingly difficult from hanging by the arms. The gruesome process could take days.”

Illustration

Kind of like the President of the United States leaving the White House willingly and putting on a prisoner's uniform, willingly spending three decades living in death row with inmates while he awaits his own execution, and willingly, after his time was up, going to the execution chamber to be lethally injected in the place of those on death row. So that everyone on death row could be set free.

Yes Jesus' experience was worse. He was crucified, not lethally injected.

But my point is that this will never happen. No President would leave their stately abode, put on a prisoner's uniform, live among inmates, and die in the place of death row inmates. It just doesn't happen. The mighty don't willingly give up their powers and rights. The mighty don't subject themselves to humiliation for the good of those below them. The innocent don't suffer in the place of the guilty.

The gospel should shock you! Who is this Jesus? Who is the God of the Bible? How can this be so? This doesn't make sense. This doesn't happen in our world. God is unique and altogether unlike us. Jesus willingly suffered on our behalf. Giving up his rights for our good!

Point 1: Be of one mind by holding self-interests loosely.

Jesus modeled for us the absence of self-seeking.

Jesus *“who, though he was in the form of God, [in eternity past] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”* (2:6). We saw the same word “count” in 2:3.

*“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility **count** others more significant than yourselves.”*

“Count” means to come to a conclusion, to come to an understanding, to make a value judgment. In verse three it was coming to the understanding that the needs of others are more important than my personal preferences. The common good outweighs selfish desires that prevent the common good.

Jesus could let go of what belonged to him because letting go of these things was good for us.

Jesus let go of his glorious, shining radiance, his heavenly dwelling, the dignity that belongs to him as God, and his rule. He let men judge him. The implication for us is obvious. Let go of selfish ambition and conceit. Let go of what prevents doing good to one another.

What things might we grasp in the local church?

We can cling too tightly to a tradition that’s no longer effective or needed.

We can cling too tightly to a ministry that’s no longer effective or needed.

We can cling too tightly to a position of power such that we don’t let those who are able serve alongside us.

We can cling too tightly to a personal conviction that we quarrel with one another or pass judgment on one another or look down on one another (Rom 14:1-10).

We can cling too tightly to personal preferences that we’re blind to the common good.

That’s not to say some things aren’t worth fighting for. There’s a need for church discipline. There’s a need for a doctrinal statement. There’s a need for membership interviews. It’s not unity in nothing. There’s biblical convictions rooted in Scripture. I have many convictions I assure you! You can’t be a pastor without convictions. But sometimes our battles are fought along the lines of personal preference and selfish desire rather than a passion for the glory of God and the common good. Sometimes we forget the common goal of gospel and forget to ask questions like how does this preference advance the gospel?

If we follow the path of Jesus by letting go, we work for unity in this local church.

Point 2: Be of one mind by taking the posture of a servant.

Jesus modeled for us serving the good of others.

Jesus *“emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant”* (2:7).

A servant is owned by another. Submissive. Humbled. Subject to the will of their master. A servant serves and obeys. A servant does things for others, not for themselves.

In Matthew chapter 20 there was an occasion when the mother of James and John requested that her sons have the seats of power and prominence in the kingdom to come (20:20:21). Not a shock, but when the other disciples caught wind of the request they were “indignant” (20:24). Yes self-seeking disturbs human relationships. Jesus responded to the dispute:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Matthew 20:25-28

The way of the local church isn’t seeking power and prominence or clinging tightly to perceived rights. No, it’s taking the role of a servant. Being on the lookout for opportunities to do good to one another.

If we follow the path of Jesus by serving one another, we work for unity in this local church.

Point 3: Be of one mind by obeying the Father's will.

Jesus modeled for us obedience to God.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. – 2:8

Who did he obey? The Father. What did he obey? The Father's will that he die on the cross for our sins. That's the Father willed the Son to suffer for our good.

In the command to have the mind of Jesus, what is God demanding of us? To look "*to the interests of others*" (2:4). To cease from self-seeking so that we look out for what's good for one another, whether individuals or the whole church.

Did you ever think of it this way? That denying our own desires for the good of another is obeying God. Better than merely denying our selfish desires is wanting to do what's good for each other. That's the way of Jesus. Wanting to do what blesses others. We're growing in our faith when we want to do the things God wills.

If we follow the path of Jesus by obeying God, we work for unity in this local church.